

Chapter Thirty-Four

A Mother's Tears

Along the dewy grass of a cow pasture across the street from Raiford Prison in Starke, Florida, it was a carnival-like atmosphere, people wearing T-shirts that read, "Burn, Bundy, Burn." As word of Bundy's death spread among an estimated 2,000 celebrants, people began to cheer. Others hugged one another, sang, danced and banged on frying pans they had brought along. Fireworks were set off, and when the white hearse bearing Bundy's body departed the prison revelers applauded.

Bundy's remains were cremated in Gainesville and no ceremony was held. Before he was executed, he requested that his ashes be scattered at an undisclosed location in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State, where he murdered at least four of his victims.

Individuals emotions about Bundy's final demise ran the gamut, but mostly there was relief.

"For everything he did to the girls - the bludgeoning, the strangulation, humiliating their bodies, torturing them, I feel that the electric chair is too good for him," said Eleanor Rose, the mother of victim Denise Naslund.

"I wish I could have been the one flipping the switch," said David Hoar, a policeman from St. Augustine, Florida.

Florida State Trooper Ken Robinson, another witness, said, "I felt no compassion for Bundy whatsoever. He had an easier death than any of his victims."

"Regardless of what Bundy did, he was still a human being," said Jim Sewell, police chief of Gulfport, Florida. But even Sewell, leaden with the sight of an electrocution, said he felt a great relief that Bundy was dead.

"During his last days, Ted Bundy called me his best friend," FBI Special Agent William Hagmaier said. "I don't know how I feel about that. Here you have a guy giving you a warm handshake, and you're thinking, this is the same hand that held a hacksaw while he cut off a young girl's head."

The Kents were up at dawn that day to watch the news of Bundy's execution on television. Unlike the crowd at the prison in Florida, they felt no jubilation.

"I thought I'd be breathing such a sigh of relief," said Debi Kent's younger sister, Tris. "But now that it's here and gone, I don't feel any different. "Just this empty, knotty feeling inside." The family found gallows humor on the day of Bundy's execution offensive, and Belva Kent even expressed sympathy for the killer's mother. "I feel so sorry for that woman," she said, "to raise a child that vicious and just not know."

When the district attorney called Kathy Kleiner to tell her that Bundy was dead, she began wailing and rocking back and forth. Margaret and Lisa were flashing through her mind. As she wept, she felt something change. "All the angst...I felt it lifting," she said. "I felt so clean." After that, she got dressed and had her breakfast.

As those who witnessed the execution left the prison, they appeared somber, some of them were shocked by the celebration that filled the chilly morning air.

Technically, Bundy died for the 1978 murder of 12-year-old Kimberly Leach of Lake City. George Robert Dekle prosecuted that case--and witnessed Bundy's death, said, "The thing that kept going through my mind was the awful crime scene I saw 11 years ago. I kept saying to myself that is where it started, and this is where it ends."

Though he confessed to many murders, the true number of Bundy's victims remains unknown. Bundy denied certain killings, despite physical evidence tying him to the crimes, and alluded to others that were never substantiated. Ultimately, all of this has led authorities to suspect Bundy killed anywhere from 30 to 40 women, making him one of the most notorious serial killers in American history. Only Gary Ridgeway, The Green River Killer, claimed more victims, with 59.

Through it all, even in the face of seemingly irrefutable evidence, Bundy's mother, remained steadfast in her defense of her son. She was especially vocal about his innocence before his

1989 Death Row confessions. Prior to and at the onset of his trial, Louise Bundy affirmed that her child was incapable of such gruesome acts, stating, "Ted Bundy does not go around killing women and little children! And I know this, too, that our never-ending faith in Ted - our faith that he is innocent - has never wavered. And it never will."

Even after her son finally confessed to dozens of murders, Louise's love for her son never faltered. This is a clear expression that she really did love him.

Louise Bundy's interaction with the media was limited, though many photographs of her exist. They are all wholly unflattering, revealing the aging woman's lean, tough face and the severe hairdo she kept all her life, which made her appear somewhat stark and prudish. She repeatedly spurned interviews through the years of her son's trials and imprisonment, but she spoke with the media about her son's reported confessions and approaching execution in the living room of her north Tacoma home.

"But if he did those things it's a mental illness," she said. "A person who would do those things is mentally ill."

She had no idea how her son, a stepbrother to four other Bundy children, could have grown into a violent killer.

"He was just not a violent person," she went on to say. "Yes, he had a temper, but nothing out of the ordinary. In all the years of growing up, we never saw any sign of these things. He was a wonderful son. I don't mean to say he was perfect; I mean he would do things that would make us angry and so forth, but what son doesn't."

She clearly was trying to come to grips with what made Ted Bundy do the things that he was accused of doing and confessed to doing. Many other people were trying to figure out the same thing, and some still are trying to figure it all out today.

"All I can say is he was the light of our lives," she said. "I wouldn't say that if he had been a problem child or constantly misbehaving. We just cannot in any way figure what would

have caused him...if, indeed, he did those things, and I still qualify that...what would have caused it.”

Louise Bundy indicated that a decade of infamy and publicity attached to her son’s trials, escapes, eventual conviction and death sentence made more acute her sympathy for the families of victims Bundy now says he killed.

“I agonize for the parents of those girls,” she said. “We have girls of our own who are very dear to us. Oh, it’s so terrible, I just can’t understand. But if the state of Florida kills him now ... kills him before we can figure it out ... oh, my God.”

As recent as 1999, she was outspoken about her son, expressing shock that anyone would connect her son to the 1961 death of eight-year-old, Ann Marie Burr. Louise told local media, “I resent the fact that everybody in Tacoma thinks just because he lived in Tacoma he did that one, too, way back when he was 14. I’m sure he didn’t.”

She never fully came to grips with her son’s actions. She couldn’t even call them murders, only referring to his crimes as “those terrible things.”

Louise Cowell Bundy wasn’t a bad person. She didn’t abuse Ted or berate him. However, the neglect of his delicate psyche and inability to communicate with him probably helped put him on his fateful path to becoming America’s most famous serial killer. She passed away on December 23, 2012 at the age of 88 in Tacoma, Washington.

As for his grandfather, Sam Cowell, who some people still believe is also Bundy’s biological father, he died while Bundy was in prison. For years Louise and her family hid newspapers stories about Bundy from him. In all that time, Louise never discussed any of it with her father, and she was not sure exactly how much he knew when he died.

Louise Bundy lost her son long before he was executed in Florida in 1989, and along the way many other lives were lost, and the tears of many mothers were shed.

Bundy once called himself “the most cold-hearted son of a bitch you’ll ever meet.” His attorney Polly Nelson, a member of

his last defense team, agreed. “Ted was the very definition of heartless evil.”