

# KILLING ANTHONY

The two men didn't know anything about him.  
They thought he was gay. That was enough.

By Lisa DePaulo

**M**

ERRY CHRISTMAS!"

Anthony Milano looked across the bar at the man who had shouted to him, a big bearded guy in a motorcycle jacket.

"Merry Christmas," he replied softly.

"What did ya say?" bellowed the big guy.

"I said, 'Merry Christmas.' "

"If you mean that, you'll come over here and buy us a drink."

Anthony didn't answer, but the man with the beard kept staring at him, raising his glass, nudging the guy he was

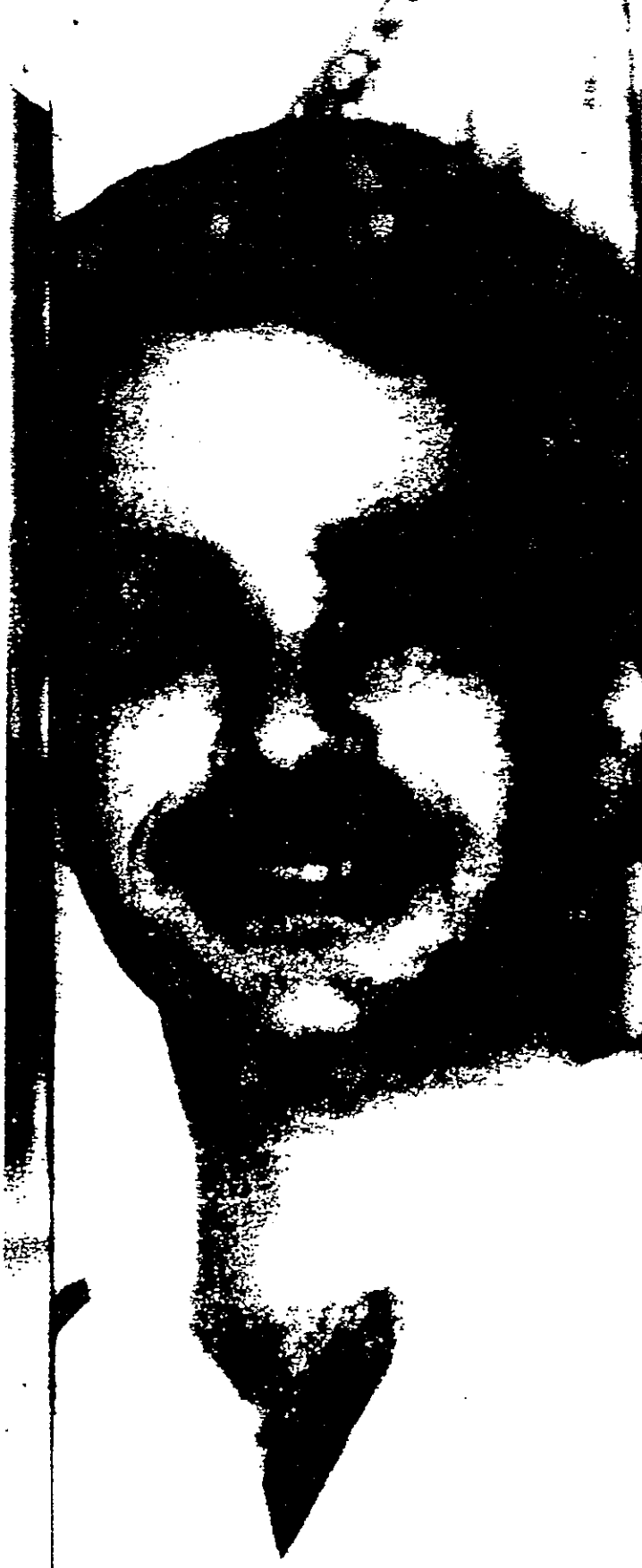
sitting with, a scruffy-looking kid in a football jersey. They were sharing their third pitcher of beer.

Behind them on the wall hung the "Edgely Inn Motto: He who drinks and drinks with grace is always welcome in this place. He who drinks more than his share isn't welcome anywhere."

Anthony Milano had been at the Edgely Inn, a tiny, smoke-filled joint on Bristol's Route 13, for about half an hour. He ate a cheesesteak, drank a beer.

He'd spent the earlier part of that Monday night, December 14, 1987, at a Christian prayer group meeting. He got home at 11:15, dropped his prayer notes on the desk in his bed-





FROM LEFT:  
Frank Chester,  
Richard Laird,  
and the victim,  
Anthony Milano.

room, put on his black leather jacket and told his mother he was going out for a while. Before he left, he went to the door of his parents-bedroom, where his father, Vito, was already in bed, and said, "Goodnight, Daddy." Then he walked out of the house into his black Chevy Nova and a cold December rain. "Be careful," said his mother.

Anthony glanced uneasily around the bar. The man in the biker jacket was still eyeballing him. It was almost 1 a.m. Anthony finished his beer, stood up, grabbed his black leather jacket, then walked across the bar and sat down with the big bearded man, Richard Laird, and his pal, Frank Chester.

"I'll have a shot of vodka," said Laird.

"Jack Daniels," said Chester.

The bartender looked at Anthony Milano.

"A Sambuca," said Anthony.

Chester and Laird exchanged looks.

"That's licorice," said Chester.

"My family always toasts with it on the holidays," said Anthony.

When the bartender returned for their money, Chester and Laird ignored him. And Anthony reached into his pocket and paid for their drinks.

Several minutes later, he got up to go to the men's room. As he walked to the door, Laird turned to Chester. "I hate fuckin' faggots," he said, loudly enough for everybody to hear.

When Anthony returned from the men's room, he sat with Chester and Laird again.

"Let's do another shot," said Laird, pouring him a beer from their pitcher.

Anthony shook his head. "I don't want another shot," he said.

"Set 'em up!" bellowed Laird.

The bartender looked hesitantly at Anthony.

"I said, 'Set 'em up!'"

The bartender filled the three shot glasses and waited for Laird's money.

Laird just glared at him. He had mastered that look, that intimidating look, narrowing his eyes and aiming them at his target, never moving, never blinking.

"You can take it out of mine," said Anthony.

At 1:30 a.m., three Bristol Township cops walked in. A car had just been stolen from an auto lot down the street, and it was parked in front of the bar. There were only four customers still inside, and three of them sat together. The cops asked to see their I.D.'s.

"Fuck you," said Rick Laird, with that look in his eyes again.

The cops moved one step closer.

"Why don't you go do your fuckin' job and leave us alone," said Laird.

"Yo, Rick," said Frank Chester. "Relax, dude. They're just doin' their job."

Laird backed down, broke the gaze. "We're just havin' a couple beers," he said.

Meanwhile, Anthony Milano had quietly opened his wallet to

"**Y**ou are

gonna give us

a ride home,

aren't you?" he

said. Anthony

didn't answer.



show them his I.D. The cops studied it. He looked so young, so different from the other two, they thought he might be underage. They never did see Chester's or Laird's I.D., but they took down their names and addresses, and left after the bartender assured them that the two had been in the bar for hours.

On the way out, one of the cops decided to remain in the lot of the Edgely Inn in case the thief returned. The other two drove off, shaking their heads at the thought of that clean-cut kid in the pin-striped jeans and button-down shirt sitting with the likes of Chester and Laird.

"Talk about a rose between two thorns," said one.

Back in the bar, Laird turned to Anthony. "You'll give us a ride home, right?"

Anthony didn't answer. He had just heard both of them tell the cops that they lived just across Route 13, at the Ambassador Arms apartments.

"You *are* gonna give us a ride, aren't you?" said Laird.

"We don't need a ride," said Chester. "We just live across the street."

"Why should we walk, Frank, when we can get a ride?" said Laird.

The bartender looked suspiciously at Laird and Chester, then started to refill the beer coolers. It was past last call; they'll be out of here soon, he thought. But still, this scene was starting to bug him. He liked this kid Tony; he'd only been in a couple of times, but each time he was quiet, minded his own business. Didn't shoot darts, play pool or get rowdy like the regulars. Just had a sandwich, drank a beer or two, tipped well, and left.

bartender's relief, Rick Laird apologized. "I'm sorry, man," he said, and he motioned for him to come over.

"Listen," he said. "I didn't mean to do that, but I'm just sick and tired of these people trying to infiltrate us."

The bartender knew Laird was referring to Anthony; he wondered if Anthony knew. He stood there, not sure what to do, and then a slow song started playing on the jukebox.

Laird turned to Chester. "Get up," he said. "I wanna dance."

Chester looked embarrassed, then stood next to Richard Laird. They started to slow dance, both of them laughing now, while Anthony Milano watched.

The bartender moved to the only corner in the bar where he couldn't be seen by Chester and Laird, and whispered to Anthony, "Come here." Anthony walked over.

"Tony, these guys are just lookin' to cause trouble," he said. "Get your stuff and get outta here now."

Anthony looked nervous. "I don't want any trouble," he said. "I'll just give them a ride."

"Just leave," said Phillips. "I'll make sure they stay here. You just leave."

Anthony stood there.

"Just *leave*," said Phillips.

Anthony turned around to reach for his jacket—and found himself eyeball to eyeball with Rick Laird.

"You ready to drive us home?" said Laird.

Chester picked up the six-pack they had bought at last call. Laird downed his beer, and the three of them walked out the door.

ANTHONY'S FATHER VITO MILANO WOKE AT 7 a.m., in time to open his barbershop. He dressed and quietly put the coffee on, careful not to wake his son.

Standing at the kitchen sink, he looked out the window. It had rained all night. Good thing he'd turned off the Christmas lights, he thought. Just that weekend he and Anthony had put the manger set on the lawn, strung the lights all around the house, put the new white bulbs in the trees out front . . .

Suddenly he shouted to his wife. "Rosa!"

"What's the matter?" asked Rose, rushing from the bedroom.

"The car is no here!"

"What do you mean?" cried Rose. Then she paused, quickly regaining her composure. Still calm, she told herself: Vito had a heart condition. She checked her son's room: the door was locked.

"I'm sure his car broke down," she said. "Go to work."

"You call me when he wakes up," said Vito. "I'll help him go get the car."

"I'll call, I'll call," said Rose. "Now go to work, look how late it is."

But the minute the door shut, Rose began to worry. If he had car trouble, why didn't he call? Anthony always locked his bedroom door; that didn't mean he was in there. Could it be that he hadn't come home? Anthony *never* stayed out all night.

She pounded on his door. "Anthony! Wake up! Anthony! A you in there?"

An hour later, after her daughter, Annamarie, rushed over the house and climbed through his bedroom window, mother and daughter began dialing the emergency rooms, the police stations, the state troopers . . .

By late afternoon, Annamarie got in her car and went out looking for Anthony. "You stay here, in case he calls," she told her mother. Carrying a picture of her brother, she drove to all the places her mother told her to check: places like the 7-11 in Fairless Hills and the Pathmark in Fairless Hills, where he often stopped at night to pick up a snack. "Wasn't in last night, sorry," they kept telling her.



The Edgely Inn in Bristol Township: When the three men left the bar that night, they got into Anthony's black Chevy Nova and headed down Route 13.

Chester and Laird, on the other hand—especially Laird—were the kind of guys a bartender kept his eye on. Why, earlier that night, he'd come close to kicking Rick Laird the hell out. Not that the bartender, James Phillips Jr., was any tough guy. He was small and thin, about Anthony's size. He wished he'd had the guts to do something when Rick Laird started harassing a guy who was winning at the pool table. Laird kept calling him a pussy and a faggot, loudly announcing to the crowd that if this guy kept winning, he'd ram a pool stick up his ass and make a popsicle out of him. When the customer finally left, the bartender took a deep breath.

It's been one of those nights, he thought, bending over the beer case, when suddenly he heard a shot glass smash behind him on the floor.

He spun around, looked right at Richard Laird, and snapped, "What the *fuck* is your problem?"

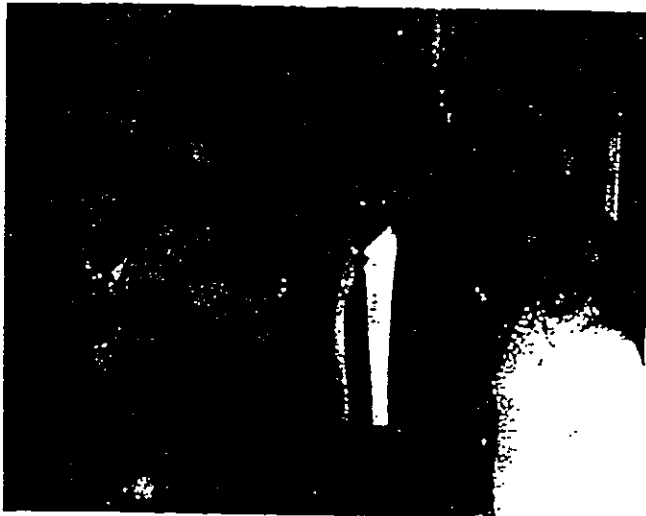
There was a moment of tense silence, then, much to the

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*Before the crime: Richard Laird in the apartment he shared with his girlfriend, Barbara Anne, and her 9-year-old son.*



*The Milanos—Vito, Annamarie, Anthony and Rose—on Christmas Day, 1986. He was buried one year later, on December 22.*



*Frank Chester with his puppy, a few weeks before the crime. He had just turned 20 and moved into his own apartment.*

Then she followed her own hunch, got on the Turnpike and headed for Trenton, to the gay bar that she knew Anthony frequented. She knew because she often went with him. She'd known for ten years that he was gay—and that he wished he weren't.

The bartender at the gay bar looked at Anthony's picture. "Sure, I know him, but he definitely wasn't in last night."

She raced back home. Her mother was sitting at the kitchen table, praying out loud.

"No one has seen him," said Annamarie.

"Where did you look?" asked Rose, trembling.

"Pathmark and 7-11," said her daughter.

ON THAT MONDAY MORNING, HOURS BEFORE HE'D WALK INTO the Edgely Inn, Anthony Milano decided to pack up his life. He was finally, at 26, ready to make the break, to move from his parents' house in Levittown, a one-story clapboard rancher known in these parts as a Levittowner, to an apartment in Center City. It was a move that Anthony Milano had dreamed of—and dreaded—for almost ten years.

One by one, he gathered his things, packed them in neat little boxes and piled them fastidiously on the shelves in his parents' shed. Everything was labeled in neat black marker: Stone-ware dishes. Bric-a-brac. Demitasse set from Aunt Mary. Copies of *GQ* magazine. Telephone. Plant holders. Melitta coffeemaker. His treasured collection of disco records, arranged by the year. And cherubs, an entire box of his beloved cherubs.

Then he went into his bedroom, sorted through the drawers of his desk, and put all of his favorite pictures, his diploma from the Art Institute of Philadelphia, his ticket stubs, his high school awards, even his report cards, in a scrapbook bought specifically for this day.

When he was finished, he called his sister, Annamarie.

"I finally got all my memories together," he told her.

## Vito Milano

woke up at 7.

"Rosa!" he cried

to his wife.

"Anthony's car

is no here."

ON THAT SAME MONDAY MORNING, IN AN APARTMENT HALF A mile away, Richard Laird was making love to Barbara Anne Parr. She was seven and a half months pregnant with his child; he had her name tattooed across his back.

He'd started courting Barbara Anne from a cell in Bucks County Prison two years earlier, when he was doing time for possession of methamphetamines and she was home raising an seven-year-old son. The fact that he was dating her sister Kim at the time didn't stop either one of them from carrying on a romance through a box marked Inmate Mail.

When he was released, Laird went straight to Barbara's mother's house, where both of the sisters were awaiting his return. He stood in the doorway, a big bearded guy in black boots and a motorcycle jacket, smoking a Kool. Then he strolled past Kim and put his arms around Barbara Anne. "I'm lookin' for a woman

with a heart, baby, and you've got one," said Laird.

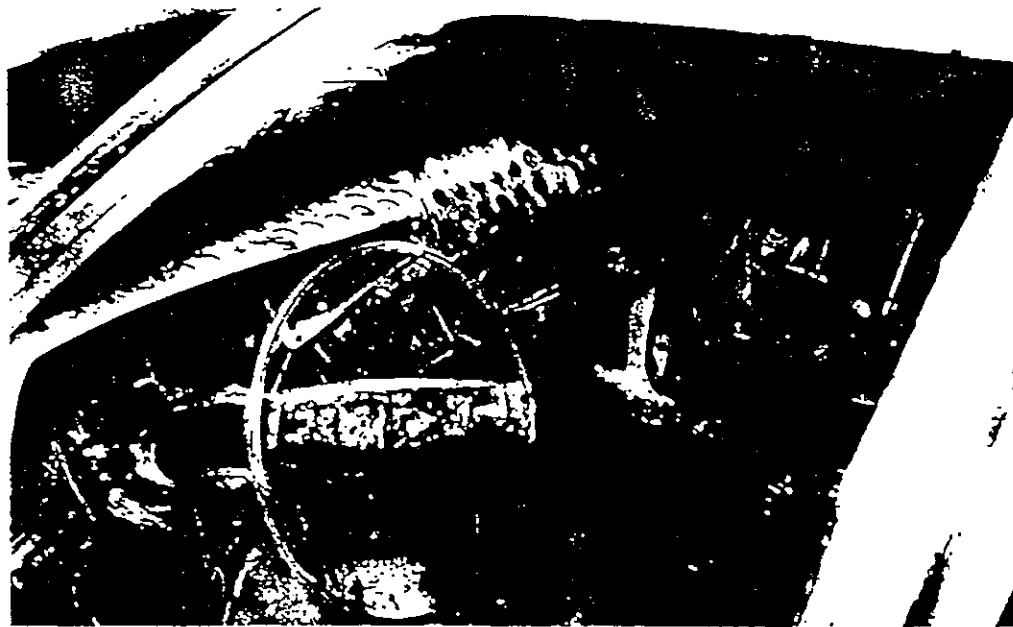
Today, almost two years later, 24-year-old Richard Laird woke up with his woman by his side. He rubbed her pregnant belly, complained that his shoulder hurt from swinging his hammer on the job, and decided to blow off work.

ON THAT MORNING IN ANOTHER APARTMENT, DOWN THE ROAD in Bristol, Frank Chester woke up scared. He'd been in a fight a couple of nights before, and though fighting was hardly unusual for Frank Chester, having the rumpers come back the next night and bang on his door with hockey sticks was.

He had just moved into his place—had finally, at 20, moved out of his mother's house. He had a decent job. And he had Colleen, his Bristol beauty, the hot blond shampoo girl at the beauty shop where his mother worked. From the first day he saw her leaning over the sink in the shop he knew he had to have her. He took her to her senior prom and she got his name tattooed on her ass.

But this morning Colleen wasn't speaking to him. They'd had a fight and she'd returned his engagement ring. He tried to call her, but she kept hanging up. He considered calling his mother, but she wasn't speaking to him either. And so he called his buddies, as he usually did in situations like these.

Eventually, his friend Gale Gardner—another pregnant girl whose boyfriend was in jail—came over to commiserate. He told her how depressed he was about Colleen. They sat around all afternoon, while Chester polished off a couple of six-packs of Bud. As it started to get dark, Frank began to get scared again—



*Anthony's torched car: It was the fire that led police to the body, 30 feet into the woods. Whoever killed him had returned to the scene of the crime hoping to destroy the evidence.*

jumping every time he heard a car door open and peeking through the windows to see if his enemies had come back. Chester was proud of his skills as a fighter; he often bragged about his training in karate and kick-boxing. Yet propped against the wall were a baseball bat and 12-gauge shotgun. Still worried, he picked up the phone and called up his closest relative. He knew if his cousin Barbara Anne came over, so would her boyfriend Rick Laird. And nobody messed with Rick Laird.

"CAR 2543 . . . RESPOND TO ASHBY AND BEAVER DAM FOR A VEHICLE fire . . . suspicious."

Officer Charles McGuigan was heading down Route 13 when the call came in over the radio. It was 11:15 on the night of Tuesday, December 15th, a night that was filled with the usual week-before-Christmas-in-Bristol stuff. Traffic violations, burglaries, guys beating up on their wives. There were a couple of those tonight. Happened every Christmas. It's what they meant

at the police academy when they said a Bristol Township cop would see more action in three years than a Philly cop saw in 15. There was something about that that made a young guy like McGuigan, with 27 months on the force, feel pretty damned important.

"2543 responding," said McGuigan into the mike.

He sped down the commercial strip, past the diners, the auto marts, the Christmas trees for sale, and turned into the dark narrow road behind Manny's Place, into the Venice-Ashby projects that bordered on the woods. Before him he could see a ball of flames. A fire on that road was like a beacon in the night.

He jumped out of the patrol car in time to take down the license plate number. He called it in to headquarters and his lieutenant radioed back.

"Owner is a Rose Milano," the lieutenant reported, reaching for a paper on his desk. "Lady reported her son missing this morning. Better open up the trunk."

McGuigan found nothing but a spare tire. As they towed the car away, he was told to finish his report and go back into service. At 1 a.m., his lieutenant called him into headquarters.

"Better go out to Rose Milano's, McGuigan. Tell her we found the car but not her son."

The cop felt uneasy. Surely Rose Milano would ask if they had checked the area. Would it be all right, he asked, if he looked around the woods first?

When he got back to the scene of the fire, another Bristol cop was there to meet him. They walked ten feet into the woods

and headed in different directions, shining their flashlights into the trees. Twenty feet later, Officer McGuigan screamed, "Oh, my God!"

*His neck . . . is gone.* McGuigan thought, as he stared at the dead boy lying under a tree. All he could see was a big red hole from the chin to the chest. McGuigan pushed the button on his radio, but couldn't move his lips. The boy's face was white, his left eye was wide open, a big jagged gash from his left ear to his chin.

The other cop grabbed the radio from McGuigan's hand. "Calling all captains, all lieutenant captains, all detectives . . ."

They had to wait till dawn to photograph the body and the crime scene. So one by one the cops took turns sitting with the mutilated

corpse of Anthony Milano, waiting for the sun to come up.

McGuigan's turn was first. He sat with him alone till his relief came at 2 a.m. The boy was lying on his back with his hands underneath him. He was fully clothed and soaking wet from the rain that continued to fall on his face, his open eye, and what was left of his neck. Around him, pieces of bloody flesh clung to the branches on the ground.

But it wasn't just the body that so horrified Charles McGuigan. It was the sickening feeling that he'd seen this kid somewhere before.

It clicked the next day, when he went to work, bleary-eyed, and looked at another report still sitting on his desk. "My God," thought McGuigan, "the kid at the Edgely Inn." He was the first to see him dead and the last to have seen him alive. Well, not the last, thought McGuigan, as he tore through the report of his visit to the bar. "Other two men identified as Frank Chester and Richard Laird."

LESS THAN 24 HOURS HAD PASSED BETWEEN THE TIME Anthony Milano was killed and the time the cops discovered his body. The Milanos spent those hours praying by a telephone that didn't ring.

Their son took his last breath at roughly 3:15 a.m. At 3:30, Frank Chester was running. And Richard Laird was right behind him. They continued to run, nearly a mile in the dark, until they reached the Lakeview Manor apartments. Chester had friends who lived there. He ran to their building, bolted up the steps and pounded on the door of Apartment E-5.

Rich Griscavage had been sleeping on the couch when he heard the pounding and Frank Chester's voice yelling, "Open up the door!"

"Yo," said Griscavage, "what's goin' on?"

Chester rushed in, covered with mud, sweat and blood, and blurted to Griscavage, "We got in a fight and the dude is dead!"

Laird walked in behind him. "Shut the fuck up!" he snapped. He was wearing boots, jeans and a motorcycle jacket—but no shirt. Griscavage was staring at the blood on his pants when Laird tossed him his jacket, strolled into the kitchen and turned on the faucet in the sink.

A few minutes later, Pete Carpinona walked out of the bedroom he shared with his girlfriend and their baby.

He looked in the kitchen and saw Richard Laird washing his hands in the sink.

"What the hell's going on?" he asked Chester.

"Something fucked-up happened," Chester told him.

"Shut up!" said Laird.

At that point Carpinona's girlfriend walked out in a nightgown. She looked at the man with the big tattoos and a nipple ring in his chest standing in her kitchen.

"Get back in the fucking bedroom," Laird told her. "This ain't no place for a woman."

She went back to bed.

"Get him out of here," Carpinona told Griscavage, pointing to Laird.

"Yeah," said Laird. "Gimme a ride home."

Griscavage took Laird on his motorcycle to the Ambassador Arms apartments, across the street from the Edgely Inn.

When they left, Carpinona asked Chester what had happened. They met a guy in a bar. Chester said, asked him for a ride home, and got into a fight with him. "And the next thing I knew, Rick was on top of him cutting him."

When Griscavage got back, Chester was still talking. "I can't believe that fucking asshole did this," he said. "He's running my fuckin' life."

Then he asked Griscavage if he'd drive him over to Laird's.

BACK AT LAIRD'S APARTMENT, HIS GIRLFRIEND BARBARA ANNE was sobbing. She'd left Laird and Chester at the Edgely Inn at 11 o'clock that night and gone back to her apartment with another young woman, Gale Gardner. Barb had never met Gale before. Her cousin Frank introduced them that evening. She felt bad for the girl, who was 17 and pregnant, her boyfriend in jail. She told her she could sleep on the couch in her apartment. Gale didn't tell Barbara Anne what she'd later tell her friends, that before the women left the Edgely, Laird had made a pass at her—told her, right in front of another guy at the bar, that he'd be the best fuck she ever had, then graphically described the other sexual acts he'd like her to perform. When Gale looked offended, she says, Laird threatened her. "You tell my old lady about this and I'll kill you, bitch."

By midnight, Gale and Barbara and Barb's nine-year-old son David were watching a movie when the telephone rang. It was Richard Laird.

"Do you want me to pick you up?" Barbara asked him, but he said no.

Gale was asleep on the couch when she heard the door open at 4:30 in the morning. She saw blood on Laird's clothes and boots. She thought to herself, "I don't even know this guy."

"Where's Frank?" asked Gale.

"Shut up and go to sleep," said Laird.

He left his boots by the door and walked into the bedroom, but Barbara Anne wasn't there. Panicked, she'd gone out looking for him.

When she returned a few minutes later, he was standing on the front porch. All he asked was, "Where were you?"

"Where were you?" asked Barbara Anne.

Laird didn't answer and she started to cry. She'd been in pain all through her pregnancy; this she didn't need.

"What, were you out getting laid?" shouted Barbara.

"Yeah," said Laird. "I was out getting laid."

He walked into the bedroom, took his clothes off and fell asleep.

Barbara was still in tears when the doorbell rang, a few minutes later. It was her cousin, Frank Chester.

"Where's Rick?" he asked.

"He's in bed."

"Get him up!"

"Damn it, Frank!" said Barbara, crying. "Every time you two go out, you get in trouble."

"I don't control his mind, Barbara Anne. I don't stop Rick from doing what he does."

She picked up a motorcycle helmet and hurried it at her cousin. "Wake him up yourself," she said.

Chester stormed into the bedroom.

"Get the fuck up!" he shouted.

"Leave me the fuck alone," mumbled Laird.

"What are you gonna do?" cried Chester. "Lay here until the cops come?"

"Frank, you better get the fuck outta here, man," said Laird. "You're ruinin' my fuckin' life."

Then he rolled over and went back to sleep.

While Chester kept trying to wake Laird, Barbara sat crying in the living room. Then she walked to the door, picked up her boyfriend's boots and scrubbed them in the kitchen sink.

BY 9 THAT MORNING, ROSE Milano had called every emergency room in the Philadelphia area. She used the phone in Anthony's bedroom, so the other line would be open if he called. The scrapbook he just made sat next to the telephone. Hidden underneath it was his Christmas list. "A sweater for Dad, oil pants for Mom . . ."

The same time that morning, Rick Laird got out of bed, washed off the knife that was used the night before, and slid it in the pocket of his pants. Chester and Gale were still awake and sitting in the living room.

At 10 a.m. Laird made a phone call. "Things got a little crazy last night, I have to talk to you," Gale heard him saying. "Just wait till I get there, I'll talk to you in person."

When he hung up the phone, he picked up his clothes from the night before, stuffed them in a plastic bag, and put them in the trunk of his car.

"C'mon, Frank," he said. The five of them—Rick, Barbara, Gale, Chester and little David—got in Laird's car, so he could

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**“Y**ou could  
bury the body in  
the mountains.  
Or dump it in  
a lake,” said  
his friends.

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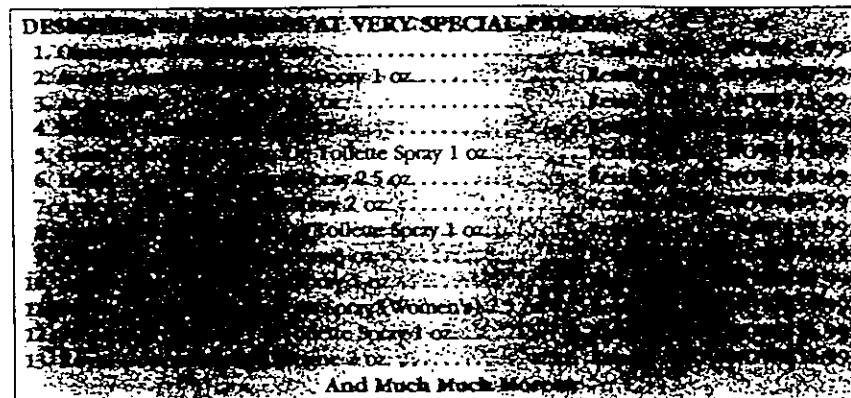
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ANTHONY

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drop Chester and Gale at Chester's apartment, then head off to Bensalem to meet his older brother for lunch.

At one point during the ride, Laird slid the knife from his pocket and held it in his hand. It was a utility knife, the kind with a razor-sharp blade that pops out when a button on the handle is pressed. "No evidence, no crime," he said, snapping it closed and slipping it back in his pocket.

"What time did we get home last night, about 2 o'clock?" he asked.

"I think so, yeah," said Gale.

"No," said Barbara Anne. "Remember, I called the bar after 2 and the bartender told me you had left."

"Aw, shit," said Laird.

When they pulled up to Frank's apartment, Laird got out of the car. "Yo, Frank," he said to Chester. "Just be cool. You know what I mean? Just keep it cool."

OVER THE YEARS, GALE GARDNER HAD listened to a lot of crazy stuff from Frank Chester, from the days when he dated her sister Gretchen to this latest—and constant—obsession with his new girlfriend, Colleen. She was used to seeing Frank act a little bit nuts, but this, this whole morning, was insanity.

She sat him down on the couch.

"Now tell me what happened."

He told her about the bar and a guy named Tony and how Laird cut his throat and the blood squirted out, and Frank heard all these gurgling noises. She asked if he had hurt him, too. First Frank told her he knocked him out of the way, then he said he knocked him unconscious, then he said no, he wasn't unconscious.

A few minutes into this, Griscava came over.

"Tell me what happened, Frank."

"Some faggot came walking into the bar," Frank told him, "and Rick kept on fucking with him." He told Griscava all he had done was kick him a little. Later, Pete Carpinona showed up, as did Alan Hilton, a friend who'd driven Chester and Laird to the Edgey Inn that night but had left before Anthony Milano walked in.

Throughout the day, and into the evening, there'd be as many as five people in Frank Chester's living room at any given time, all asking questions, offering suggestions.

They discussed whether he should leave town. And Frank kept saying he was worried about the car. "My fingerprints are in it," he said.

When Pete Carpinona went out for cigarettes, Frank told him to drive by the Venice-Ashby projects and see if the car was still there.

At one point the phone rang. "Yo, what's up?" said Frank. When he hung up, he told his friends that the call was from Laird. "Him and his brother are gonna



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take care of it, blow the car up," said Chester.

At one point, the group in the apartment tossed out ideas on how to get rid of the body.

"You could bury it in the mountains," said one friend.

"Dump it in a lake."

"Take it up to the Poconos."

Chester asked Alan Hilton if he'd take the body to the Poconos.

"Fuck no!" said Hilton. "You want my advice? If you didn't do the slashing, you should just go to the cops, come clean with all this."

Chester said he couldn't tell the cops, because he was afraid of Rick Laird.

Toward evening, a guy named Mike showed up in his brand new red Chevy Beretta.

"Hey, Mike," said Chester. "Can I borrow your car?"

"What for?" he asked.

*He'd been carved from  
 ear to ear, all the way  
 down to the bone,  
 through the spinal cord.  
 It was as if someone had  
 tried to behead him.*

"I got a dead deer I have to get rid of."


Mike looked around the room suspiciously. "Sorry, Frank," he said, and turned to walk out the door. Gale ran after him. "Can you give me a ride home?"

Carpinona said he had to leave, too. He had to go pick up a Christmas tree.

ON THE MORNING OF WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16th, Rose Milano and her daughter were called to police headquarters. When they got there, Annamarie heard someone whisper, "The family's here." An hour later, Vito Milano would look out the door of his barbershop to see his wife and daughter being led in, supported by the arms of police officers. "No! No!" he screamed, falling to his knees on the white tile floor. "My boy . . . my boy . . ."

That afternoon, Rick Laird and Barbara Anne went Christmas shopping. They bought little David a pile of ninja toys and some army shirts.

By the end of that afternoon, the autopsy on Anthony Milano was completed. Three cerebral hemorrhages. A fracture of the skull. Front teeth punched in. Chin kicked or hit. Cheeks slashed and bruised. Neck cut so many times the pathologist lost count. He'd been carved from ear to



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ear—cut right through the jugular vein, the thyroid gland, the Adam's apple, the voicebox, all the way down to the spinal cord, so deep it cut the bone of the spine. It was as if someone had tried to behead him.

It was determined, based on the blood they found in his lungs, that Anthony had been alive, and gasping, for five to ten minutes during the cutting.

From his chest to his toes, he'd hardly been touched.

"BOSS, WE HAVE A MURDER."

Bucks County D.A. Alan Rubenstein lit up a cigarette and listened as his chief detective filled him on the latest grisly discovery.

"His throat slashed?" asked Rubenstein. "Tell me some more." At the time he'd gotten that first call, the body hadn't even been identified, let alone the suspects. But Rubenstein knew the minute he saw the photograph of the corpse, a few hours after the call, that this was a case he would keep for himself. No assistant prosecutor was going to try this one.

So far, all he had in terms of evidence was a torched car and a wet pack of Kool cigarettes, found under the body. Neither was likely to turn up any fingerprints. And though the Venice-Ashby area was known for its drug-related robberies and other crimes, he knew this wasn't a case of a deal gone sour. Milano's wallet was on him, with his credit cards, his driver's license and \$10.50 in bills and change. In fact, the only thing missing was his car keys.

Rubenstein paced the room until the early report from the autopsy came in. He suspected a homosexual tie from the start—mostly because he'd been around the block enough times to know that the way the boy was killed was typical of the most extreme cases of gay-bashing: gory mutilation of the face and the neck. This wasn't a case of a couple of stab wounds. It was an angry and vicious frenzy, where the killer was face to face with his victim, kneeling on his shoulders, pinning his arms down under him so he couldn't fight back, as he hacked away at his neck.

When, less than a day later, a motive began to take shape—that it was possible Milano was killed because two thugs in a bar thought he was gay—Rubenstein was determined to run both of his suspects: on first-degree murder. Now it was just a question of how.

Within 24 hours of the discovery of the body, the D.A. had probable cause to arrest both Frank Chester and Richard Laird. He had a statement from the bartender, he had statements from the cops at the Edgely—including one who'd seen the three of them leave together. And anonymous calls started coming in from



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ANTHONY

"friends," calls that made it very clear that one of his suspects was a talker.

But death penalty cases, as he knew—as he hoped—this one would be, weren't built on probable cause. Rubenstein wasn't going to lock either of them up until he was sure he had everything he needed. And he knew exactly how he'd get it: He'd give the talker a chance to dig both of their graves. It was risky, but if the plan worked, he'd have both Chester and Laird exactly where he wanted them.

On the 18th of December, he put the plan into action. Frank Chester was stopped by a patrol car as he drove down Route 13.

"You Frank Chester?"

Shaking, he nodded his head. "What I do?"

"Aw, nothin', Frank. Just a matter of some outstanding traffic tickets is all. Why don't you come down to headquar-

*All Chester had to do,  
as the cops told him,  
was get Laird to admit  
to the killing. But he  
also had to find a way  
to clear himself.*

ters, we'll get it all straightened out."

"Yes, sir," said Chester.

Later, as he was about to leave the precinct, one of the cops stopped him. "Listen, by the way," he said. "We're investigating a murder, kid left with his throat slashed out near Venice-Ashby. You don't know anything about it, do you, Frank?"

"No," he said quickly. Then he added, "Just what I read in the papers."

The cop paused, took a few steps around the room. "Just read about it, huh Frank?"

"It's in all the papers."

"Right. Well, see, Frank, we have a little problem. There's this bartender out at the Edgely Inn says you were with the guy that night."

"Yeah, well, I saw him," said Frank.

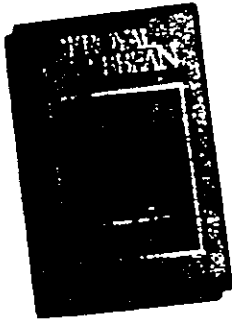
"So you saw him . . ."

"Yeah, I went to the Edgely Inn that night, had a couple beers and left. When I left, he was sitting at the bar . . . with Rick Laird."

At that point, Detective Frank Dykes walked into the room. He was the guy Rubenstein had picked to lead the investigation.

"Frank," he said, "that's not gonna work, either. We have a cop, see, who

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says he saw you leave with Milano."

By the end of the conversation, Chester had changed or embellished his story several times. The last version was that he did leave the bar with Laird and Milano, but got dropped off first. He insisted that was the whole truth, and that he didn't come forward because he was afraid of Richard Laird. Especially when he read what had happened to the kid.

"We can understand that, Frank," said Dykes. "But we need you to help us out."

"Anything I can do," said Frank Chester.

"Why don't you come in tomorrow, take a polygraph to clear your name from all this, and maybe answer a few more questions."

Following Rubenstein's directions, the cops shook his hand and sent him home. That night Chester told his friends that the cops were on his side; they weren't after Frank Chester, they were after Richard Laird. Rubenstein's plan was working.

The next day, Detective Dykes picked Chester up at his apartment and brought him back to Bristol Township headquarters. As is routinely done in a polygraph exam, the questions were recited to Chester before the test was given. When Frank heard that one of the questions was whether he was present when the murder actually took place, he reconsidered. "I don't think I want to take this," he said.

"All right, Frank," said Dykes. "But let's go through this again."

By the end of the conversation, Chester's version went something like this: He had lied the day before about getting dropped off first. Actually, he said, he did stay in the car with them and they drove around for 45 minutes. Anthony kept pleading to go home, said Chester. But eventually, they stopped the car on Ashby Avenue. Laird and Anthony got out and walked into the woods. Through the shadows, said Chester, he could see them fighting. When he got out to see what was going on, he heard grunting, and the next thing he knew, Laird came out of the woods with blood all over him, and Frank Chester began running.

Dykes thanked Chester for his cooperation, shook his hand and sent him home again--this time, with the promise that he'd return and make a wiretapped phone call to Richard Laird. The detective added one condition; that Chester have no contact whatsoever with Richard Laird until the time of the call.

The phone call was scheduled for the evening of the 19th. That afternoon, Rose and Vito Milano picked out a casket for their son. Barbara Anne Parr hung stockings over her fireplace and started to decorate the tree. And D.A. Alan Rubenstein dressed for a holiday dinner party, leaving orders for his detectives to call him when

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Chester showed up.  
But Chester never did show up. For the first time. Rubenstein panicked. All along, he'd been banking on the hope that, as long as he kept sending Chester home, he'd be stupid enough to keep coming back.  
"What do you mean, he didn't show up?" he screamed to his detectives, over the happy chatter of the dinner party guests. He lowered his voice. "Just get him in here!"  
The next morning, Frank Chester calmly answered the phone in his apartment. "Sorry," he told Dykes. "Colleen and I got in a fight."  
At 2 o'clock that Sunday, December 20th, Chester sat in a room with two county detectives and nervously waited as they dialed Laird's number.  
All he had to do, as the cops told him, was get Laird to admit to the killing. But he also had to find a way to clear himself.  
"Yo, what's up?" said Laird.  
"Yo," said Chester.  
"What's up?"

"Are you gonna be able to do this or not?" Laird asked. "I don't know," Chester replied. "You know I've never been in this kind of shit before."

Chester: "So what's, what's, what we gonna do? What's going on?"  
Laird: "Huh?"  
Chester: "What's going on?"  
Laird: "Nothing, man."  
Chester: "A lot of people coming around asking me questions about you and me in the bar."  
Laird: "So?"  
Chester: "So . . ."  
Laird: "What's up with that? There ain't nothing up with that."  
Chester: "No, but, you know, if [the cops] come to me and wanna talk to me, what am I going to say?"  
Laird: "What do you mean, what are you gonna say? . . . Nothing. You just say, yeah, we were there drinking. . . . We got fucking wrecked and came to my house and passed out."  
Chester: "Yeah."  
Laird: "Did they talk to you yet?"  
Chester: "No."  
Laird: "The cops didn't?"  
Chester: "No."  
Laird: "Oh, well, what the fuck, Frank. You got me shittin' my pants, dude."  
Chester: "Why?"  
Laird: "I thought you said the cops

continued on page 192

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continued from page 189

questioned you and shit."

Chester: "No."

Laird: "No? . . . I thought that's what you said last night."

Chester: "I didn't talk to you last night."

The cops exchanged glances. They could only hear Chester's part of the conversation, but if he had contacted Laird the night before, he was deep into another lie.

Laird: "Yes, you did."

Chester: "No, I didn't."

Laird: "The fuck you didn't, Frank."

Chester: "I was with Colleen."

Laird: "Frank, you called me last night."

Chester: "No, I didn't."

Laird: "Yes, you did, dude."

A few seconds later, Laird told Chester, "I'm gonna fucking hide until this blows over."

Chester: "Why, do you think it will?"

Laird: "Yeah, eventually it will have to go into a dead case."

Chester: "Are you sure?"

Laird: "Yeah, the statute of limitations is something like seven years."

Chester: ". . . That has nothing to do with it when something, you know, something like that."

Laird: "I know, but there's no evidence, Frank, you know?"

Chester: "Yeah . . ."

Laird: "We didn't do nothing, you know?"

Chester: "Yeah."

A little later, Chester asked, "So what are you gonna do, just hang out there?"

Laird: "No, we're getting ready to . . . out."

Chester: "Where are you going?"

Laird: "I don't know, somewhere. Christmas shopping or something . . . What are you gonna do?"

Chester: "I don't know. Like, what am I supposed to do if they come up to me and, and, you know, 'cause you can't, you, if they do tell you to take a polygraph test, you can't, you know, pass them things."

Laird: "With downs."

He suggested that Frank try to get some downers from a doctor.

Laird: "You gonna be able to do this or not?"

Chester: "I don't know . . . you know I've never been in this kind of shit before. . . . I'm scared."

Laird: "Yeah."

Chester: "'Cause that's, what can they do to you, what can they do for that?"

Laird: "Kill you."

Chester: "They can kill you?"

Laird: "Lethal injection . . . [Or] put you in jail for fucking life. Which would you rather have?"

Chester: "Nothing, I didn't do nothing."

Laird: "Me neither. Just go away for a

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white, man."

Chester: "I can't leave."

Laird: "Why?"

Chester: "'Cause it's Christmas . . ."

Laird: "So what?"

Chester: ". . . You know what I mean, my family and shit."

Later in the taped conversation Laird told Chester, "You just be cool, man. Like, the motherfucker gave us a ride here and that was it. We came in and passed the fuck out."

Chester: "Yeah."

Laird: "Can you handle that?"

Chester: "Yeah."

Laird: "I hope so, Frank, man."

Chester: "So do I."

Laird: "What do you mean, so do you?"

Chester said he might get nervous.

Laird: "You know, if they ask you what you're nervous about, say what the fuck you think? You're trying to pin a fucking homicide on me, you know?"

Chester: "Yeah."

Laird: "You know? I ain't no fucking murderer, you gotta be fucking crazy."

*Rubenstein walked Frank Chester to the door and told him to go home. By dusk of that night, December 21st, Chester had disappeared.*

Chester: "All right, so what are you gonna do? Go shopping?"

Toward the end of the conversation, Laird told Chester, "You got me a paranoid fucking wreck, man, you know? I don't want nobody try punning no fucking homicide on me either, you know? I ain't got it in me to kill somebody, you know?" To which Chester replied, "Yeah, all right, how long you gonna be [shopping]?" The call lasted 14 minutes. As they hung up, Laird said, "Just get your shit together and stick to it, all you gotta do it stick to your guns. . . . No evidence, no case, you hear me?"

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, CHESTER and his girlfriend Colleen showed up at the Bucks County Courthouse. "I'm Frank Chester," he told the secretary. "I'd like to see the D.A."

Rubenstein thought his secretary was joking. He'd heard the taped conversation several times by now, and knew that it hadn't gone very well for Chester. There he was, out to prove that Laird was the killer, and yet every time Laird denied having done it, all Frank could say was "Yup, all right." Not "What do you mean? You cut him!" Just "Yup, all right." But

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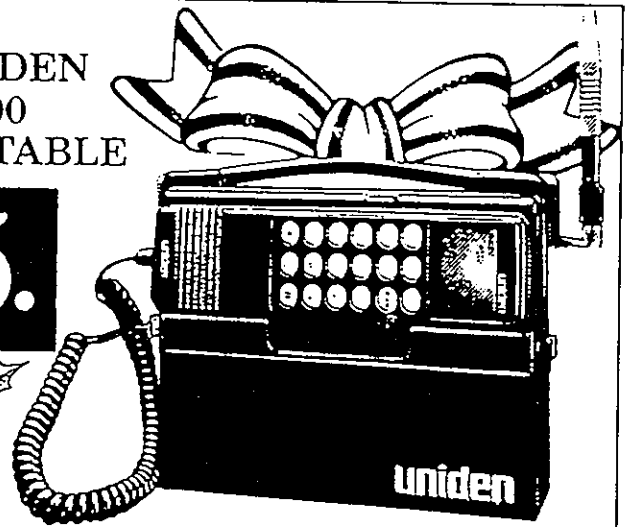
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# WINE NEWS

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As an international wine authority and importer, I have devoted my life to the wine industry. Whenever I return from one of my many trips to visit the world's finest vineyards, people always ask me about the new wines I have discovered abroad. Most often, they ask me to find a new Soave that's not too dry to bring back to America — a Soave that would be of superior quality, yet reasonably priced. They wanted a new Soave customized for the American palate.

I sought the help of Livio Manera, one of Europe's most highly respected oenologists. Together we returned to the United States to find out the likes and dislikes of American wine drinkers. Most full dry whites and Soaves have almost zero residual sugar which, in my opinion, is too dry for Americans. On the other hand, the new Blush wines and most Chablis' and White Zinfandels have over 3% residual sugar which, of course, is too sweet. Our surveys and tastings indicated that Americans really preferred a sugar content of 1.5% — which is not too sweet or too dry. I returned to Italy to find a new Soave that would perfectly satisfy American tastes. My new Soave is just right!

Verona, Italy, the romantic setting of Romeo and Juliet, is the heartland of the Soave grape zone. Here, in this ancient fertile soil, where the terrain is stony and shaley, where the roots of the Garganaga vine grow deep, I found at last, the vineyard that produced the best grapes.

Working with these superior grapes, my goal was to produce a new Soave, a Soave of incomparable quality and uniquely distinctive flavor. I accomplished this by using a "secret blend" and cold storage aging process. This unique blending resulted in a much smoother, higher quality wine that was truly created to please all American wine lovers. In addition, I use only the finest natural cork to seal in the perfectly balanced character of the wine. I personally rate my Soave higher than Robert Mondavi white, and believe it is unquestionably better than all others. Enjoy it!

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ANTHONY

what really struck Rubenstein was their attitude through the whole conversation — referring to Tony as "the dude" and "the motherfucker," talking about shopping for Christmas presents, for Chrissake. It's like they ran over a dog, thought Rubenstein.

"Come in, Frank," he said.

He kept it casual, rolled up his shirt sleeves, lit up a cigarette, offered one to Frank.

"I got some, thanks."

"So what's on your mind?"

Chester said he just wanted to talk. Gradually he gave the D.A. more details to go on — like the fact that he was a kickboxer, and that there was a girl named Gale who'd spent that night at Laird's. Then finally he asked Rubenstein what he thought of the phone call.

"It was OK, Frank," said Rubenstein. "But we want you to make one more."

Chester began to shake. "OK, sure," he said.

Rubenstein walked him to the door, shook his hand, and told him to go home and wait for a call from Detective Dykes.

By dusk that night, on the 21st of December, Frank Chester had disappeared.

AT THEIR TINY HOUSE IN LEVITTOWN, Rose and Vito Milano were dressing for their son's viewing.

They had decided that Anthony would be laid out in his new blue suit, the one they'd bought him for his graduation from the Art Institute just two months before.

When they handed the suit, along with a crisp white shirt and tie, to the funeral director, he nodded and put it aside. Vito was the undertaker's barber; they'd known each other for years. He couldn't find the words to tell him that his son's body had been so horribly butchered that it would take a work of art to conceal the carnage. Instead, the undertaker took the suit, told them it was beautiful, then quietly went to work on a plaster of pans cast to rebuild Anthony's neck.

The casket was placed in a room filled with flowers and memories of Anthony, most of them selected from the scrapbook he'd made on the last day of his life. There were photographs of him laughing, snapshots with his sister, Annamarie. His portfolio from the Art Institute, which was voted best in the class, was displayed on a table. Next to it was a picture of him wearing the blue suit, holding up his diploma and smiling with pride. Vito and Rose were beaming that afternoon as they watched their only son graduate with honors. It was the kind of day Vito Milano might have only dreamed of years ago, as he arrived in this country from Bari, Italy, his new bride on his arm, knowing just enough English to find his way to Philadelphia.

In 28 years of marriage, Rose had

never before seen her husband cry. Now every time Vito tried to talk he started sobbing, his thin body shaking so violent that it took all of Rose's energy just to help him walk. They were both so tiny — each under 5'5" — that they looked lost in the big chairs next to their son's coffin.

On the sidewalk in front of the funeral home that night, a long line of people stood in the freezing December air, slowly filling in. A few of them were men Anthony had met at gay bars. Many more of them were from the Milanos' Mennonite church. The family had left Catholicism for the Mennonite faith when Anthony was 15, embracing a religion whose members frown on drugs and alcohol, refuse to bear arms (they are excused from military combat and can't become cops), and lead such pious lives that owning car insurance — for which the Mennonites have their own program — costs as little as \$1 a month. They also adhere to the sword of the Bible on virtually all things including homosexuality.

It would be days after the viewing before Vito Milano would read in the newspapers that his son was gay; to this day he refuses to believe it.

But that night, all he knew was that his boy lay dead beside him, and that somewhere out in the cold December night, his killer or killers continued to live. "Please pray," Vito said through his tears and broken English to the people who paid the respects, "that they find who did this to my son."

"OPEN UP! POLICE!"

A half-dozen armed cops stood outside the door of Room 32 of the Falls Motel, a run-down roadside stop in Falls Township, on the morning of December 22nd.

Richard Laird's Pontiac was parked in front. When they entered the room, they found Laird and Barbara Anne Parr in one bed. Laird's brother Mark and his girlfriend (Barbara's sister Lisa) in the other and Parr's nine-year-old son David sleeping on a bed made of two chairs.

"Don't move," said one of the officers pointing a pistol at Laird. Another held shotgun as he ripped back the sheet that was covering Rick Laird. They reached for his arms to handcuff him while little David began crying in the corner.

"You're under arrest for the murder of Anthony Milano . . ."

Barbara Anne began to scream.

"You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you . . ."

As they led Laird out the door, handcuffed in his long johns and sneakers, he looked back at the very pregnant Barbara Anne. "I love ya, baby," he said.

Detective Dykes was waiting for Laird back at the Bristol Township police headquarters. He was waiting and he was ready.

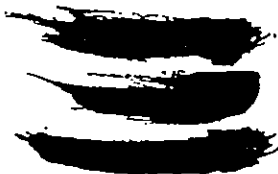
"There's a couple of things we get straight," said Dykes, at



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ANTHONY

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him down. "First of all, Rick, the death penalty in this state is carried out by electrocution, not lethal injection."

Laird glared at him. "And the other thing, Rick, there is no seven-year statute of limitations on a homicide charge. . . . Do you know what I'm saying?"

"Yeah," said Laird. "I really know what you're saying."

"Then you know why you're here. . . . So where's Chester?"

"I'm no rat," said Laird. "Are two rats better than one?"

"When was the last time you spoke to him?"

"Don't you know?" said Laird.

"Listen," said Dykes. "You're the one in the cell right now, you better start thinking about your own problems."

"I am," replied Laird, grinning while they took his mug shot. "You're trying to pin a homicide on me."

"I've heard that before, too," said Dykes, referring again to the taped phone conversation.

"Yeah, I already figured that out," said Laird.

As they continued the process of booking him, Dykes turned to him again. "You know," he said, "you should have taken off somewhere good, Rick, instead of just running to the Falls Motel."

"Yeah, you're right, but . . ." Laird made a gesture with his hand, rubbing his thumb and two fingers together, implying that he didn't have the money to run any farther.

Dykes shook his head and grinned at the officer standing next to him.

"You know, Rick," he said, "in our experience, this was the dumbest homicide we ever saw."

AT 11 O'CLOCK THAT MORNING, THREE days before Christmas, the body of Anthony Milano was lowered into the ground at Levittown's Rosedale Memorial Park. Rose had asked that a photo of her son be inserted on the brass and marble plate, under Anthony V. Milano, 1961-1987. Underneath the picture it said, "We will always love you."

Nine days passed before the cops found Frank Chester. They knew he hadn't gone far, because twice over the Christmas holiday, lawyers called Alan Rubenstein, trying to arrange his surrender in exchange for a deal.

Rubenstein told the lawyers to have a nice Christmas. "The only deal I was willing to offer Frank Chester," he says, "was AC current or DC current."

So they waited. And they searched, meanwhile gathering statements from the friends of Frank Chester who had listened as he spilled his guts.

Finally, on December 30th, a Bristol attorney who was friendly with Chester's

family called Rubenstein. Chester was ready to turn himself in. Two county detectives were waiting in the lawyer's office when Chester walked in with his stepfather at his side. He was silent as they read the charges on the arrest warrant: first-degree murder, kidnapping, criminal conspiracy and others. Then he was handcuffed, put in a car and brought to police headquarters, where Detective Dykes was waiting.

"So, Frank," he said, "would you like to add anything to your previous statements?"

"The last story I told you was the truth," said Chester.

"Well, we have information that's different from your last truthful statement, Frank."

Chester laughed. "Well, maybe I didn't tell you *all* of the truth," he said.

THE NEW YEAR BEGAN IN LEVITTOWN with Chester and Laird both behind bars. But the truth—certainly all of the truth—was locked up with them. Five months would pass before they'd sit in a county courtroom, on trial for the murder of Anthony Milano. When the trial began on May 13th, it was still uncertain exactly what happened in the woods that night.

From the time of Laird's arrest, when all communication stopped between the two suspects, they turned against each other, each building a separate defense, each with a different version of what happened. Laird's version blamed it all on Chester; Chester's blamed it all on Laird. And the D.A. stood in the middle with a third theory: Neither man could have done this to another man alone.

Rubenstein gathered evidence for his theory: photographs and medical reports and bloodstained clothing wrapped in plastic bags. But the truth of his theory went deeper than the evidence.

The killing of Anthony Milano began long before that night at the Edgely Inn. Because before this was a case of murder, it was a case of men—of one man struggling to deny his sexuality and two other men struggling to defend theirs.

Next Month:  
Killing Anthony, Part 2:  
The Trial and the Truth

**Editor's Note**

The events surrounding the murder of Anthony Milano were reconstructed from courtroom testimony and from interviews over a six-month period with witnesses, attorneys, defendants Richard Laird and Frank Chester and families of the accused and the victim. In all instances, reported dialogue is based on testimony from at least one of the speakers, and corroborated with interviews, further testimony, or statements made to police.

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# KILLING



# ANTHONY

As the trial began the question lingered:  
What really happened in the woods that night?

By Lisa DePaulo

## PART II

**F**IVE MONTHS AFTER THE MURDER OF HIS son, Vito Milano sat in a packed Bucks County courtroom and, choking back the tears, told the jury, "I said goodnight."

*And after that evening, you did not see your son again?*

Vito began to sob. "I never see him anymore."

*"... No further questions."*

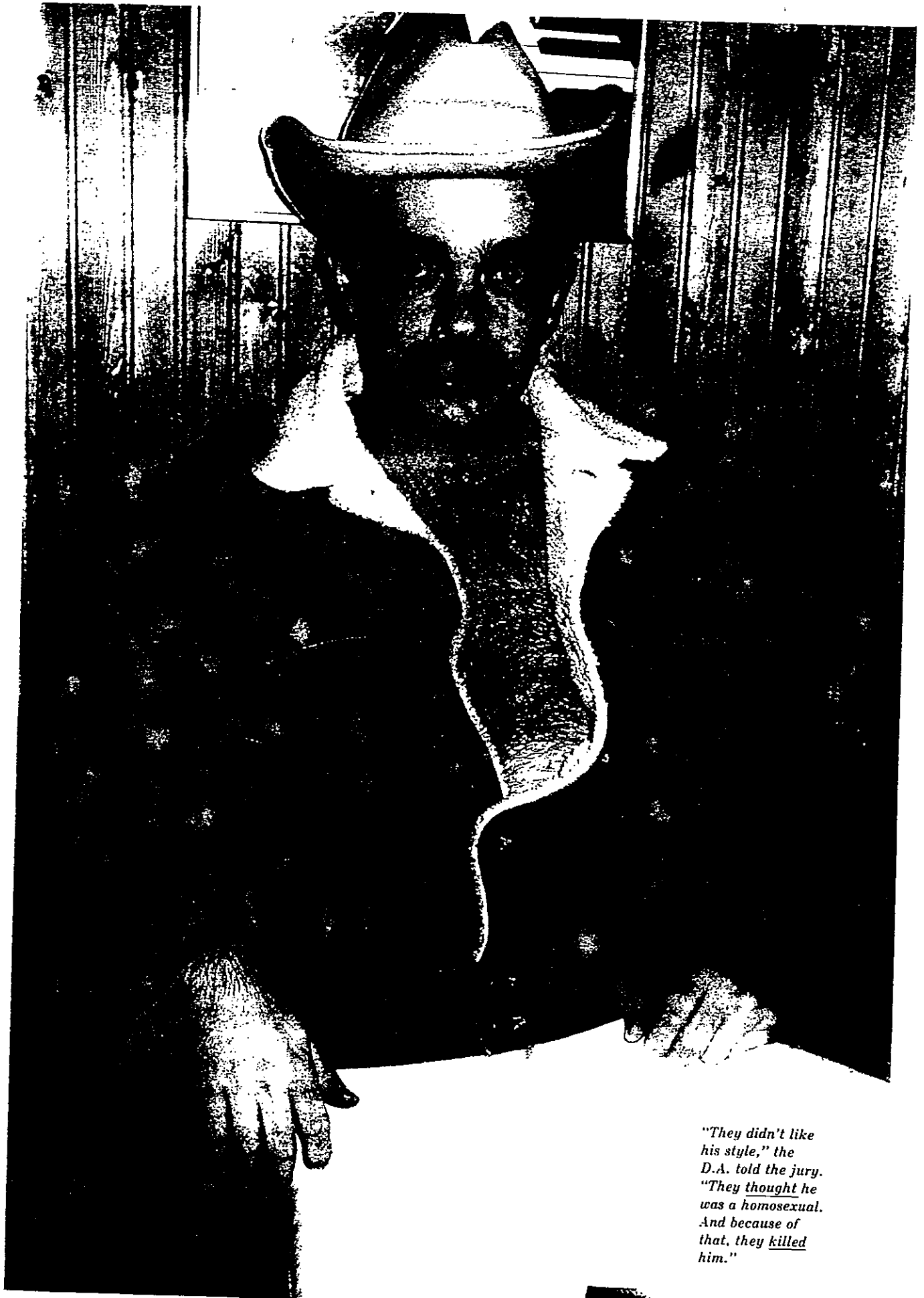
On the Friday before, a sunny May afternoon, Bucks County District Attorney Alan Rubenstein delivered his opening argument in the case of the commonwealth vs. Frank Chester and Richard Laird.

"You will hear testimony in this courtroom," Rubenstein bellowed, "that what [we] found was horrifying. The *unspeakable*. Horror in the form of a young boy, a young man, who had his throat slashed. Not once, not twice, but more times than you can count. *More times than you can count.*

"Anthony Milano was beaten, *violently*. He had a skull fracture. He was hit. He was kicked. He was stomped. . . . He had a brain hemorrhage. His brain was expanding in his head. . . ."

Rubenstein pivoted on his heels, pacing before the jury box, locking eyes with the jurors.

"Now you may say to yourself, 'What was the reason for



*"They didn't like  
his style," the  
D.A. told the jury.  
"They thought he  
was a homosexual.  
And because of  
that, they killed  
him."*

this: Was it a robbery?' *No* . . . Did they take his ring and his watch and his clothes and his car? *Of course not*. There had to be a reason. Why would someone do that to another human being? There must have been some provocation.' *No*. You won't hear that.

"There was a reason," Rubenstein thundered. "Because on the last day Anthony Milano was alive, he had the misfortune to walk into the Edgely Inn. And he meets Richard Laird, who sits here, and Frank Chester, who sits here. He has nothing in common with them. He doesn't know them. He's there to get a sandwich and a couple of beers before going home.

"But they don't *like* him. They didn't like his clothes. They didn't like his style. They didn't like the way he looked. They thought—they *thought* he was a homosexual. And because of that, they *killed* him."

The parents, Rose and Vito Milano, seated in the second row of the courtroom, clutched each other's arms and wept. Then the D.A. paused, narrowed his eyes at the defendants, and turned again to the jurors.

"But the key words in this trial," he declared, "are not that they didn't like the way he was dressed, that they didn't like the way he was talking. . . . The key thing isn't even that he was or may have been a homosexual. The key word is that he *was*. He is no more. He's dead. He was *butchered*. *They did it!*"

As Rubenstein fired those last three words, he spun around dramatically and pointed to Chester and Laird.

Neither of them even blinked.

They sat together at the defense table, flanked by their attorneys. These two young men were once so close that they shared the male bonding ritual of being tattooed. They were so close that one had asked the other to be the godfather of his baby. But now the bonds were coming apart, as each decided to plead not guilty and to try to put the blame entirely on the other.

Chester, five months shy of 21, was cleanly shaven for the trial. He had a new short haircut and a crisp charcoal suit. He would sit for most of the six days' testimony with his hands folded in front of him, his eyes darting nervously from the witness stand to the jury box to his hands. For the duration, he was under strict orders from his lawyer, Tom Edwards, not even to look at Richard Laird.

But Laird would look at Frank Chester. Often throughout the trial he would glare at his former friend, his eyes seeming never to flicker. Even his own attorney, Ron Elgart, worried about "those eyes. They were just . . . *cold*." He had even considered fitting his client with a pair of eyeglasses, so the eyes would seem less penetrating to the jurors. Instead, he positioned Rick Laird so that he *could* stare down Frank Chester, in view of the jury, as if to say, "Look what you got me into, man."

What Elgart hadn't anticipated was how Laird would stare down the crowd as well. As it happened, the members of the press covering the Milano murder trial were mostly women and gay men. Laird leered at the women in the press row and snickered at both the male reporters and the gay rights activists who had come to witness the proceedings. Occasionally, he'd stretch his neck back to look up at the clock on the wall behind him. He had better things to do, Richard Laird seemed to be indicating.

Like Chester, Laird looked nothing at all like the man who'd

been arrested in December. His long scraggly hair was cut stylishly short, a navy suit covered up the tattoos, and the bushy beard that once had hung to the middle of his chest was neatly thinned and trimmed. Not actually shaven, though, since the fact that Rick Laird had a beard would figure prominently in his defense, but cleaned up to the point that the new Rick Laird looked strikingly handsome.

In less than two and a half days, the D.A. marched 25 witnesses up to the stand, from Orpha Newswanger, a Bible teacher, who knew—but dared not speak—of Anthony Milano's tortured mind, to Dr. Raafat Ahmad, who described his tortured body. Newswanger came to court to testify that before Anthony went to the Edgely Inn on the night he was murdered, he had been with her—studying the Bible.

Dr. Ahmad came to demonstrate—graphically—what had happened to the young man. For over 50 chilling minutes, she stood before a life-size picture of the victim and drew, with red and black markers, the lines of every slash, every bruise and every injury. When she was finished, the neck of the cardboard poster was awash in bright red ink.

"And according to your testimony," Rubenstein asked her, "he was alive for some [five to ten] minutes while this was happening?"

"Yes."

"Cross-examine."

Every morning, Rose and Vito Milano walked slowly into the courthouse, Rose holding Vito by the arm. He dressed each day in a dark blue suit, his eyes red and puffy. Rose wore all black and clutched a patent leather handbag. The tiny gold crucifix Anthony had given her the year before on Mother's Day hung from her neck. When they informed D.A. Rubenstein that they were going to attend the trial, he insisted that they not sit through Dr. Ahmad's testimony. And so they read the accounts of the torture—their first real hint of how brutal it was—in the papers the following day.

Anthony's parents wept through most of the proceedings—as their son's bloody clothes were held before the jury, as their son was referred to by Chester's friends as a dead deer that had to be gotten rid of, as the torture of the night unfolded with every witness.

But from the very beginning, it was Anthony's mother who showed incredible strength in the face of tragedy, and it was his father—his strong Italian father—who fell to pieces.

At each recess, as the defendants were led in and out of the courtroom in handcuffs and shackles—Chester with his head bowed, Laird grinning and snickering—Rose pressed her fingers tightly into Vito's arm. She had tried repeatedly to keep her husband from attending. But he was determined to be there, with or without her, and she wouldn't let her husband be alone.

"I have to know," he kept repeating, "what happened to our son."

It was the question on everyone's mind: What *really* happened in the woods that night? And perhaps even more disturbing was the question of *why* Anthony Milano walked out of a bar with two men who had called him "faggot." Who was this young man and how did he come to such an end? As the trial revealed and as an examination of Anthony Milano's short life would demon-

## He told his sister he had put his feelings for men "on the shelf," hoping they would go away.



strate. this was no ordinary case of murder. Indeed, it said rather extraordinary things about the lives of all three men.

ANTHONY MILANO'S PARENTS MET IN ITALY IN 1959. ROSE WAS 29 at the time and had returned with her parents from the States to their birthplace of Laterza for a two-week vacation. She came home with a husband. Rose taught Vito English, and he went to work as a landscaper and then a clothes presser to support his new wife. When he knew enough of the language to pass a written test, he became a certified barber in America; in Italy he'd cut the townspeople's hair since the age of seven.

Vito had dreamed of owning his own business here—and he dreamed of having a son. When little Anthony Vito was born in September of 1961, Vito wrote home to his family in Italy that America was the greatest place in the world, and vowed to give his son every opportunity he himself had never had.

Rose, for her part, doted on Anthony. By the time he was 22 months old she was convinced that he was smarter than the other kids, and she taught him to identify words she had written on pieces of cardboard and scattered around the floor. The *Philadelphia Daily News* wrote a feature on the "wonder tot" who had learned to read 75 words. It was with equal passion that Rose taught her son about God and religion.

But toward the end of his years in high school, Rose's happy child began to come home in tears. Rose always knew when something had happened to Anthony because he'd go into his room, lock the door, and play his records as loudly as possible—so she couldn't hear him crying.

At first there were little things that Rose brushed off as "kid stuff." Like the day he tripped in chorus and all the other kids laughed at him. Or the times when he'd walk out to his car to find other students sitting on it, taunting him for rides home. Anthony always reluctantly said OK. It was easier, he told his younger sister Annamarie, than getting teased.

But there was one incident that, even years later, he'd write about in his diaries as though it had happened yesterday. Anthony, who suffered from allergies, had often been excused from gym. It was an arrangement that made him relieved, because he always felt awkward competing in sports with the other kids. Still, it kept him conspicuously on the sidelines. One day the

gym teacher announced loudly to the class, "Now we'll all go and play ball and leave Anthony to take care of the dishes." Anthony stood against the wall fighting back tears as the kids all laughed at him. Then the gym teacher threw the ball at him. It hit him in the stomach and bounced to the ground. "What's the matter, Anthony?" the teacher singsonged. "Is the ball too heavy for you?"

After that day, he was never the same leaving for school in the morning. His grades suffered and he went out less with classmates. He began to tell his mother, with tears in his eyes, that someday he'd be famous and none of the teasing would

matter anymore. When he graduated in 1979, he had inscribed on his class mug, "Anthony V. Milano—Famous Person."

Six years later, still struggling and certainly not famous, he was still writing in his journals about the humiliations he'd felt in high school: "Often I am tempted to put in the garbage can my sapphire class ring, the medals I earned for being in chorus, my forensics award with the ruby, my National Honor Society pin, my graduation tassel, the four yearbooks I helped design . . . the Italian award . . . the awards for best Halloween costume. . . . Anyway, all this crap is sloppily dumped in a paper bag—well hidden under boxes and old clothes out in the stupid shed, where I don't have to be confronted every day, painfully reminded of what it was like. . . ."

On the last day of his life, Anthony confronted those demons when he walked into "the stupid shed" and packed up all his memories. At age 26, he had decided that it was time to move away from home. He was planning to rent an apartment in Center City.

Through all of Anthony's early adult

years, he had latched on to people who didn't tease him—people he knew from his Mennonite church. Most of them were older women who often looked at their own kids and said, "Why can't you be more like Anthony?" Always so polite, remembering their birthdays and holidays, sitting over coffee with them, listening to their troubles and making them laugh. If there was a common thread in the people he befriended, it was that usually they too felt like underdogs or outcasts. One woman in her 40s, who counted Anthony among her closest friends, weighed nearly 600 pounds. "He was the only person I ever met," she says, "who looked at me and didn't see a fat person. It was like he could feel other people's pain."



Frank Chester, top, appeared nervous during the trial; Richard Laird stared down the crowds.

ART GENTILE/BUCKS COUNTY COURIER TIMES

ART GENTILE/BUCKS COUNTY COURIER TIMES

But what Anthony rarely discussed with the women he knew from church was the pain he himself was feeling. And, of course, neither he nor the women could ever permit themselves to utter the word "homosexual." As one of them put it, "We all just sort of *knew* about Anthony, and I think he knew that we knew. But it wasn't something you *asked* about." Like others from the church, she believed that someday he'd "gain control" of his sexuality. "I knew he was repenting," she says. "With the help of Jesus Christ, you can overcome anything."

The one person he shared his secret with was Annamarie. They'd always been close as kids, and they trusted each other—enough that when he was 18 and she was 16, he began to take her along to gay bars. Anthony just called them "clubs," and at first Annamarie, with her new fake I.D., was too naive to realize they were cruising the gay bar scene. She wasn't even sure at first, when she did realize what it was about, if it meant that her brother was gay. Maybe he just liked those clubs better, she thought. She knew she did. At straight bars, Annamarie had always felt awkward or ignored, but the men at the gay bars were always kind to her. "Your sister's so pretty!" they'd tell Anthony. No one but her brother had ever told her that before.

Anthony and Annamarie began to make regular trips to gay bars such as the CasaLido in Trenton and Equus and Kurt's in Center City. When Anthony bought a membership to Philly's DCA club, he bought one for his sister, too.

Sometimes they brought her girlfriend Melanie along. For years Melanie had had a crush on Anthony, from the day they met in a 9th-grade play. They quickly became friends and started going on what she thought were dates. He even took her to the Christmas Ball. Dating was new to Melanie, so at first she never dwelled on the fact that they never did things her friends did on dates. Finally, she started to push him, and the more upset he got, the more she was convinced that it was because she wasn't attractive enough. Melanie, like many of Anthony's older women friends, was very overweight. When Annamarie told him what Melanie thought, Anthony was so concerned about her feelings that he decided to tell her the truth: "Never think you're not pretty enough, Melanie," he told her. He wished he *could* love her that way, he said, but the truth was that he was gay. "I had to tell you," he said, "because I'd never want you to think it was your fault."

Melanie's response to Anthony's revelation was to reassure him that she'd still be there waiting for him—as soon as he "changed."

Then one night at the CasaLido, Melanie was horrified. "Annamarie!" she said. "Anthony is kissing a *man!*"

ANNAMARIE DECIDED THAT NIGHT THAT SHE WOULDN'T BRING it up unless he did. And eventually he did. It wasn't an an-

nouncement; he just began to talk about men the way she talked about men. It depressed him, he told her, that his relationships with men just never seemed to work out, no matter how hard he tried.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"They just never work out," he said. "And maybe it's not meant to be anyway. God doesn't want it that way, that's probably why they never work out."

Once he went to the shore with a man he met at the 'Lido. He told his sister how excited, but nervous, he was; it was someone he really liked a lot. Someone who was kind and hand-

some and wore Acqua di Selva cologne, he said, giggling in a way she'd never heard from her brother. But when he came back from the weekend, he was terribly depressed. "It's over," he told his sister.

Later, he told Annamarie that he had put his feelings for men "on the shelf," hoping they would just go away.

When Anthony first got out of high school, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do. His father assured him that when he decided, there would be money for schooling. For years, Vito had put aside his tip money—carrying a jar home to Rose every week—to

save for Anthony's and Annamarie's college educations.

But with his bitter feelings from high school, Anthony decided to postpone college for a while. He got a job in the display department at Pomeroy's, then worked for a furniture store, then went to work for Bamberger's (now Macy's) as a salesman in the men's shoe department.

In a matter of months, he had reached his goal of becoming department manager. Rose saw her son's self-confidence take a positive turn after that, so she and her husband were happy when he announced he'd decided to go to art school. Aware of how expensive tuition was, and not wanting to burden his father, Anthony finished a three-year course in two years at the Art Institute of Philadelphia, graduating in September of 1987 with straight A's. He started working as a free-lance artist.

The Milanos had sacrificed much for their son's schooling. When Rose, who handled all the money in the household, realized that Anthony's tuition bills were more than her husband was bringing home, she secretly got a part-time job, sneaking out of the house to care for a woman who had Alzheimer's disease. Fearful of hurting her husband's pride, she kept her secret for months. When Vito learned the truth, he ordered her to quit. Anthony remained protected from the truth.

"Thank you for the two happiest years of my life," he announced in a toast to his parents at his art school graduation. That day was exactly three months before his murder. When they handed him a gift of \$1,000, he was so touched he kept the check in a frame, until finally they made him cash it. He told his mother he was going to use the money for a deposit on an apartment he'd found near Rittenhouse Square; the lease was to

**"L**aird is like the primal heterosexual man," his lawyer argues.

**"Very confident about his sexuality."**



Anthony's parents, Vito and Rose Milano.

SHIRLEY LABANEA/COURTESY

start after the first of the year. The week of his death, he'd begun to send his résumé out for full-time jobs.

At 26, it seemed he was finally ready to live on his own. But there was also something about that independence that frightened him. He told friends he felt guilty about leaving his parents; he told his parents he felt guilty about moving so far from Annamarie. His friends noticed that he'd begun wearing a gold wedding band on his left hand. And lately he'd been telling his father that what he really wanted to do was "find a good girl, get married and have kids."

"You make me so proud," Vito would say.

Yet, to Annamarie, he spoke of different plans. He always told her that his dream was to move to New York City. Whenever they went clubbing there, he'd say, "This is where I want to be."

His sister believes his ambivalence may have been a fear of temptation. Though Anthony Milano reached out to the gay scene, he hardly embraced it. Even when he did go to the bars, he ended up befriending men who seemed as tortured and oppressed about their gayness as he was. One of his closest friends, whom he had met one night at Equus, has since become a monk. After Anthony was buried, he wrote to Annamarie from his religious community: "I know how Tony struggled with his gayness. . . . When I was around Tony, I talked to him a lot about how I never felt comfortable in the gay life that I had seen and had participated in for a while. I knew he felt the same way." Orpha Newswanger, the woman with whom Anthony shared Bible studies, talked about his inner struggle with homosexuality, and how he wished to be "healed." She too assured Anthony that anything was possible with Christ.

In the hours before Anthony was murdered, he attended his ninth Bible study with Orpha. The theme that night was "Thinking Like a Servant Thinks." One part dealt with the "natural mind vs. the renewed mind." The natural mind, Anthony scribbled in his notes, "listens to man instead of God, perceives flesh rather than heart."

On another page, under "Blessed Are Those Who Have Been Persecuted," Anthony wrote that a peacemaker was "one who settles quarrels rather than initiates them," and that "avoiding the issue breeds aggression."

On yet another page, he scribbled two questions: "What is it I am not forgiving?" and "What are some of the reasons it still hurts?"

Two hours later, he was sitting on a bar stool at the Edgely Inn, with Richard Laird and Frank Chester.

BY THE TIME FRANK CHESTER WAS 20, HE WAS ON HIS OWN. His mother, Elaine Holley, was proud of her Frankie's new independence. Or maybe she was relieved. She'd had problems with her youngest child since he was 10, when his father left home for good. Despite the beatings Frank claims he got from his dad, the boy worshiped his father. Frank's father, an exterminator and handyman, denies ever having laid a hand on his son. He does agree with his ex-wife that when he left home, it seemed like "the trouble with Frank" began overnight. One day, little Frankie was an altar boy, smiling through mass at Sacred Heart Church. The next, he was being brought home by the cops.

Elaine had three other teenagers to raise by herself. Luckily, they adjusted to the split, went to work part time, helped her out. But the problems with Frankie just kept getting worse. He began to steal, from both his parents and from his stepfather, and was constantly getting into fights, as though beating were a

sport. By the age of 11, he started to run away—so many times that Elaine lost count. There were days when she'd come home from her job at the beauty salon, almost expecting to find that he'd left home again. It seemed that her kid did nothing *but* run away. And every time he ran, she'd call her ex-husband.

Elaine knew she had to find help for her son. She started calling social agencies, only to hear that unless he committed a crime, there was little the state could do. Eventually he began committing those crimes, and so the next places Frank Chester ran away from were juvenile detention centers. Finally he was sent by the courts to Glen Mills, a school for delinquent male

teens. There, a teacher who counseled Frank sat his mother down and tried to explain what was wrong. Running away, he told her, was Frank's way of getting his father back, because every time he fled, his mother called his dad.

On the open campus of Glen Mills, Frank Chester was free to run, but to his mother's surprise, he didn't. Instead, he excelled on all the sports teams, held a job at the snack bar, and was known as a friendly and likable kid. He started to talk about someday being a counselor there, like the one who had helped him, and whom Frank had begun to trust and worship.

When he got out of Glen Mills, he landed a job as a cashier at Bristol's DeGrand Diner, where he responsibly handled the money every night. Meanwhile he got interested in the work his older brother did, cleaning up toxic waste for a pollution control company. And, after taking courses to learn the trade, he got a job with his brother's

company.

About the same time, he met Richard Laird.

Laird, who was 24 at the time of the murder, had been in and out of prisons for five years—on everything from drug charges to assault charges to the time he stole somebody's boat "just for the hell of it."

He was born in South Carolina, the son of a Marine sergeant, and he spent most of his childhood moving from city to city, mostly in the South. When he was ten his parents split, and his mother eventually settled, with Rick and his younger brother Mark, in Levittown. His father remained in Louisiana, where he's still in the Marines. His mother eventually was remarried, to a Pennsylvania state trooper.

After Laird's arrest for the murder of Anthony Milano, his father visited him for the first time in years. In an interview from prison, Laird declined to discuss his mother, other than to say that he was proud that she recently earned a nursing degree (she is an L.P.N.) and that they are "very close." Records show she, too, has a criminal record. She pleaded guilty in March 1987 to 12 counts of forgery, theft and embezzlement brought against her by an employer. The employer told police she said she stole the money for her sons (97 of the 339 checks she forged were made payable to Rick Laird).

When he was 15, Rick Laird met a girl named JoAnn at the Levittown Rollerama. They were married and had two kids—a son named after Rick, who was seven at the time of the murder, and a daughter, four. When they split up several years ago, he had his "JoAnn" tattoo covered up with clouds. That didn't stop her—or his mother-in-law—from taking their vacation time from work to attend the Milano murder trial in support of Rick Laird. "I still love him. I'll *always* love him," JoAnn told reporters at the trial. Until a couple of months ago, she was still refusing to sign for a divorce.

The effect Rick Laird had on his women was legendary. At the trial, reporters needed a score card to keep track of all the

*continued on page 193*



Laird's girlfriend Barbara Anne with their child.

PHOTO BY JAMES FITZGERALD FOR COURIER TIMES



**ANTHONY**

*continued from page 90*

women who had come to support their Rick. In one corner were his estranged wife JoAnn and her mother, who took turns checking on Laird's son, who had to be removed from school when his fellow second-graders began to torment him after learning of his father's arrest for murder. In another corner sat current girlfriend Barbara Anne Parr holding the 11-week-old infant she had by Laird—born two months after Laird's arrest for murder.

Outside the courtroom, Rick's women spent much of their time glaring at each other. One day JoAnn and Barbara Anne happened to end up in the same elevator, Barbara Anne with Rick's baby in her arms. They emerged screaming "Fuck you" at each other, and engaged in a shoving match.

Laird had known the former Barbara Anne Kessler since she was 13 and he

*When she finally had to choose between her man and her cousin, Barbara Anne stood by her man. "I still love my cousin Frankie," she says. "But I know my Rick could never kill someone."*

was 12 and they lived in the same neighborhood. Though they were barely in their teens, their world was hardly innocent. In those days, Levittown—particularly the neighborhood they grew up in—was plagued by a motorcycle gang called The Breed. In its heyday, over a decade ago, its members, dressed in jackets with an American flag logo, ran one of the biggest methamphetamine rings in the state.

Any affection Laird may have felt for Barbara Anne was futile by the time she'd turned 15, because she was pregnant with another man's child. That marriage lasted only a couple of months, and then George Parr, the president of The Breed, claimed her as his own. George was 22 years older than Barbara Anne. When she met him, he had just gotten out of prison, where he did federal time on drug charges. During their five-year relationship, she was a princess in a world where the princes drove Harley-Davidsons.

Barbara Anne met Richard Laird again when he was separated from his wife and dating her sister Kim. She was divorced again, raising her son David, and trying to

put her past life behind her. "I couldn't stand him at first," she recalls in a sweet, quiet voice. "I thought he was a little loud for me. And to be honest, after I separated from George, I didn't want that kind of stuff in my life anymore."

But Richard Laird worked his charms on Barbara Anne—the woman he'd tried to steal from George Parr so many years before—and she began to fall in love with him. When he went back to prison on a parole violation he started to write her love letters, announcing his intention to care for her and her son. And she started to break the news to her sister. Kim found someone else and Barbara waited for Rick, hanging his prison poems on her bedroom wall. One of them was titled "In My Heart":

You are my woman and  
I am your man. Baby,  
we will walk through  
this life hand in hand.

It may be a little rough  
in the start, but we can  
count on the love that  
is in our hearts. It will be  
so beautiful I just know  
this is true. Barbara Anne

I love you  
I love you  
I love you.

As soon as he was released they moved in together, and promptly decided to have a baby. She tried for months to conceive, and when she finally did, she called her cousin, Frank Chester, first, to break the news. Then Laird got on the phone and asked Frank to be the baby's godfather.

But from the beginning of Barbara Anne's pregnancy she had a difficult time, and was under doctor's orders to spend most of her time in bed. Laird had gotten a job doing the carpentry work at their apartment complex, the Ambassador Arms, and all through the day he would check on Barbara Anne. When he'd get home, he'd make the dinner and clean up the house. Barbara Anne, who'd cleaned houses for a living at one point, was a meticulous housekeeper—even the cops who took photos of their place after the murder talked about how "clean and homey" Laird's place was—but Rick would insist when he left in the morning, says Barbara Anne, that she leave the work for him. In the evening he'd help little David with his homework. "He'd tell me," says David, now ten, "that he'd give me 15 chances to get it right." By now, Barb's son had begun to call Rick Laird "Dad." Rick took him to the malls, to Great Adventure and on hayrides. When David's school had a parent/teacher meeting, it was Rick Laird, in his biker boots and black leather jacket, who attended.

Barbara Anne knew that the Rick she lived with was no angel in the eyes of others. But it was her little theory that his life of crime and drug abuse was behind him, that as long as he stayed home with her and David—the life he *really* wanted—

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Barbara Anne felt that the one person who always disturbed their happy domestic life was Cousin Frank, who never came to visit without a case of beer and a couple of pals. Once, before she lived with Rick, she had welcomed her cousin's visits. But now, the two together meant trouble. "I love my cousin," says Barbara Anne, "but he was the kind of guy who, when he'd come to your home, would stay. I don't know if you've ever had company like that."

She says her cousin Frank turned to Rick constantly to help him out of trouble.

"Rick and I fought for an hour before we went over to his place that night," says Barbara Anne. "But I knew as long as Rick wanted to go, we'd go. He always wore the pants in this family. And to be honest with you, I liked it that way."

When the choice came down to her man or her cousin, as the details of the murder began to unravel, Barbara Anne stood by her man. "I still love my cousin Frankie," she says, "but I know *he* was the killer. My Rick could never kill someone."

TODAY FRANK CHESTER SAYS HE WAS never friends with Rick Laird; he just put up with him because of Barbara Anne, who he still thinks could clear him. He also insists that he was always more fearful of Laird than he was adoring. Regardless, the two made an interesting combination: Chester, always the follower, always in search of the hero, and Laird, big tough womanizing Laird, who had nothing to prove. Or did he?

As the trial progressed, there was increasing doubt as to which of the defendants was scarier. Which was tougher. Who really was the bigger "pussy," to use Laird's term—Laird, the one who wore his macho like a badge, or Chester, who lived in awe of his buddy's arrogant swagger?

When the two of them got tattooed together, Frank Chester chose a little devil for his forearm; Richard Laird chose a pair of lips with semen dripping out.

They were also close enough to share an assault charge, almost one year to the day before the Milano murder. The incident involved a man who dropped off Barbara Anne Parr one night and ended up beaten with a baseball bat. As with the Milano killing, Chester said that Laird did it and Laird accused his buddy Chester. At any rate, the charges were dropped when the subject decided he couldn't remember his attacker.

EVERY DAY, AMONG THE WOMEN WHO showed up for the trial were Frank Chester's mother, Elaine, escorted by her two daughters, and Colleen Ingram, the pretty blond shampoo girl she had fixed Frank up with. Together, the four women sat on a

bench holding hands. As the trial progressed, Chester's mother seemed to age, the circles under her eyes becoming darker, the wrinkles in her face more apparent. By the end of the week, she could barely walk without assistance from her daughters, and her blank expression seemed to change only when someone offered her coffee. Then she'd wipe her tears, apologize, and say, "Thank you." Often, with tears brimming in her eyes, she'd ask reporters how Rose Milano—seated on another bench—was holding up. Even D.A. Rubenstein noticed this suffering among the women—all of them. "I don't know what's worse," he said, watching Rose and Elaine passing each other in the corridor, "being the mother of Anthony or the mother of Frank."

Occasionally Frank's girl Colleen, who sat clutching the prom picture taken of her and Frank exactly one year before, would rub Elaine's arm and say, "It's all gonna be all right."

As the families and friends of both the accused and the victim waited for Laird

*Chester's lawyer painted the picture of a mixed-up kid who was petrified of Laird. Frank might have changed his story, he admitted, but that didn't make him guilty of murder—just stupidity.*

and Chester to take the stand, so did yet another group. These were the gay rights activists, who attended in "silent protest" of the most extreme case of anti-gay violence ever to occur in the Philadelphia area. Every one of them seemed to have experienced at least a part of what Anthony had experienced—whether it was the taunting, the guilt, or the struggle of coming to terms with one's sexuality.

Anthony Milano came to symbolize the worst of their fears, the ultimate "silencing," a literal silencing.

Despite D.A. Rubenstein's attempt to downplay "the gay thing" in the Milano killing (he never mentioned it again after his opening argument), the activists in the courtroom saw this prosecutor, who was seeking the death penalty, as something of a hero. It was almost with reverence that they greeted him each morning.

So intense were the emotions at the trial that all spectators were scanned with a metal detector and stripped of all possessions every time they entered the courtroom. Richard Laird's attorney had even considered fitting his client with a

bulletproof vest. For his part, Laird returned the enmity: At one point he requested that his estranged wife JoAnn be allowed to sit in a different row, so she wouldn't "catch anything from the homos" that could be passed on to his kids.

At the start of the trial, the families and the gay activists were separated by more than a bench. But the tension began to break on the second day, when Rose Milano discovered Rita Addessa, spokesperson for the group. Anthony's mother approached Addessa and thanked her for being there. The two women found they had more in common than having suffered at the hands of anti-gay bigots: Rita had a son almost Anthony's age.

By the end of the trial Addessa found herself comforting none other than JoAnn Laird's tough-talking brother, Mike Walters, who carried a cane with a brass serpent curled over the top and had spent previous days muttering obscenities behind Addessa's back. Now they were chatting over a cup of vending-machine coffee.

Walters was telling Addessa, "Look, I don't mind men in dresses," and that in fact, he knew a few "dykes and homos" himself, but he wouldn't want his friends to know that.

"Sure, sure," said Addessa. "I understand." And she meant it.

She tried to explain what her role here was.

"Yeah," said Walters. "But if anything happens to me or my kids 'cause I told you I had gay friends, are you gonna support me?"

Addessa assured him once again that she understood. She certainly *did* understand. And she hardly believed that the solution to the problem of anti-gay violence would come out of this court, or any court, for that matter. She also had something in common with the macho young man: Neither believed in the death penalty.

"In other words, she's not here just to see Rick fry," said one of the Laird relatives. So as they sat in the courtroom together a lot more seemed to be at stake than the fate of the accused. Somehow, the victim's parents, the families and friends of the accused, and the gay activists all seemed to be in this together. How they'd all come out of it would depend on what happened when the prosecution finally rested.

FRANK CHESTER HAD RETAINED BRISTOL attorney Tom Edwards, who built his defense largely around the tactics of the cops. Why, he wanted to know, if they had in their charge a guy they were so sure had committed an unspeakable crime, did they continuously send him home, drive him back, send him home? He reminded the jury that nearly every witness here came courtesy of Frank Chester, who had given all of their names to the detectives. They had gained his

trust by not arresting him immediately, instead letting him slowly implicate both Rick Laird and himself. Edwards painted the picture of a mixed-up young kid petrified of Laird, horrified by what he'd seen and gradually more trusting of the cops he thought he was cooperating with.

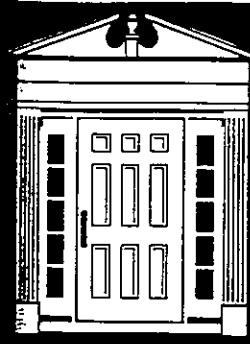
Frank Chester was at the scene of the crime, Edwards argued, but that didn't make him guilty. Frank might have changed his story, he admitted, but that did not make him guilty of murder. Just guilty of stupidity. Frank at least had a conscience, Edwards insisted—or he wouldn't have blabbed to his friends during those days after the crime while Laird unfeelingly went about his Christmas shopping. He had turned to the only people he knew—a bunch of scared teenagers—to help him out, and that was why he acted so foolishly. Chester's only crime, his attorney argued, was being at the wrong place at the wrong time—with Rick Laird.

Laird's lawyer, Ron Elgart of Fink, Fink & Associates, the largest criminal defense firm in Lower Bucks County, was just 28, and was trying his first murder case. From the moment he first saw Laird, on Christmas day in prison, he knew this was going to be a doozy. Unlike Chester, Laird didn't feel the need to claim innocence repeatedly. He just looked at his lawyer and said it once: "I didn't kill him. Frank Chester killed him." And that was that. So Elgart tried to get a fix on Rick Laird, tried to understand the "Croydon code" he operated by. Croydon, just south of Bristol, is a tough blue-collar town notorious for its brawls.

Ron Elgart describes the Croydon code as "a lot like the South Philly code, in that there's no honor in being a squealer. And you don't drag somebody else down because of something you did."

His defense was built mostly on the theory that Rick Laird was guilty of nothing but trying to protect his friend, Frank Chester—who really did the killing. His remarks on the phone, suggesting that Chester get out of town, his destruction of the evidence—all were designed to cover up for his buddy. His smug arrogance, his Christmas shopping in the days after the murder, even his attitude in the courtroom, Ron Elgart saw as further proof of his client's innocence, not of his guilt.

When Elgart took a look at the evidence, he knew there was something that had to have triggered what he called "a frenzy killing, the absolute worst kind of knifing." In his mind he painted the nightmare. "You're holding a short knife. So your fingers are right in the blood and you're slashing and dragging this knife through the throat. You can hear the sounds of the blood gushing and the trachea breaking. You're being sprayed by blood, and you're face to face, you're eye to eye with the victim. There was just a huge amount of anger involved in this kill-



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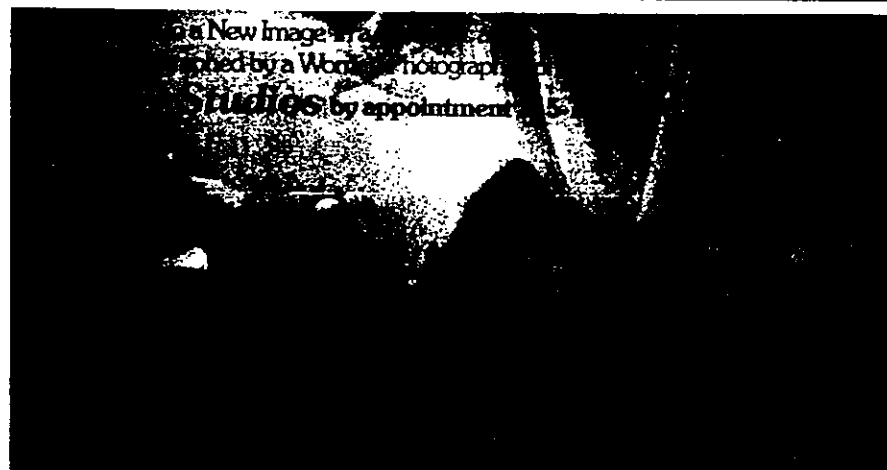
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ANTHONY

ing." And that anger, he decided, would not have come from Laird.

"Laird is like the primal heterosexual man," Elgart says. "Like a caveman. Knock a woman over the head and drag her into his cave. Very confident about his sexuality. Didn't have anything to prove to anybody."

Elgart argued to the jury that the prosecution's entire case against Rick Laird was based on "the gospel according to Chester," an admitted liar and a man who had a reason that night to be carrying a weapon (since he feared retaliation from a rumble he'd been in). He told the jury that Laird's only crime had been treating Frank Chester like a friend.

"You may not like Rick Laird," he said in his closing argument. "You may not invite him to your place for coffee when this is over. . . . He is foul-mouthed. He is obnoxious. He lacks the social graces, as one would say. . . . You may think he's

*Chester described for  
the jury a 45-minute  
horror ride, starting  
when they left the Edgely  
Inn. Laird slapped  
Anthony around, he said,  
while Anthony begged to  
go home.*

crude, and frankly, he is." But that didn't mean he was guilty of murder, said his attorney.

Edwards and Elgart had drastically different styles. But what both of them managed to do for D.A. Alan Rubenstein was unequivocally put both of their clients at the scene of the murder. With a weapon.

That helped, for Rubenstein had more than a murder charge to prove. He had conspiracy and he had kidnapping. The latter seemed the least likely, at first. Anthony, by all accounts, willingly left the bar with Chester and Laird. A cop had even witnessed their departure: no struggle, no force of any kind. But under state law, kidnapping doesn't necessarily mean ransom and abduction. All it requires is that a victim be moved "a substantial distance" against his will. Proving the kidnapping charge would depend on what happened from the time they left the Edgely Inn to the time they got to the woods off Ashby Avenue.

Conspiracy was really the key to the case. Because, as Rubenstein kept repeating to the jury, if they believed there

was proof of conspiracy—that is, two people acting in concert toward the same objective—it did not make a bit of difference which of the two men actually cut Anthony Milano's throat. As accomplices, they'd be equally guilty regardless of who did the kicking and who wielded the knife.

The real question for the jury was whether they believed that either man could have acted alone. And answering that question depended as much on their assessment of the men as it did on their judgment of the hard evidence.

**"THE DEFENSE CALLS FRANK CHESTER."**

On the morning of May 18th, after the prosecution rested its case, Frank Chester took the witness stand. This time, the more he talked, the more he filled in the pieces of what he claimed happened in the car—from the time that the pair left the bar with Anthony Milano to the time they arrived in the woods. He described for the jury a 45-minute horror ride, with Anthony driving, Chester in the back seat, and Laird in the front seat, telling him where to drive and slapping him around, as Anthony pleaded to go home.

Chester testified that he got into the car expecting to be dropped off with Laird at his apartment practically across the street from the bar. But Laird wanted to drive around first. They made three stops, he said, before they got to the woods near Ashby Avenue. The first stop was at a 7-11. When they pulled up to the store, both of them got out of the car—Laird went to the pay phone in front of the building to make a call, Chester went inside to buy cigarettes. At this point, Anthony—presumably sensing a chance to escape—tried to back the car out of the lot. More interesting was that, according to Chester, Anthony waited for him to get back in the car before he tried to flee. But he hit the gas so quickly that the car stalled. Laird, seeing him try to get away, furiously slammed down the phone and jumped back in the car. It was then that the beating started in earnest, said Chester.

They made two more stops along the way, said Chester—once for drugs (Rick Laird got out of the car, approached a house, changed his mind, and got back in the car) and once "to take a piss." Chester swore that the three of them got out and relieved themselves, though the coroner's report showed that Anthony had a full bladder.

According to the route Chester said they took—about six miles altogether—they'd have passed both the back yard of Anthony Milano's house as well as his Mennonite church. They also passed several all-night diners and gas stations. Why Anthony didn't pull over, flash his lights, do *something* to escape, was never explained.

But there was also a question as to whether he was behind the wheel the entire time. In one of Chester's earlier ver-

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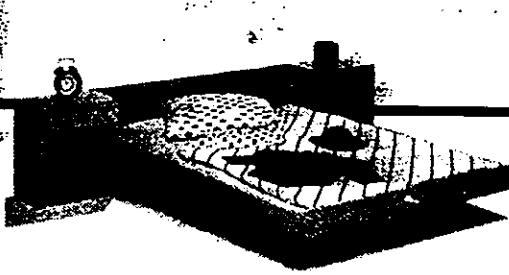


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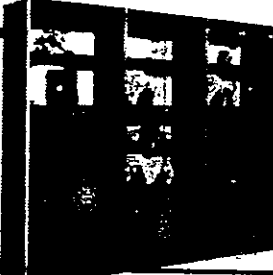


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sions, Laird took over the wheel after one stop. It's possible that someone else drove: Anthony's keys have never been found.

They were also heavily intoxicated—all three of them. Anthony, who had drunk the least of the three, had a .23 blood/alcohol count, more than double the limit for legal intoxication. His reactions—or lack thereof—may have been simply due to a combination of alcohol and fear.

Though Chester blamed Laird for every act of violence in the car, Rubenstein theorizes that what happened on the ride was a steady escalation of torture on the part of both of them, an escalation that ended with the slashing in the woods.

"I think that once they got him into the car, they started to intimidate him," said Rubenstein later. "You know, 'Let's have some fun with this guy, let's bash in a fag.' And that they started in the car to punch him, maybe beat him, and by the time they got to the woods, it was 'Let's kick his head in,' 'Let's punch him in the mouth,' 'Let's teach him a lesson.' I really don't believe that Frank Chester intended, or for that matter, Richard Laird intended, when they first got in the car, that they were going to slash his throat. I think their intentions were, 'Let's teach the fag a lesson. He's just a fag.' And it just escalated and escalated, with each trying to prove to the other how tough he was."

Frank Chester gave this version of what happened when they got to the woods. They had stopped there to buy drugs from a guy who lived across the street. He and Anthony both got out on the driver's side, Laird on the passenger side, near the woods.

"I had the six-packs with me," said Chester. "I got out of the car, started walking toward [the] house," when he noticed that Rick Laird and Anthony Milano were walking toward the woods. He said that Rick Laird had one arm around Anthony, and with the other, punched him squarely in the face. He said he saw this from the back, then he ran over and pushed Anthony Milano to the ground.

"Why did you push Anthony Milano?" asked his lawyer, Tom Edwards.

"Well, look at the size of Rick . . ."

"Did you want to stop a fight?"

"Yeah, you could say that. I didn't want to see the kid get beat up there for no reason."

"So you pushed Milano out of the way?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then what happened?"

"I said to Rick, 'Let's get out of here' . . . And then Rick said, 'Fuck that,' and jumped on him."

"Then what happened?"

" . . . I thought he was hitting him, you know what I mean? Because when you're on top, you can hit something like this.

[He described Laird kneeling on Anthony's chest, pinning his arms underneath him.] When I walked, when I went over there, he was doing . . . the thing."

"What was he doing?"

"Slashing his throat."

"What did you do?"

"I froze. I never seen anything like that.

[Even] on TV."

"Then what happened?"

"Well, I was just, like, standing there.

[Then Rick] looked up at me. I turned around and I ran."

When Rubenstein cross-examined him, Chester elaborated for the district attorney how he saw "blood squirting up" from Anthony Milano's neck and how he heard "gurgling noises."

"You were afraid of Rick Laird, correct?" asked Rubenstein.

"Yes. I mean, I wouldn't want to have to fight him."

"Me neither!"

"Objection!"

"Objection sustained," said the judge.

"After you saw Rick Laird making these

*From the moment when  
Ron Elgart asked his  
client what the weather  
was like that night, and  
Laird replied, "Kinda  
shitty," it was clear that  
Laird would play the  
tough guy to the end.*

motions back and forth with his hands, did that scare you?"

"Yeah."

"Were you worried?"

"I was in shock . . ."

"Never saw that before?"

"No."

"Kind of stuff they won't show on TV?"

"No, they don't."

"Pretty horrible, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

" . . . Scared as you were of Richard Laird, you went back to his apartment that night, didn't you?"

Later, Rubenstein turned his questions back to the specifics of the crime.

"You mentioned that you saw Rick Laird punch him in the face *once*, right?"

"Yes."

"Then all of a sudden, Rick's on top of him, right?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Positive."

"One punch in the face?"

"Yeah. Bang."

"Bang, right in the face. That's it?"

That's all you saw?"

"Like I said . . . that's what I seen."

Rubenstein turned the life-size drawing of Anthony Milano around, as the victim's mother gasped and rushed from the courtroom.

"OK," said Rubenstein, pointing dramatically to the drawing, "Who did *this* injury, this bang to the head, do you remember that?"

"Do I remember? No."

"How 'bout this bang to the head here?"

He slapped the canvas.

"No."

"How 'bout the bang to the chin?"

"No."

"You *heard* the pathologist's testimony, right?"

"Yes."

"Wasn't Rick Laird, was it?"

THERE WERE OTHER THINGS ABOUT Chester's testimony that just didn't jibe with the evidence. He didn't explain, for instance, how the body ended up more than 30 feet into the woods (there was no evidence whatsoever that Anthony had been dragged). Nor did he explain what he was doing—besides being in shock—for the ten minutes the knifing apparently lasted. But what Laird's attorney Elgart tried to establish, as he cross-examined Chester, was other inconsistencies. For one thing, as Chester described the slashing—and because of the way the body was found—it was clear that Milano was pinned down. Chester said Laird was kneeling on his chest. Yet Laird is big, well over 200 pounds. And the one thing the pathologist did *not* find on the body was any evidence of bruising, such as the kind he would have if Rick Laird were kneeling on him. More damning, in Elgart's opinion, was the fact that no one had testified to blood on Rick Laird's beard, a beard that hung down to his chest. It was Elgart's contention that had Laird done the cutting, he "would have looked like Eric the Red."

But any small relief Ron Elgart may have felt when he finished with Frank Chester ended moments later, when the defense called Richard Laird.

From the moment when Elgart asked his client what the weather was like that night, and Laird turned toward the jury, laughed, and said, "Kinda shitty," it was clear that Laird would play the tough guy to the end. His testimony was peppered with expletives. His style and language clearly put the jury off.

There was a stir in the courtroom as Elgart led his client through the events of the night. Laird admitted—rather proudly, in fact—that sure, he called Milano a faggot. "I call lots of people faggot," he explained later in an interview. But he insisted that it wasn't he but Chester who asked Anthony for a ride home. It was Chester, he said, who *needed* a ride home. He himself lived just across the street. He added that when they left the bar, they

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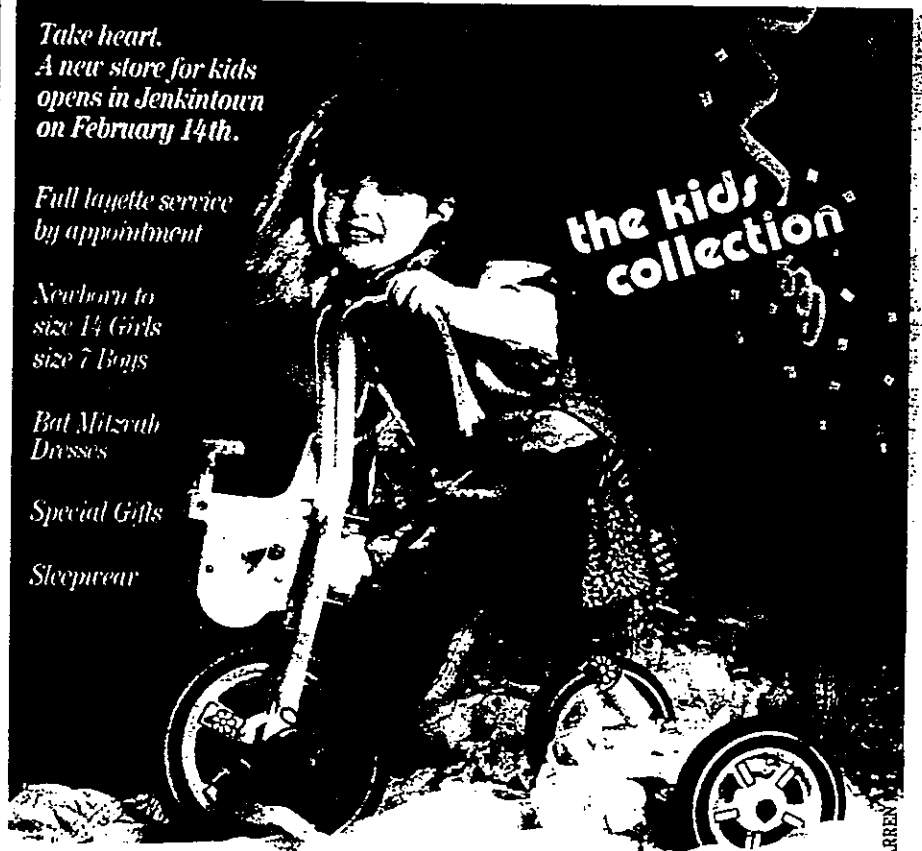
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## ANTHONY

headed in the direction of Frank's place, several miles away. None of which, of course, explained why he went along for the ride with a guy he thought was “a faggot.”

Laird swore that there were no stops between the Edgely and Ashby Avenue, no torture ride that he knew of, and though he sat in the passenger seat, he said he never laid a hand on Anthony.

“What happened when you pulled up on Ashby Avenue?” asked Elgart.

“I got out my side there and I started walking towards the houses.”

Immediately, some of the same inconsistencies that surfaced in Chester's version began to surface in Laird's. Namely, how he didn't notice the other two weren't with him until they were 30 feet into the woods.

“What happens next?”

“Well, I heard [Frank yell], ‘Yo, over here!’ . . . I turned around. I started walking over towards him . . . I heard a punching and a smacking, that's what it sounded like.”

“Noises?”

“Yeah.”

“Voices?”

“Just grunts.”

“What happened when you went towards the noise?”

“I started, you know, I got up towards it, and I seen him rolling around on the ground . . . they were rumbling, you know? And I says, ‘Yo, Frank! What the fuck you doin', man?’ ”

“And what happened next?”

“Well, [Frank] jumped up, you know? . . . And [Anthony] started to get up, and he was all wobbling, you know? And he grabbed onto my jacket . . . ”

“What happened next?”

“I heard some noise coming [from] behind me.”

“And then what?”

“And then Tony's eyes got *real big*, man. And I started getting sprayed with all this hot shit, you know? And I heard this fucking noise like water going down the drain.”

He ran, he said, and when Chester caught up with him, his buddy was like a wild man. From this point on, the Croydon code kicked in on the witness stand, as Laird got meaner and angrier, explaining the extremes to which he'd gone to protect Frank Chester. First he took the knife from his hand, wiped it on his shirt, then handed Frank the shirt so he could clean himself up. When they got to Frank's friends' apartment, sure he told him to shut up; he didn't want his pal sent away for life. In fact Laird said that everything he did—from throwing his own bloody clothes and the knife in a dumpster to the advice he gave him on the phone, even Laird's saying that *he* himself was leaving town, was all a grand attempt to

help Frank beat the rap.

At one point, Laird stopped in mid-sentence, fixed his steely eyes on Frank Chester, and shouted abruptly from the stand:

“I loved you like a brother, dude, and you *fucked me*, you know that?!”

There was a moment of silence in the courtroom. Chester fidgeted in his chair. The “code” that was becoming most apparent wasn't Laird's or even Chester's, but the one that existed between them.

When Rubenstein cross-examined Laird, he didn't even bother questioning him on what happened in the woods. Instead he tried to goad Richard Laird into continuing to be as “normal” as possible.

“You had an OK relationship with Frank Chester for a couple years?” asked Rubenstein.

“Yeah.”

“So you can't figure out any other reason why he is saying that you carved up Anthony Milano?”

“Any other reason?”

“You can't think of any reason why he

*The most telling part  
of the trial came when  
Chester—who claimed  
to remember the most  
intricate details of  
the night—couldn't  
remember slow dancing  
with Richard Laird.*

would say that, would you?”

“I can't *think* of any? Look where I'm sitting! He's trying to get the fuck out of this and what he did.”

Rubenstein moved on to the taped phone conversation, in which Laird told Chester to get out of town, and in a couple years all this would blow over.

“You figured if he could hide out for seven years, he would have this rap beat?”

“I told him that,” said Laird.

“All he had to do was hide out . . . and people just forget about this murder, right?”

“I was trying to keep him calm, sir.”

“Seven years pass by like Milano was never there, right? *That's* what you told him?” Rubenstein snapped his fingers. “*Just like that?*”

Laird turned to the jury, brazenly snapped his fingers in the air, and repeated, “*Just like that.*”

Afterward, Rubenstein said that at that moment, he was convinced that every juror was on his side.

It was neither Rubenstein's job nor his



desire to demonstrate conclusively what *really* went on that night in the woods. Whether Chester's version or Laird's was closer to the truth. Or if the truth really lay elsewhere.

Psychologists who study such things say that in most attacks on homosexuals, the individual is really striking out against himself. His fears, his insecurities, his own doubts about his sexuality. And in some ways, Laird and Chester—with their tattoos, hard drinking, hard talk and tough-guy mentality—seemed to be textbook cases: men who were trying, perhaps too hard, to be . . . well, men.

The armchair psychologists—the reporters and the local lawyers who hung around the trial—formed their own hypotheses outside the courtroom, hypotheses that rarely discounted the notion that something besides murder happened in the woods that night.

The most common theory assumed that sometime during the ride either Laird or Chester, or both, had intended to do more than fight with Anthony. "Let us suppose," said one lawyer, "just for the sake of argument, that Laird makes this big thing about hating faggots, and let us suppose he wants to do something with this kid, and Anthony is agreeable, or perhaps has little choice in the matter, and somewhere during the course of the sexual act, Laird snaps. Really snaps."

Far less possible, though certainly suggested, was the thought that Anthony had in some way, before they left the bar, propositioned one of his killers. The idea is unlikely mostly because even gay men as closeted as Anthony are usually quite perceptive about such things. They can almost sense who's game and who isn't. Gay men call it "gay-dar," and it doesn't go off out of fear—which there's no doubt Anthony felt. If there was an interest among them, it was probably not coming from Anthony.

Whatever the surmises, there was no evidence that a sexual act had been *completed* that night. But that didn't necessarily mean that one had not been attempted.

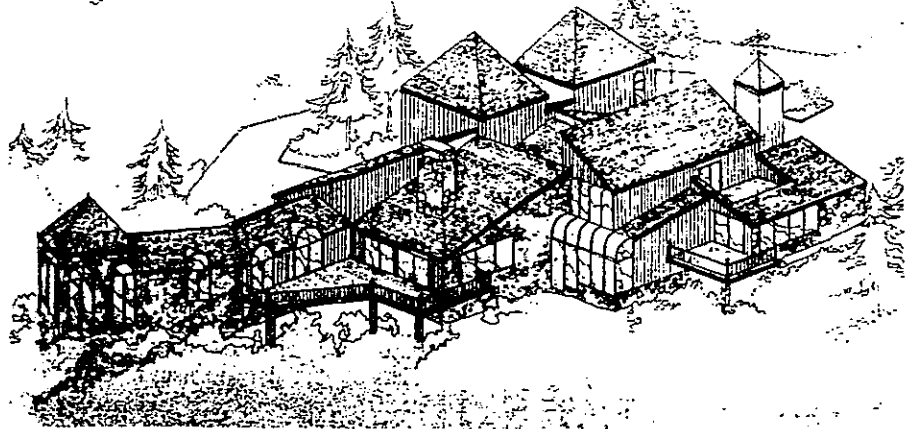
"But even if a sexual thing did take place, or start to," Rubenstein said later, "neither one of them would ever, *ever* admit it. They would have admitted killing him before they'd ever admit that."

In fact the most telling testimony of the trial came during Rubenstein's cross-examination of Chester, when the D.A. was trying to determine exactly what happened in the bar. The bartender had already testified that one of the ways Laird and Chester ridiculed Anthony Milano in the bar that night was by slow dancing together. Laird, when he testified, confirmed it as well. "Yeah, we slow danced," he said in his nothing-to-prove tone.

But Chester, who claimed to remember the most intricate details of the night, couldn't seem to remember slow dancing with his buddy.

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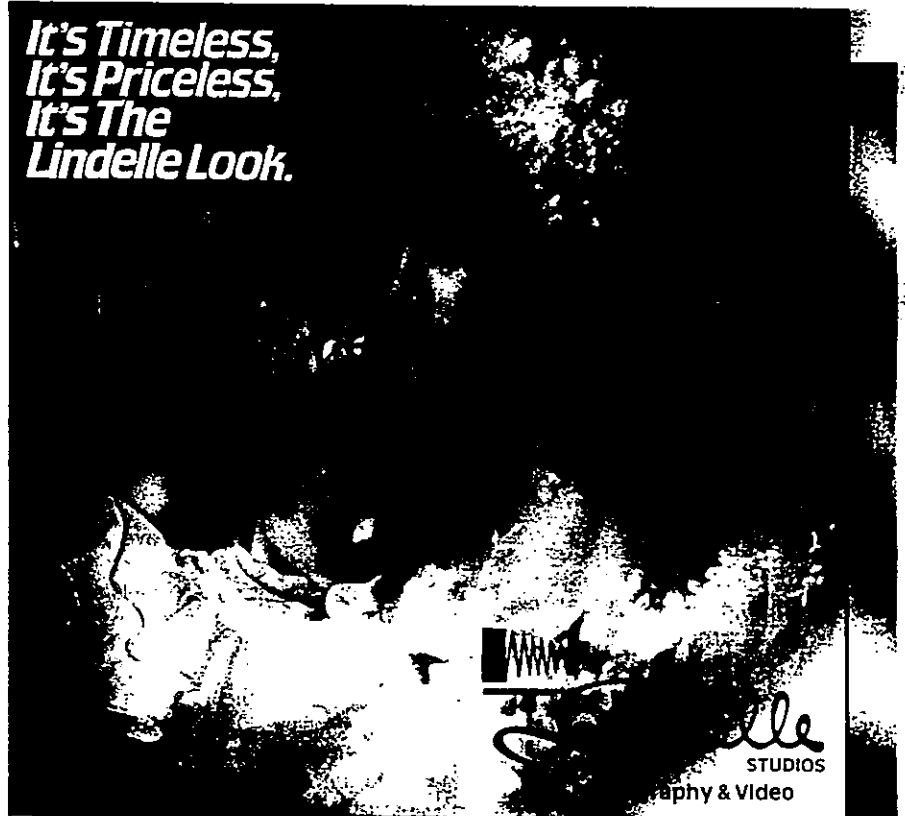
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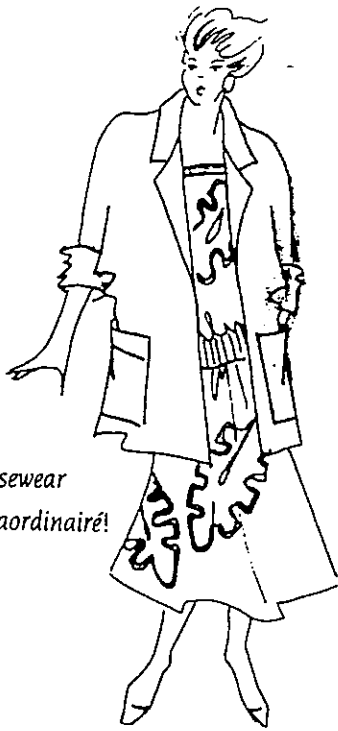
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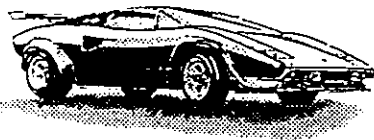


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## ANTHONY

said Rubenstein mockingly. "You weren't cheek to cheek with [Laird], were you?"

"No, sir!"

"Then how did this happen, this thing that people have described as dancing which you say was not. Can you tell us about that?"

"How it happened? If I'm saying it didn't? If it did, I don't remember it."

"In other words, you're not saying that you didn't dance with Laird, just that you don't recall?"

"I'm saying to my recollection."

"Let me ask you this question: Do you usually make it a habit to dance with other guys, and I don't mean that as a joke, Mr. Chester, but do you usually make it a habit?"

"No, sir!"

"So if you *did* that, you would probably remember that, right?"

No response.

AFTER CHESTER AND LAIRD HAD THEIR say, Rubenstein delivered his closing argument to the jury. He reminded them not to "get caught up . . . in who plunged the knife, who hit first, who hit where. Ladies and gentlemen, it doesn't make a difference."

Under the law, it didn't. But Rubenstein admits that to this day, even *he* isn't absolutely sure which of the two really did the slashing.

"We're not here," he also told the jury, "because Frank Chester and Richard Laird may have been friends. We're not here because they want to point the finger at each other. We're here because, together, with the coldness of heart that's hard to believe, and with an evil intention of mind that we just sometimes can't comprehend, and with ice water running through their veins . . . they treated him like a cheap piece of tenderloin and they carved him up!"

AT 11:20 A.M. ON FRIDAY, MAY 20, 1987, the jury convicted Frank Chester and Richard Laird of first-degree murder, kidnapping, conspiracy, and a half dozen other related offenses. As the verdicts were read—"Guilty . . . guilty . . . guilty . . . guilty . . ." over and over, 32 times, Frank Chester's mother Elaine and Rose Milano both bowed their heads and cried. Laird's girlfriend, Barbara Anne Parr, stared at the ring on her left hand and sobbed. Chester's girlfriend, Colleen Ingram, fainted in the arms of a guard. Neither defendant showed any emotion.

As Rick Laird was led out of the courtroom, through the lights of TV cameras, Barbara Anne stood holding their baby.

A TV reporter shouted, "Any comment on the verdict?"

"Fuck you!" said Laird, then turned his head toward his woman and the baby he'd seen for the first time that week, and said,

"I love ya, babe."

A few feet from Barbara Anne. JoAnn Laird, tears and mascara dripping down her face, was being interviewed by another TV crew. "I love him," she said.

Later that day, five women were called to the witness stand to plead that the jury spare the lives of Frank Chester and Richard Laird.

"I don't want you to take my son's life," begged Elaine Holley. She was followed by her two daughters and Colleen Ingram.

"I love him with all my heart," said Colleen. "Please let him live."

Barbara Anne, in a powder blue polyester suit, took the stand for Rick Laird. "I love Richard very much," she told the jury. "He's a wonderful person . . . We all love him . . . and we all need him."

At that point, defense attorney Ron Elgart walked out of the courtroom and returned with 11-week-old Nicholas Laird wrapped in his arms. As the attorney handed the baby to Barbara Anne on the witness stand, Richard Laird burst into tears.

*In Anthony's bedroom,  
his Christmas list still  
sits on his desk. The  
things he packed that  
day are exactly as he left  
them. "Why?" asks his  
mother. "Why did they  
have to kill him?"*

The jury returned 30 hours later.

"All rise."

The court clerk addressed the jury foreman.

"Do you the jury unanimously sentence the defendant Frank Chester to death or to life imprisonment?"

"To death."

"Do you the jury unanimously sentence the defendant Rick Laird to death or to life imprisonment?"

"To death."

Chester bowed his head. Richard Laird said, "Shit."

WHEN ALL WAS SAID AND DONE, WHEN Frank Chester and Richard were led away in handcuffs to await their turn on death row, all that remained were the living victims: the women.

Almost a year after the murder, Barbara Anne Parr sits in the kitchen of her mother's home, rocking her baby and wiping the tears from her eyes. She sided with her man instead of her cousin and ended up losing them both. She often wonders how her Aunt Elaine is doing.

Barbara Anne moved in with her mother when this happened because Rick used to pay all the bills, and has just recently found an apartment she can afford on her own. She goes to Bible school once a week, collects her welfare check, and has enrolled in classes at Bucks County Community College to build a career. She's majoring in psychology. Once a week, she packs up the children for the ten-hour round trip to visit Rick in prison. Each time he's moved he's sent farther away from her, closer to joining the 87 other men waiting on Pennsylvania's death row. Once a month, she waits for her phone call. She sends him the books he asks for—mostly classic. He writes every day.

She is asked what she is going to do with the rest of her life.

"I'm going to stand by him," says Barbara Anne Parr.

IN A YELLOW HOUSE IN TULLYTOWN, Barbara Anne's Aunt Elaine quietly says, "I believe my son.

"If you just could have seen my Frank," she says, "the night he told us what was happening. Sitting right here at the kitchen table, holding his head, shaking and sobbing, saying, 'I just can't believe what I've seen.'"

She wipes the tears. "I tried so hard with him. I really did. And I knew when I heard the story, I knew he would have to serve time. He was there. I know that. I knew he'd have to go to jail. But I just never dreamed . . ."

Frank's girlfriend Colleen continues to speak to Frank in whichever prison he is moved to. But her visits are tapering off. "I have to go on with my life," she says now. A few weeks before her 19th birthday, she walked into a tattoo parlor and had the "Frank" on her buttock covered with a peacock.

Both the verdict and the penalty are now on appeal. Frank's mother continues to visit her son in jail, but every time she walks into the prison she loses control.

"I know that's not good for Frank to see me that way," says Elaine. "But I can't help it . . . I'm his mother."

IN ANTHONY MILANO'S BEDROOM, HIS Christmas list still sits on his desk, with his prayer notes and the scrapbook he made. The lights he hung last Christmas still frame his bedroom window. In the shed, the things he packed that day are exactly as he left them. Outside on the sidewalk cement are his handprints, made long ago when he was Rose's little boy.

Rose Milano sits with the curtains drawn at the kitchen table. "Why did they kill him?" she asks. "Why did they have to kill my son?"

Every weekend, Anthony's sister Annamarie visits her brother's grave, kneeling in front of the stone that bears a picture of her brother.

"Anthony," she says, "always wanted to be famous."

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