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Richard Ramírez: The life and crimes of the Night
Stalker / Richard Ramírez: Leben und Ver-
brechen des Night Stalkers

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to not only showcase the early life of the serial killer Richard Ramírez, commonly known as the “Night Stalker”, but also to present a basic overview of his crimes, his imprisonment as well as the consequences he faced for his wrong-doings. In addition, there is also a chapter highlighting the media’s view on the killer.

First of all, the paper outlines Ramírez’ childhood and the events that led to his initial few minor crimes and eventually to his first murder. Then the next chapter summarizes a few of the cases of the murder spree in detail, with emphasis on the circumstances leading to his arrest and how law enforcement managed to catch him. In the final chapter the media’s as well as the general public’s view on the person of Richard Ramírez is discussed.

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1. Introduction

“It’s [killing someone (A/N)] like nothing else; you can’t explain its intensity in words. To have that power over life – nothing is more sexually exciting; it’s the ultimate, something very few people experience.”¹ – Richard Ramírez

This paper is focused on the serial killer Richard Ramírez, also known as the “Night Stalker”. It illustrates the childhood and therefore also the possible motives as to why he eventually turned into a sadistic serial killer. Furthermore, a few of his murders, as well as non-fatal attacks are described in more detail, while not all of them are necessarily touched upon. The methods of the police, in addition to other evidence provided, are explained and it is showcased how the identification and arrest of the Night Stalker were made possible. As his trial proved to be surprisingly tricky for authorities, it will also be discussed in this paper. The last chapter will present the media’s view of the case as well as other instances in which people - or things - surrounding Ramírez gathered media attention and how the Night Stalker is still in today’s popular culture.

While the literature for this paper mainly came from two books and various internet pages, there were many newspaper articles and a documentary used to work out the details. Especially the newspaper articles proved to be very useful as they also provided insight into what people at the time thought and felt regarding the killer. One of the books (Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016.) was used as the most frequent source and can probably be considered the closest thing available to the full truth, as the author Philip Carlo directly worked with Richard Ramírez and could therefore showcase details which would otherwise not have been possible.

The main purpose of the work at hand is to summarize and explore the life of the Night Stalker, including the impact he had on other people as well as his personal life and the human behind the notorious serial killer. In chapter 2 the childhood of

¹ Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 38.

Richard Ramírez is discussed while chapter 3 is a summary of the murder series in 1984-1985 with some of the cases described in detail. In chapter 3 the time line and the circumstances that eventually led to his arrest in 1985 are presented. Chapter 5 summarizes the impacts onto the media at that time, as well as now. At the end I present my conclusions.

2. The childhood of Richard Ramírez

This chapter contains a summary of the early years of Richard Ramírez, a closer look at his family and their relationship.

2.1 The origins of the Ramírez family

Ricardo (is equal to Richard) “Richie” Ramírez (is equal to Ramirez) was the last of the five children of Julian Tapia Ramírez and his wife Mercedes Muñoz. The latter two had met for the first time at the early age of 14 in Camargo, Mexico, Julian’s birthplace, when the Muñoz family moved there in order to escape the possibility of the family’s sons being drafted into the army to fight in World War Two. Julian and Mercedes first discovered their feelings for each other at 19 years old. Their young love prevailed even when Guadalupe, Mercedes’ mother, decided to move to Juarez, a town bordering the Texan city El Paso, with the entire Muñoz family. As all of them possessed the American citizenship, they had no problems going back and forth between the two cities and Mercedes quickly found work in El Paso as a housekeeper. The couple remained in contact by writing letters to each other, which proved to be a challenge for Julian at times, as he only had a first-grade-education.

After Julian had been drafted into the U.S. Army, only to be discharged a short time after due to scarlet fever, he successfully proposed to Mercedes. The two went on to marry at the tender age of 19, defying their families’ protests. At this point both of them were living in Juarez, Mexico. Mercedes, however, was deeply unhappy there, as the crime and poverty rates were at an all-time high. This led to the two young adults’ move to a small apartment in El Paso, although Julian’s papers had not been approved by the U.S. government yet. Several months later the couple welcomed their first child, a son named Ruben, who, due to the effects of a nearby nuclear testing site, had been born with several lumps across his neck and head and was considered very ill. At that time the cause was unknown. Soon after their second son Joseph (or Jose) was born and although he appeared

to be healthy at birth, he was later diagnosed with Collier's disease, an illness which causes the bones to grow in a curve.²

Another unfortunate event followed shortly after when the family of four were deported back to Mexico in 1952. Back in Juarez, Julian accepted a job as a police officer and the couple had their third son, Robert. In 1954 the father was granted the American citizenship which led to the family being able to return to El Paso. Both young parents were quick to find new jobs, Julian laid track for the railroad while his wife worked for a bootmaker and unknowingly inhaled highly toxic fumes almost every day. Nevertheless, six months later she became pregnant again and gave birth to the family's first daughter, Ruth. Roughly four years passed until the family would grow again, it would be Mercedes' last and most difficult pregnancy. Despite of all the difficulties, Richard Ramírez was born on the 29th of February 1960 at 2:07 A.M.³

2.1.1 Julian Tapia Ramírez' childhood

Julian Tapia Ramírez was born in Camargo, Mexico, on the 16th of February 1927. He was the oldest male amongst his nine siblings with whom he grew up together on a farm. Their family was not very well off and after Julian's mother died, the 12-year-old boy had to take over much of the family's burden and was forced to quit school to work on the farm full-time. Besides this he had to face frequent beatings not only from his father but also his grandfather. They would punish him for small things, such as going to bed too late. Although they would often beat him too hard, Julian never cried or begged them to stop. Hitting your child in order to punish it was considered normal in Mexico at that time. However, when the young boy was fourteen years old, he stood up to the older males of his family. In 1944 the act of defying your father was a crime punishable by death. Despite that, the beatings stopped. Later on, Julian would swear to never beat his children, a promise he would fail to fulfill.⁴

² cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 129-134.

³ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 135-139.

⁴ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 129, 130, 132.

2.2 As a small child

In this part, a part of Richard Ramírez' early childhood will be discussed by highlighting his relationship to his sister and by elaborating on a few accidents Ramírez had as a boy.

2.2.1 Richard and Ruth

Ruth Ramírez had been protective of her little brother starting from the moment she had laid her eyes on him in the hospital. Therefore, it was no surprise that once Richard was old enough to think for himself, he would return this behavior towards his sister. While Ruth could have been

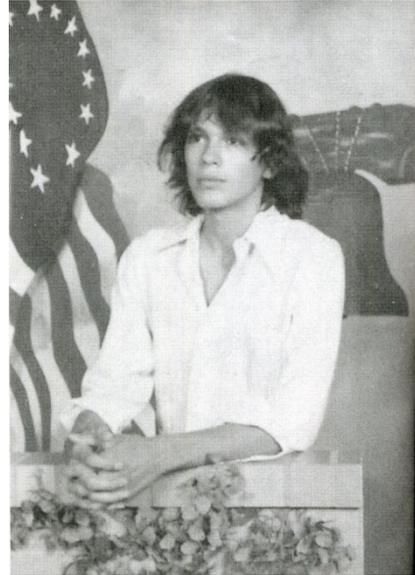


Figure 1 - Richard Ramírez, approximately at the age of 15.

considered a “tough” child, as she had grown up with four brothers, and would be quick to laugh at herself when one of her older brothers bothered her, Richard would often become her defender.⁵

As a child the youngest Ramírez was often described as very imaginative, although sometimes in a slightly more negative way. Neighbors would knock on the door of the family's home to tell Mercedes that their son was behaving in a strange way while playing in the garden. The young mother shrugged this off, she didn't see a problem with it.⁶

2.2.2 Childhood accidents

As a young boy, Richard Ramírez suffered two accidents on different occasions. Once as a two-year-old a dresser fell on him while he was trying to turn on the radio on top of it. It left him unconscious and with a deep cut on his forehead, resulting in a scar which was visible until his death. This accident almost cost him his life.⁷

⁵ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 140.

⁶ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 145, 146.

⁷ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 142, 143.

The second accident occurred when he was five years old. A swing in the park struck the young boy so hard, he was once again knocked out and suffered another deep gash on his forehead.⁸

2.3 Suffering from epilepsy

In fifth grade Richard Ramírez experienced his first seizure. One of many to come, they tormented him until his early teen years. These epileptic fits were a hard blow for the young boy who had always had trouble sitting still, as he did not want to sit at home in order to be cured.

After his second seizure Richard was hospitalized. However, the doctors decided against medicating him and determined that the problem would solve itself with some time. In the following years, alongside occasional grand mal seizures, he ended up having up to 24 petite mal seizures every month. According to Ruth Ramírez he would stare at an object from anywhere from five to fifteen minutes without saying anything or moving.

After the end of his killing spree, Richard Ramírez was diagnosed with temporal lobe epilepsy. Some people affected by lobe epilepsy suffer from altered sexuality, hyper-religious feelings, are hypergraphic⁹ and are described as exceptionally aggressive.¹⁰

2.4 Cousin Miguel's influence

The family member that would end up affecting Richard Ramírez' childhood in a notable way, was his cousin Miguel, often also referred to simply as "Mike". Miguel was a veteran of the Vietnam War and would often recount his experiences to young Richie. However, the former soldier had not only committed countless

⁸ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 146.

⁹ cf. N.N. Medical Definition of Hypergraphic. 2018. online <https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=26493> (accessed on February 25, 2019, 18.44 o'clock). (a person suffering from hypergraphia; an insatiable compulsion to write).

¹⁰ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p.148.

acts of sheer violence while he was serving in the army, he had grown to enjoy doing so and would proudly show his nephew evidence, such as pictures, of his crimes. These mainly showed Vietnamese women, either while Miguel was sexually assaulting them or their dead bodies or what was left of them. Miguel had also kept eight shrunken heads of his victims, that he stored in a suitcase under his bed.¹¹

“Having power over life and death was a high, an incredible rush. It was godlike. You controlled who’d live and who died – you were God,”¹² is what he told the young boy for whom his older cousin indeed became a sort of God.¹³

Twelve-year-old Richard found himself fascinated by his cousin’s war stories and even more so by the pictures he was shown. They awoke something in him, that he knew would not be accepted by God and the church. He felt himself becoming aroused despite his conscience telling him it was wrong. It was during this time Richard first started thinking that maybe Satan would be a better God for him to follow.¹⁴

Mike and Richard kept spending time together, often smoking weed and driving around town in El Paso, all while Miguel would continuously feed his sadistic war stories to the underage boy. In no time he would end up taking to Richie as his pupil and teaching him the ways of war. Mike taught the boy many things such as how to stay undetected, how to kill stealthily and how to make sure your kill goes through. Richard learned all of this fast and willingly.¹⁵

Julian Ramírez began noticing the amount of time his son and Mike spent together. Although he was very displeased by this, he could do seemingly nothing to stop it, as no matter how he would reprimand Richard, the young boy still did what he wanted to do. To escape his father, the young boy would often spend

¹¹ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez. 2./3. edition.* New York: 2016, p. 151, 152.

¹² Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 152.

¹³ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 152.

¹⁴ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 152, 153.

¹⁵ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 153.

the night in a cemetery close to his home, where he would sleep deeply and without an ounce of fear.¹⁶

2.4.1 Witnessing a murder

Miguel was married to a Mexican-American woman named Jessie, who was described as having a strong personality. The couple had two children, both boys, who were named Paul and Orado.¹⁷ Similar to Richard's father, Jessie was not pleased with her husband spending all his time with a child, sleazing around and being unemployed.

On May 4, 1973, Jessie was out grocery shopping while her husband and Richard were at their home. Upon getting something to drink out of the refrigerator, Richie came face to face with his cousin's .38 caliber revolver and subsequently asked him what the gun was doing in the fridge. Miguel answered this question by saying he might use it later and wanted it to be cool. Shortly after, Jessie returned home and nagged her husband for being unemployed and because of the resulting money issue. Mike lashed out and told her to shut up, but she continued. The veteran of the Green Berets grabbed the gun from the refrigerator and threatened to kill her, which once again did nothing to faze his headstrong wife – she even dared him to do it. This was the final straw for Miguel, and he shot Jessie at point-blank.¹⁸

2.4.2 Consequences

Miguel served merely four years of his prison sentence in a mental hospital, due to a plead of insanity, before he was released again.

The young Richard on the other hand, seemed to be traumatized by the event he had witnessed, he started withdrawing himself from other people. Later on, he eventually moved in with his sister Ruth and her husband, who was said to be what would be considered a “peeping Tom”. Ruth's husband would take his wife's

¹⁶ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 153, 154.

¹⁷ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 152.

¹⁸ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 154.

younger sibling on night rides, where they would spy into other people's homes through the window, hoping to get a look at women undressing themselves. Around the same time, Richard Ramírez first started delving into LSD, as well as Satanism.¹⁹

3. Murder spree 1984-1985

The series of murders that would later grant Ramírez the alias of the "Night Stalker" took place from 1984 to 1985. During this time, he claimed an estimated total of 13 lives, seriously injured at least five more people and raped eleven.²⁰



Figure 2 - Richard Ramirez

Unlike most known serial killers, Richard Ramírez did not target "society's rejects", such as prostitutes or homeless people, he focused his attention towards upscale suburbanites, law-abiding citizens, who preferably felt safe in their homes. In addition to this, the Night Stalker did not stick to a certain type of victim, another feature usually common for serial killers.²¹ His victims ranged from ages nine to 83 and had different sexes. At one point during the investigations, authorities were sure they were dealing with at least two different killers (notably the two leading detectives Sergeant Frank Salerno and Deputy Gil Carrillo believed otherwise).²² However, Ramírez stayed in one, large geographical area for the most part of his killing spree.²³

¹⁹ cf. Dyke, Robert: The Night Stalker – Richard Ramirez (Serial Killer Files #14). 2015. online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nfh11mjpfVA> (accessed on January 13, 2019, 21.15 o'clock).

²⁰ cf. Biography.com Editors: Richard Ramirez Biography. 2017. online <https://www.biography.com/people/richard-ramirez-12385163> (accessed on September 21, 2018, 16.52 o'clock).

²¹ cf. Linedecker, Clifford L.: Night Stalker. New York: 1991, p. 9.

²² cf. Carlo, Philip: The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 36, 53, 63, 64.

²³ cf. Linedecker, Clifford L.: Night Stalker. New York: 1991, p. 10.

3.1 First victims

For a long time, it was unknown that Richard Ramírez' first murder victim was not actually Jamie Vincow but nine-year-old Mei Leung, whose mangled body had been found on a pipe in the basement of a hotel Ramírez was staying at. Autopsies later revealed the young girl had been raped and beaten prior to her death on April 10 in 1984.²⁴ This was only confirmed in 2009, when authorities matched Ramírez' DNA to a sample from the basement.²⁵

His first recorded crime in connection to another human had been around the time Ramírez had been working in a hotel. He had attempted to rape a young woman in her room but was stopped and beaten by the husband who had returned in time. The charges were later dropped as the couple was from another state and did not want to return to testify. Richard's only punishment was getting fired.²⁶

3.2 First official murder

Jennie Vincow was a 79-year-old female with thinning white hair. According to sources she stood at 5'9" and weighed 190 pounds. While the status of her marriage is unknown, she had two sons called Jack, who lived in the same apartment building as her, and Manny, who had lived there until 1981 as well. On the night of June 27, 1984, the pink, two-story building was approached by an aggravated Richard Ramírez. The young man had driven around in a car, snorted coke, hired a prostitute and was in need of money. At random he had picked a house to steal from, and noticed the open window of apartment 2, which had only been covered by a screen. Outside the building Ramírez had thought to himself that Satan was with him and would protect him as long as he stayed evil and showed no mercy.²⁷

²⁴ Dyke, Robert: The Night Stalker – Richard Ramirez (Serial Killer Files #14). 2015. online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nfh11mjpfVA> (accessed on January 12, 2019, 21.22 o'clock)

²⁵ cf. Vives, Ruben: San Francisco police link 'Night Stalker' Richard Ramirez to girl's 1984 slaying. In: Los Angeles Times. October 23, 2009, n.p.

²⁶ cf. Dyke, Robert: The Night Stalker – Richard Ramirez (Serial Killer Files #14). 2015. online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nfh11mjpfVA> (accessed on January 12, 2019, 21.22 o'clock)

²⁷ cf. Carlo, Philip: The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 6.

The man entered through the window by prying the blockage off but encountered some difficulties which caused him to take one of his gloves off. Once he was in, he started trashing Jennie Vincow's apartment in the search for some valuables. Richard Ramírez' anger was fueled as he did not find anything, which caused him to grab his six-inch hunting knife and move towards his sleeping victim. Ramírez was sexually excited by what he was about to do and plunged the entire knife in Jennie's chest, causing her to wake up and scream. However, he kept stabbing her, eventually slashing her throat from ear to ear and almost decapitating the woman and thereby killing her. Richard Ramírez, aroused by his doing, pulled down the old woman's blanket and stabbed her three more times post mortem. Despite the crime he had just committed, the Night Stalker stayed in Jennie Vincow's apartment for another hour before washing his hands and leaving quietly at around five a.m.

Later he recalled wanting to run a stop sign but something stopped him from doing so. In the next moment a police car stopped in the lane next to him and subsequently watched him drive away just half a block away from the crime scene.²⁸

Jennie Vincow's body was discovered roughly ten hours after Ramírez had left, at 1.20 p.m. Her son Jack had wanted to bring her some food when he noticed the screen on the window missing. Worried someone had broken in, he entered through the unlocked door and found his mother's corpse in her bed.²⁹

3.3 The killer strikes again

The next murder occurred in the evening of March 17, 1985 in the suburban part of the middle-class town of Rosemead.³⁰

Ramírez had purchased a .22-caliber revolver from someone at a terminal, fully aware of the weapon's deadliness and its popularity with hitmen from all around the world.³¹ "The bullet enters the skull and zigzags about without exiting, causing

²⁸ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 5-7.

²⁹ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 7, 8.

³⁰ cf. Linedecker, Clifford L.: *Night Stalker*. New York: 1991, p. 37.

³¹ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 11.

havoc to the brain; it's almost always fatal.”³² After his purchase he stole a car and began driving on the highway of Los Angeles, where he set eyes on who he planned to murder next. While continuously listening to AC/DC's album “Highway to Hell”, he spotted an attractive brunette, the young Maria Hernandez, on her way home and decided to follow her there to once again fulfill his sadistic desires.³³

The moment Maria Hernandez pulled into the garage of the house she shared with the 34-year-old Dayle Okazaki, Richard Ramirez exited his vehicle and moved towards the young woman, barely making any sounds and with his AC/DC cap on his head. He entered through the closing garage door and snuck up to Maria who had her back turned to him. When she turned around, car keys still in hand, she recalls being able to actually look down the barrel of the gun Ramirez was pointing at her. Showing the young woman no mercy, the gunman pulled the trigger on her and Maria Hernandez fell to the floor, seemingly dead. The killer, presuming the shot had been fatal, used his foot to shove aside her body and continued making his way into the home of the two women. In the meantime, Dayle Okazaki had been startled by the gunshot and, in



Figure 3 - Dayle Okazaki

an attempt to evade the unknown assailant, had ducked behind a white-tiled kitchen counter. At one point curiosity overtook the 34-year-old Hawaiian and she rose slowly from her position, coming face to face with Richard Ramirez who had expected this to happen and shot her in the middle of her forehead, ending her life in an instant.³⁴

Prior to this occurrence, Maria Hernandez had gotten up from her spot on the garage floor, having survived the previous attack. As she had raised her hand in defense, the bullet had ricocheted off her car key, saving her life and only resulting

³² Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez.* 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 11.

³³ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 12.

³⁴ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 12, 13.

in a minor injury on her hand, causing it to bleed. She fled the scene through the door of the garage and through an alleyway, when she heard a gunshot coming from the inside of her condominium, to the front of the building. There she once again encountered the man dressed in black as he was leaving her home through the front door. She immediately went to hide behind a close-by car, but he had already spotted her and once again aimed his .22 caliber gun in her direction. However, he was more than surprised to find her fully alive in front of him and after a short moment of pondering, started backing away until he reached his stolen Toyota, which Hernandez could not see anymore, and he drove off the crime scene.³⁵ Therefore he left behind the first-ever witness of his murder spree, as well as his AC/DC cap, another key piece of evidence.³⁶

Not even an hour later, the killer had struck again.³⁷ Having become aroused by his previously attempted, as well as successfully committed homicide, he had found himself on the San Bernardino Freeway where he, for the second time on the night of the 17th of March 1985, had laid eyes on another potential victim. When the 30-year-old Tsai-Lian Yu took the freeway's exit at Monterey Park, he followed closely behind her. The Taiwanese-born Veronica Yu (Tsai-Lian Yu mainly went by this name in the United States) had just been on the way home from lunch with a friend, who just like her had immigrated to the United States seven years prior, when she had begun noticing the Toyota tailgating her. This caused alarm bells to go off in the law-student's head and she started scanning the road for a nearby police car. Not being able to find one, she decided it was her best bet to stop at the side of the street to get a better look at her stalker. This action caused Ramírez to infuriatedly give up his pursue on her, and he continued driving until he realized that the young woman had chosen to now trail him in his car. At the next intersection he caught a red light and seized the opportunity to exit his car and approach Veronica's, his gun tucked away behind his black jacket. As soon as he had reached Tsai-Lian Yu, she rolled down her window and began questioning his intentions on following her. Despite Ramírez continuously making

³⁵ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 13.

³⁶ cf. Linedecker, Clifford L.: *Night Stalker*. New York: 1991, p. 43.

³⁷ cf. Linedecker, *Night Stalker*, p. 43.

up excuses, insisting he had confused her for someone he knew, the headstrong woman did not back down and while trying to remember the Toyota's plate number, presented the unknown man with the claim that she had already contacted the police. Her constant defiance angered the killer and all of a sudden, he attempted to yank the woman out of her own car's window, which he failed to do as the driver's door had been locked. Not letting himself be stopped by this, he leapt over the car and managed to open the door on the passenger side before Veronica Yu had the chance to lock it as well. Richard Ramírez entered the young woman's car, ignored her fearful begging and shot her in the right side. The bullet pierced her skin right under her arm, roughly seventeen inches below the top of her head. Trying to escape her attacker, she was shot a second time, in her lower back. In spite of her injuries, she was able to get out of her car and stumble a few feet until she slumped down in the street, profusely bleeding. As she was crying for help, Ramírez laughed at her dying and sped from the crime scene.³⁸ Unbeknownst to him, there had been witnesses who had called the police, as early as when the attack had started. Officer Ron Endo of the Monterey Police Department had been the first to arrive on the scene, closely followed by Officer Gorajewski. When the former tried to get any sort of statement from the dying woman, she stopped breathing and was later pronounced dead by doctors from Garfield Hospital.³⁹

After putting some distance between himself and the place, where he had just committed another murder, Richard Ramírez disposed of his stolen car and began his journey back to downtown LA by bus. His mind was clouded by visions of him as Satan's loyal soldier, returning home from another battle with nonbelievers.⁴⁰

³⁸ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez. 2./3. edition.* New York: 2016, p. 13-15.

³⁹ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 16,17.

⁴⁰ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 15.

3.4 The Zazzara couple

Ten days would pass before⁴¹ “The Valley Intruder”, as the media had dubbed the nameless killer⁴², decided to venture out to once again unleash terror onto an unknown LA home. This time however, no one caught his eye. Driving down the San Gabriel River Freeway in another stolen car, once again a Toyota, a home in the affluent area of Whittier, which he had robbed a year prior, came into his mind. It would become



Figure 4 - Vincent and Maxine Zazzara

his next target. At 2 a.m.⁴³ on March 27, 1985⁴⁴, Richard Ramírez came to a silent stop in front of the Zazzara residence and began approaching the house as inconspicuous as his cousin had taught him to all these years prior. Through a window he was able to spot the sleeping body of the⁴⁵ “64-year-old Vincent Zazzara”⁴⁶ on the sofa with the TV still turned on in his vicinity. Making his way to the house’s backyard, he stopped halfway there when he could make out 44-year-old Maxine Zazzara sleeping in the married couple’s bed. Sexually excited by the sight of a woman, he tried to enter the home through the bedroom’s window but failed to do so as it was closed as well as locked. It was the same case with all the other windows, until he located a smaller one, higher up compared to the others. Using an empty compound can he had found in the yard as leverage, he pried the screen off of the window, forcefully opened it and entered the Zazzara’s residence through there. Finding himself in a small room, he proceeded to take off his shoes, pulled out his .22 caliber handgun and made his advance towards the dozing Vincent Zazzara. In a close distance, Richard Ramírez fired a shot which entered the sleeping man’s body right above his left ear.

⁴¹ cf. Linedecker, Clifford L.: *Night Stalker*. New York: 1991, p. 48.

⁴² cf. Biography.com Editors: *Richard Ramirez Biography*. 2017. online <https://www.biography.com/people/richard-ramirez-12385163> (accessed on January 13, 2019, 20.49 o'clock).

⁴³ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 28.

⁴⁴ cf. Biography.com Editors: *Richard Ramirez Biography*. 2017. online <https://www.biography.com/people/richard-ramirez-12385163> (accessed on January 13, 2019, 20.49 o'clock).

⁴⁵ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 28, 29.

⁴⁶ Biography.com Editors: *Richard Ramirez Biography*. 2017. online <https://www.biography.com/people/richard-ramirez-12385163> (accessed on January 13, 2019, 20.49 o'clock).

This awoke the now dying man, who, full of shock, attempted to grasp the unknown intruder but lost his motor movements just a few moments later. The sound of a shot being fired had also startled the soundly asleep wife of the victim, who shortly after came face to face with the Valley Intruder. He threatened her at gun point and demanded to know the location of the couple's valuables. Maxine Zazzara, an attorney who was known for being strong-willed and very difficult to intimidate, refused to answer him and instead told him to leave her home. Infuriated by this, Ramírez beat her up, while simultaneously forbidding her to look at him before the woman was forced on her stomach and tied and gagged by her attacker. After disabling all the phones, he ransacked the bedroom in the hopes of finding something of value. Unbeknownst to the assailant, a shotgun was hidden below the bed Maxine Zazzara was laying upon. Vincent Zazzara had purchased the weapon shortly after Ramírez had invaded their house for the first time the previous year, to make sure they were not defenseless if the burglar were ever to return. Spurred on by the sound of her husband's dying breaths, the attorney used the killer's current preoccupation of looting their home to free herself from her binds and get hold of the shotgun, pointing it at the still oblivious man. When he turned around and saw the woman pointing the weapon at him, his hands immediately went to grab his own gun, but Maxine Zazzara had already pulled the trigger. The outcome was a mere metallic click, as the shotgun had not been loaded. More than enraged at her attempt to defy him, Ramírez cursed loudly before shooting the woman in front of him three times. He continued beating, kicking and punching her body as she was lying on the floor. Not satisfied with that, he darted to the kitchen to retrieve a large, roughly ten-inch-long knife. Equipped with the new weapon, he returned to the bedroom and resituated Maxine Zazzara's body on the bed, where he pulled up her shirt to cut out her heart, which proved unsuccessful as the sharp blade could not penetrate the rib cage. Instead he opted to carve an inverted cross into her chest, leaving behind a big gaping wound. Richard Ramírez was not finished though, he wanted to possess a fragment of her soul. Therefore, he sliced off her eyelids and gouged out both of her eyes, keeping them as a souvenir in a jewelry box he had found earlier. The killer then proceeded to stab and slice the woman's body, mainly in the areas

of the stomach, the throat, and around her private parts. His attempt at rape failed as he was still too affected by the woman's audacity to stand up to him.⁴⁷

The dead bodies of the Zazzara couple were discovered a day later by a coworker and friend of the family. Police were able to recover a footprint from the crime scene, size eleven and half Avia sneakers, and due to the bullets used in the Zazzara killings could tie them to the previous ones committed by "The Valley Intruder".⁴⁸

3.5 Further attacks

Richard Ramírez would continue his killing spree over the summer of 1985 and took the lives of at least an additional eight people, by shooting, bludgeoning or stabbing them to death. However, he left quite a few of his victims alive for largely unknown reasons.⁴⁹

Notably, on one occasion he had invaded a home in San Gabriel, where he beat a 16-year-old girl unconscious with a tire iron before trying to strangle her with a telephone wire. All of a sudden, the cord sparked, and the girl regained consciousness, leading the killer to believe that it had been a divine intervention by Christ himself and he fled the house. When the victim alarmed her parents, they were barely able to recognize her, and it took doctors a total of almost 500 stitches to repair her scalp.⁵⁰

3.5.1 Laying low

During the time of his murder spree, the Night Stalker was plastered everywhere in the media. At one point mayor Dianne Feinstein released crucial information to the public during one of her press conferences.⁵¹ Richard Ramírez had left several footprints on multiple crime scenes, once on the face of 61-year-old Joyce

⁴⁷ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 29, 30.

⁴⁸ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 29, 30.

⁴⁹ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 13, ff.

⁵⁰ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 66-70.

⁵¹ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p 113.

Nelson, a woman he had beat to death.⁵² The shoe was a sneaker of the size 11 and a half, produced by the brand Avia, with a very distinct pattern.⁵³ Ramírez, who followed the media coverage on himself, got rid of the shoes on the same evening and proceeded to lay low for the following few days before making his return to Los Angeles.⁵⁴

3.6 The last crime

Upon his return he broke into the home of Bill Carns and his fiancée Inez Erickson, only carrying a gun. Richard Ramírez entered the couple's bedroom, turned on the light, and shot the 29-year-old man three times in the head. He then introduced himself to the 27-year old Erickson as "The Night Stalker" before he forced her to proclaim her love for Satan and raped and sodomized the young woman, as he had done to many victims previously. Afterwards he ransacked the house for valuables. When he did not find any, he made the fiancée swear on Satan that 400 dollars cash was all they had and fled in a stolen car.⁵⁵

Bill Carns survived this incident.⁵⁶

3.7 Trademarks of the Night Stalker

While Richard Ramírez did not stick to a certain type of victim, there were other factors that helped tie his attacks together.⁵⁷ These were some of them:

Footprints: The killer often left prints of his shoes behind. Until shortly before the end of his string of attacks they usually were from sneakers of the brand Avia.

⁵² cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 73, 74.

⁵³ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 64.

⁵⁴ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 114.

⁵⁵ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 116, 117.

⁵⁶ cf. Gavagan, Robert: *The Night Stalker – Richard Ramirez (Serial Killer Files #14)*. 2015. online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nfh11mjpfVA> (accessed on February 9, 2019, 18.14 o'clock).

⁵⁷ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 36, 53, 63, 64.

The size eleven and a half shoes were easy to distinguish as their pattern was quite unique.⁵⁸

Pentagram: Ramírez often drew pentagrams at the scene of his crimes, usually with lipstick or anything else available to him at that time. It would end up becoming his “calling card”, a common feature for serial killers. To him, it meant expressing his love for Satan.⁵⁹

Satanism: The Night Stalker would often force his victims to swear on Satan to make sure they were not lying. In addition, some of them had to verbally assure their love for the Devil.⁶⁰

At night: One thing that most of the crime scenes had in common was either an unlocked window or door, through which Ramírez was able to enter at nighttime.⁶¹

Rape: Another trademark of the Night Stalker was the fact that a large amount of his female victims, regardless of their age, were often sodomized and raped. The male residents of the home were usually murdered right away.⁶² During the rape of Lillian Doi, he had used handcuffs to restrain her which would be used as a piece of evidence against him in the duration of his trial.⁶³

Ransacked homes: The “Valley Intruder”, as he had also been named, not only murdered and raped, he additionally stole whatever valuables he could get from the homes of his victims, leaving behind an almost uncanny mess.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 64.

⁵⁹ cf. Chen, Edwin: *Ramirez Guilty on All Night Stalker Murder Charges. Ramirez: Convicted*. In: *Los Angeles Times*. September 21, 1989, n.p.

⁶⁰ cf. Helling, Steve: *Detective Who Helped Capture Notorious Serial Killer Richard Ramirez Speaks: 'He Was Pure Evil'*. 2017. online <https://people.com/crime/richard-ramirez-night-stalker-killer-murder-made-me-famous/> (accessed on February 20, 2019, 18.23 o'clock).

⁶¹ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 29, 38, 39, 73, ff.

⁶² cf. Biography.com Editors: *Richard Ramirez Biography*. 2017. online <https://www.biography.com/people/richard-ramirez-12385163> (accessed on February 20, 2019, 20.49 o'clock).

⁶³ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 41.

⁶⁴ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, n.p.

4. The arrest and conviction of the Night

Stalker

Ramírez' history of leaving behind various evidences, such as footprints or in the form of surviving victims, finally proved to be the key for his arrest in 1985. This chapter will provide more information on his capture as well as his later trial.

4.1 Identification

After the crime he had committed in August 1985, involving Bill Carns and Inez Erickson, Richard Ramírez headed towards downtown LA in a stolen Toyota where he wiped the car down to get rid of any fingerprints, as he had not worn gloves while driving, something he usually made sure to always do. Even though he had been very thorough in cleaning the vehicle, he missed a single print on the outer part of the car's rearview mirror.⁶⁵

4.1.1 A witness

Richard Ramírez managed to get the attention of a 13-year-old boy when he got close to the house of Inez Erickson and Bill Carns. James Romero the third had noticed the orange Toyota with its lights turned off creeping up to his neighbors' home, taking note of the suspicious looking man inside of it. When the Night Stalker fled the scene, the young boy memorized a part of the Toyota's license plate.⁶⁶

4.1.2 A suspect and his name

Soon after, the police force got in contact with Jesse Perez, a man who had known Richard from the bus terminal he often frequented and who had believed he was indeed the serial killer known as the Night Stalker. They now had a rough description that fit those of the surviving victims as well as the suspect's first name, "Rick". Additionally, pictures of jewelry the killer had stolen were published and a

⁶⁵ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 118.

⁶⁶ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 115, 116, 118.

friend of his, whom he had given some of the valuables to, was tracked down. However, the woman could only recount his home town, El Paso. She then gave the police the contact information of a man who finally revealed the Night Stalker's full name, Richard Ramirez.⁶⁷

4.2 AFIS and the breakthrough

The AFIS, short for “Automated Fingerprint Identification System”⁶⁸, had just been introduced by the LAPD and within minutes the new system was able to connect the fingerprint from the stolen car to ten matches, one of which bore



the name Richard Muñoz Figure 5- Police sketch of Ramirez.

Ramirez.⁶⁹ A mugshot of his was revealed to Jesse Perez and he gave the confirmation that this man was the “Rick” he suspected to be the Night Stalker.⁷⁰

4.2.1 How the AFIS works

Before the invention of AFIS, law enforcement had to compare the existing fingerprint to the ones existing in their data bank manually. In the case of the Night Stalker, having to check 1.7 million different print file cards would have taken approximately 67 years.

⁶⁷ cf. Carlo, Philip: The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 119-124.

⁶⁸ cf. N.N.: Automated fingerprint identification. Wikipedia. online https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automated_fingerprint_identification (accessed on February 9, 2019, 17.55 o'clock).

⁶⁹ cf. Mathews, Jay: High Technology, New Techniques Stalked 'Night Stalker' Suspect. September 6, 1985. In: The Washington Post. online https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/09/06/high-technology-new-techniques-stalked-night-stalker-suspect/645aac23-eda-46c7-b219-7bb6036ae0b9/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.706e627b1edb (accessed on February 16, 2019, 17.21 o'clock).

⁷⁰ cf. Carlo, The Night Stalker, p. 125.

The AFIS can analyze and correlate more than 60.000 fingerprints per second. The computer then releases a few likely matches, that are subsequently looked over by a specially-trained agent.

In addition to being able to assign thousands of prints within seconds, the AFIS can also improve their quality, it can improve the brightness, darkness and blurriness of the evidence.⁷¹

4.3 The arrest

Having gone away to visit one of his brothers in Arizona, Richard Ramírez had not realized that his identity was now public and that his face was everywhere. The killer made his return to LA on a Saturday morning, taking note of the amount of police men wandering around the bus terminal, still unaware that his face was plastered on the front page of every single local newspaper. He then decided to enter a nearby liquor store where he was instantly recognized by a group of elderly women who were referring to him as “El Matador”⁷², Spanish for “the killer”. Confused by this occurrence, he caught sight of his picture on one of the journals and proceeded to leave the store in a hurry.⁷³

As the store clerk had already contacted law enforcement, the police were headed towards his location. Richard Ramírez went on to make his escape by crossing a freeway on foot and taking a bus he ended up leaving as passengers recognized him. Even while running through a street, everyone knew his identity and the police received constant calls informing them of the Night Stalker’s current position. The killer attempted to steal a car by pulling a woman out of her car, with no success as her boyfriend and other passersby intervened. Once again forced to make a run for it, Ramírez bolted through several yards and landed in an area made up of mostly Mexican-Americans, all aware of his crimes and angered by his doings. As a last resort the man tried his luck with another car, again occupied by a woman, but he was once again denied when the driver’s angry

⁷¹ cf. Lyle, Douglas P.: CSI-Forensik. Für Dummies. Germany: 2009, p. 113,114.

⁷² Carlo, Philip: The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 185.

⁷³ cf. Carlo, The Night Stalker, p. 183-185.

husband struck him with a metal bar. The Night Stalker proceeded to take off once more, this time however he was stopped by the angered citizens and brought to the ground. Shortly after, the police arrived and Richard Ramírez was apprehended.⁷⁴

4.4 The trial

The Night Stalker's first official appearance after his apprehension took place on the third of September in 1985 where the accused serial killer presented himself in a previously rather uncharacteristic shy manner. However, this changed when he came to realize how many people were now interested in him. During his trial he not only managed to attract the attention of multiple young women that firmly believed in his innocence, but also attracted a large following of Satan worshippers.⁷⁵

In addition to the fact that Ramírez switched his legal advisor quite a few times, the large territory of his criminal spree provided complications due to jurisdictional issues. Accordingly, a few charges were dropped. On July 22, 1988, almost three years later, the jury selection process was set to start. The court hearing of the "Night Stalker" case took another year and was once again delayed when one of the jurors was found dead on the 14th of August the next year. Although there were implications that Ramírez had arranged the woman's murder, the accusations proved unfounded. On the 20th September 1989 Richard Ramírez was found guilty on 13 counts of murder, five of attempted murder, eleven of sexual assault and 14 burglary charges. When the killer received 19 death sentences and was set to die in the gas chamber on November 7, 1989, he replied with the quote:⁷⁶ "Big deal, death always went with the territory. See you in Disneyland."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 185-189.

⁷⁵ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 206, 207.

⁷⁶ cf. Gannon, Kevin: *Richard Ramirez: The Night Stalker. Trial*. online <https://www.crimeandinvestigation.co.uk/crime-files/richard-ramirez-the-night-stalker/trial> (accessed on February 19, 2019, 17.31 o'clock).

⁷⁷ *Serial Killer Documentaries: Richard Ramirez (The Night Stalker) – Serial killer documentary*. 2017. online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtEOzX8V6yI> (accessed on February 9, 2019, 17.51 o'clock), TC 39:01.

Throughout his trial, people were rather shocked to see how he relished in the crimes he had committed and even giggled at pictures of either crime scenes, or bodies of victims, shown to the court as evidence. Occasionally he would even turn in his chair to sneer at survivors that were present.⁷⁸

4.4.1 The Pentagram

Throughout his murder spree the pentagram eventually became a trademark of Ramírez, and it could often be found on the scenes of his crimes, starting with the murder of Mabel Bell and the attempted murder of Florence Lang in their home.

During the trial Richard Ramírez flashed a pentagram, which he had drawn on the palm of his hand to the court while proclaiming “Hail Satan!”⁷⁹



Figure 6 - Ramírez holding up his hand with a pentagram drawn on.

5. Depiction in the media

Richard Ramírez' violent crimes had not only gathered large media attention during his murder spree, he continued to be fairly well-known, even more so after his arrest.

5.1 Death and legacy of Richard Ramírez

During the murder spree from 1984 to 1985, articles surrounding the unknown assailant often made it into various newspapers. The stories of the gruesome

⁷⁸ cf. Serial Killer Documentaries: Richard Ramirez (The Night Stalker) – Serial killer documentary. 2017. online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtEOzX8V6yl> (accessed on February 9, 2019, 17.51 o'clock), TC 37:19.

⁷⁹ cf. Chen, Edwin: Ramirez Guilty on All Night Stalker Murder Charges. Ramirez: Convicted. In: Los Angeles Times. September 21, 1989, n.p.

assaults caused fear to erupt in the LA community. However, despite being sentenced to death, Ramírez died from an illness at the age of 53 on June 7, 2013, having spent almost 24 years on death row.⁸⁰

The stories of his sadistic actions led to quite a few productions in popular culture. For instance, his character appeared in the fourth episode “Devil’s Night” of the fifth season “Hotel” of the TV-series “American Horror Story”. In the episode Ramírez checks in at “Hotel Cortez”, reprimanding an employee that it had already been his third time there, as he had died in 2013. He is then led to his room by said employee before being told that there were “treats” awaiting him on his pillow. When he is handed the key to the room, Ramírez retorts that he does not need one, and is subsequently shown entering through the window, as a homage to one of his trademarks during his killing spree. The Night Stalker proceeds to grab some food (another nod as the real killer did the same on at least one occasion⁸¹) while the lights are still turned off, before taking a look at his bed where his “treats”, a man and a woman, are sleeping soundly. He then grabs the night lamp from the table and begins to bludgeon the presumed husband with it. The wife awakens and screams before being silenced when Ramírez puts his hand over her mouth. During this part a pentagram is visible on the palm of his hand, similar to the one the real Richard Ramírez had drawn on during a court appearance (as mentioned in chapter 4.4.1.⁸²). The scene continues with the killer threatening the woman to swear to Satan that she would stay quiet (as he did with Sakina Abowath, a woman he had raped after he had shot her husband⁸³) and when she does not do so, he strangles her with a telephone cord, which emits a spark and allows her to flee (a direct reference to the case of the 16-year-old girl Richard Ramírez had attempted to murder, as mentioned in chapter 3.5⁸⁴).⁸⁵ Later in the episode, the character is referred to as Richard Ramírez, the

⁸⁰ cf. Biography.com Editors: Richard Ramirez Biography. 2017. online <https://www.biography.com/people/richard-ramirez-12385163> (accessed on February 20, 2019, 20.18 o'clock).

⁸¹ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 102.

⁸² cf. Chen, Edwin: Ramirez Guilty on All Night Stalker Murder Charges. Ramirez: Convicted. In: *Los Angeles Times*. September 21, 1989, n.p.

⁸³ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 101, 102.

⁸⁴ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p. 66-70.

⁸⁵ cf. Peristere, Loni: *American Horror Story. Devil’s Night*. 2015, TC 0:00-2:31.

Night Stalker upon which he raises his hand in a devil sign, once again mirroring his real-life version.⁸⁶

Additionally, a movie retelling the dramatized story of the serial killer titled “The Night Stalker” was released in 2016, which was based on Philip Carlo’s same titled book and starred Lou Diamond Phillips as the killer.⁸⁷

5.2 Leading detective Frank Salerno

Sergeant Frank Salerno, the leading detective of the “Night Stalker” case alongside Deputy Gil Carrillo, was no stranger to the media, as he had already gained reputation for solving the “Hillside Strangler” case of 1977 and 1978. When it was announced that Salerno would lead the search for the notorious “Valley Intruder” an article was released in which he was described as “The perfect man for the job”.⁸⁸ “You don’t want



Figure 7 - Sergeant Frank Salerno.

this guy following you”⁸⁹ and “He’s as good as you can get”⁹⁰ were additional statements reported in the article by the “Los Angeles Times” from 1985.⁹¹

The Night Stalker himself had read this article and the fact that someone of Frank Salerno’s importance was after him pleased him.⁹²

⁸⁶ cf. Peristere, Loni: American Horror Story. Devil’s Night. 2015, TC 33:15.

⁸⁷ cf. N.N: The Night Stalker (2016). online <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1821657/> (accessed on February 20, 2019, 19.56 o’clock).

⁸⁸ Roxane, Arnold: Homicide Cop Is Perfect Man for Job. Veteran Detective Leads Search for ‘Valley Intruder’. In: Los Angeles Times. August 14, 1985, p. 8.

⁸⁹ Roxane, Arnold: Homicide Cop Is Perfect Man for Job. Veteran Detective Leads Search for ‘Valley Intruder’. In: Los Angeles Times. August 14, 1985, p. 8.

⁹⁰ Roxane, Arnold: Homicide Cop Is Perfect Man for Job. Veteran Detective Leads Search for ‘Valley Intruder’. In: Los Angeles Times. August 14, 1985, p. 8.

⁹¹ cf. Roxane, Arnold: Homicide Cop Is Perfect Man for Job. Veteran Detective Leads Search for ‘Valley Intruder’. In: Los Angeles Times. August 14, 1985, p. 8.

⁹² cf. Carlo, Philip: The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 110.

5.3 Music in correlation to the Night stalker

Music had been very important for Richard Ramírez during his time as the Night Stalker. Through albums like AC/DC's "Highway to Hell" he felt inspired and encouraged to fulfil his duties to Satan.⁹³ This caused a spark in the media, as more metal-oriented groups, such as AC/DC, were pointed at and people began partially blaming their music for creating a sadistic serial killer. Things took a turn for the worse, when connections were made between their song "Night Prowler", which talks about sneaking into a girlfriend's bedroom while her parents are sleeping, and the name of the killer: "The Night Stalker".⁹⁴ Richard Ramírez later admitted that it was his favorite song and that Satan had inspired the group to write it, so it could be the serial killer's anthem.⁹⁵

5.4 Ramírez and his "groupies"

After Richard Ramírez' capture in 1985 he turned into a beacon of attention for multiple young women, seemingly attracted by his looks from seeing pictures of either his arrest or the trial in the newspapers. These women who media dubbed "Richard Ramírez Groupies" frequently visited the killer starting from the beginning of his trial to when he was already on death row. Some of them even got in physical fights with each other.⁹⁶

One of these women, Doreen Lioy, eventually became his wife in 1996.⁹⁷

⁹³ cf. Carlo, Philip: *The Night Stalker. The life and crimes of Richard Ramirez*. 2./3. edition. New York: 2016, p. 12.

⁹⁴ cf. Deriso, Nick: *The History of AC/DC and the 'Night Stalker' Murders*. 2016. online <http://ultimateclassicrock.com/acdc-richard-ramirez-night-prowler/> (accessed on February 17, 2019, 16.42 o'clock).

⁹⁵ cf. Carlo, *The Night Stalker*, p 38.

⁹⁶ cf. *The Uncombed One: A Current Affair: "Death Row Romeo" – Richard Ramirez Groupies*. online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYbldHKksnw> (accessed on February 20, 2019, 18.03 o'clock).

⁹⁷ cf. Botelho, Greg: *Serial killer, rapist Richard Ramirez – known as 'Night Stalker' – dead at 53*. In: CNN. 2013. online <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/07/justice/california-night-stalker-ramirez-dead/index.html> (accessed on February 20, 2019, 18.12 o'clock).

6. Conclusion

Summed up, it is possible to say that Richard Ramírez was an individual with a disturbingly twisted mind, making it very hard to understand as to why he found so much popularity with women even after he was proven to be guilty. Even though I believe that his childhood played a large part in how he eventually turned out to be, this can and should not be used to excuse his actions in any way. Nonetheless, the negative influence that his cousin had on Ramírez, would certainly mess with a child's mind. The fact that the Night Stalker appeared to have enjoyed his crimes and felt no remorse for them until his death in 2013 is appalling. Having read through detailed descriptions of his actions and their cruelty was certainly shocking. Although, admittedly it fueled my interest as in how a human is capable of turning out in such a way.

This paper provides a basic overview of Ramírez' crimes but does not explicitly mention and/or describe all of them, as it would not have been possible due to the restricted space. What can be considered the "most impactful" were picked out by me and then analyzed.

One part of this topic that I would have enjoyed exploring further, is Richard Ramírez' unique trademarks as a serial killer and how they came to be. Not only did he seemingly have no preference when it came to his victims, he also appeared to be a "normal" child until he had started to hang out with his older cousin. This is a contradiction to many other serial killers who often already showcase certain types of behavior at a young age (such as cruelty towards animals, arson or excessive aggression). Having previously thought that the Night Stalker did not fit the profile of a serial killer as a child, I was proven wrong when I found out that common issues of a serial killer's childhood also include head injuries or witnessing extreme violence and fantasizing. All of these were a match for the young Richard Ramírez. Furthermore, I would have liked to touch on not only the killer's, but also on the psyche and overall mental health of his "fangirls".

Although I did learn multiple new things while writing this paper, there was one fact that stuck with me the most. To me it seemed very fascinating that temporal lobe epilepsy, an illness, could have possibly played such a large part aside from Ramírez' childhood traumas in turning a friendly, energetic child into a sadistic serial killer. Additionally, I was surprised to find out that many historic figures, for instance Julius Caesar, Van Gogh and Napoleon, had apparently suffered from the same form of epilepsy.

Another surprise was finding out about how much Richard Ramírez is still present in today's popular culture. From overly dramatized movies to factual books to songs that even glorify his doings - there is a lot of material that can be found which was at least inspired by the Night Stalker.

Working on this paper was quite intimidating at first, which was soon proven an unfounded worry. The main reason for my initial worry was the fact that the amount of work and its details seemed overwhelming.

All in all, the story of Ricardo Ramírez was triggered by the social environment in the southern US of the 1980s and is unlikely to be portable to Austria in the 2010s.

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9. List of abbreviations

AFIS – Automated Fingerprint Identification System

LA – Los Angeles

LAPD – Los Angeles Police Department

Selbstständigkeitserklärung

Name: Anna Strassmeier

Selbstständigkeitserklärung

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