

Aura of Dread Lingers in Wake of West Side Rapist

Slayings Still Haunt Neighbors, Friends of Elderly Women Who Were Victims

BY BELLA STUMBO
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He was an old man of 80 in poor health, and he was afraid as he stood on her front doorstep listening to his heart beat. He knocked on her door again.

"Cora! Are you there?" he shouted at last. His voice quivered slightly, so he shouted again, louder this time to steady himself. He sounded almost angry.

Then Albert Lockyer, whose hearing had faded years ago, folded his tall, gaunt frame forward, pressing his ear close to the smooth wood, waiting for some small sound from within.

There was none.

The old man's chest tightened with dread. Despite himself, he stared again at the newspaper lying on the doormat at his feet, then glanced at his watch. It was 10 a.m.

He searched his memory a final time.

No. Not once during the 31 years that Cora Perry, 79, had been his tenant, next-door neighbor and close friend could he remember ever seeing her newspaper there later than 9 a.m.

Cora was an early riser and she loved her morning paper. She couldn't even drink her coffee without it.

Briefly, he turned his back to her door and took a deep, harsh breath, trying to clear his head, calm his nerves.

Albert Lockyer glanced up at the sky. It was vividly blue. It would be a marvelously clear day, he thought, almost like it used to be 40 years ago when he and Mildred had selected this small West Los Angeles hillside to build their four small bungalows, three to rent, one for themselves.

Momentarily, he even smelled the fresh, pungent salt air again, drifting past on a bygone breeze. . . .
"Go ahead. Open the door," Mildred Lockyer said quietly. A small, stout woman with silver hair now stretched over pink rollers, she stood directly behind her husband.

"Cora's probably just sick," she added, but the uncertainty in her tone caused his heart to pound even harder.

He stared at the master key in his hand. His hands were trembling.

And so, using both, he shoved the key into the lock, while his mind raced everywhere he didn't want it to go: Cora was a strong, healthy, active woman, widowed so long ago that she'd practically lived half her life alone. She still drove her own car, attended half a dozen different club meetings every week and looked 20 years younger than she was.

This week, she'd even been working again, helping an old friend at a Beverly Hills travel agency.

Besides, if Cora was sick, why hadn't she called?

Gently, he pushed the door. It swung open, slowly, easily.

The living room lamps, behind drawn shades, were still on. Albert and Mildred Lockyer paused on the threshold, glancing through the small room, into the tiny kitchen at the opposite end.

The window was wide open. The screen was gone.

Automatically, instinctively, they reached for each other, two old people clutching for support like children in the dark as they moved slowly, soundlessly, toward Cora Perry's bedroom. . . .

Within an hour, the sheriff's deputies had arrived. Later they contacted the Los Angeles Police Department.

It looked like the work of the "West Side Rapist."

That was Sept. 20, 1975.

One week later, Albert Lockyer was mugged in his alley by two

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See full page image
microfilm.

PORTRAIT OF FEAR—Elderly woman peers from behind a chain-locked door at a caller.

AP photo

youths who knocked him to the ground, bruising him slightly, and made off with his wallet.

Two weeks later, Lockyer had a nervous breakdown and went to the hospital for a long time.

Next month the old couple will move to a small rural community up north, hundreds of miles from the only home they've ever known.

Mildred Lockyer has made all the arrangements because her husband is so weak lately that all he's able to do is sit quietly on the couch in their small, overheated living room, fingering a bright Afghan draped about his shoulders, staring vacantly out the window toward Cora Perry's door, not more than four feet away.

He seldom speaks.
When he does, it's almost always about the events of last Sept. 20.

A special task force has been hunting the rapist for a year, but police say they have no solid leads.

Then, his voice grows abruptly stong, the listless hollowness replaced by harsh, brittle anger.

"What kind of fiend would do that?" he demands. "You should have seen it . . . her . . . just laying there all all covered up with pillows and clothes, with just her feet sticking out! And then that shower cap pulled over face . . ."

It is as if the old man is forcing himself. As if he believes that, by re-living the events of that day over and over again, he might reduce them to the same, commonplace status of any other mindless human tragedy. And, perhaps, even rid himself of the nightmares that awaken him nightly, and Mildred, too. . . .

His wife rises quickly, with surprisingly agility, moving silently as a cat in her blue knit slippers to pull the Afghan over the old man, who seems to be dozing off.

"Yes, his health is ruined," she repeats softly, leading her visitor to the door.

She fingers a pot she hand-painted at age 17. "Cora and I used to love our camera club more than anything," she adds, "but now, like all our other clubs, it's falling apart. Because most of the members were like us—old women, widows mostly—and now they're afraid to even come out at night . . ."

She smiles again, brightly, as she closes the door, and her expression seems genuinely cheerful. Except there are tears in her eyes.

Outside, the wide boulevard lined with once-elegant, still-immaculate old homes and apartments, was very quiet. Only an occasional car passed, and half a block away a young man jogged in a royal blue sweatsuit.

Two weeks before it would have been impossible to believe that such serenity had been so grotesquely invaded by that elusive maniac the police loosely refer to as the "West Side Rapist," now accused of sexually assaulting at least 33 old women and murdering perhaps 10 of them.

But that had been two weeks ago. Two weeks filled with grim, depressing visits with people like the Lockyers.

Two weeks of wandering through-out Los Angeles, from a few fine old neighborhoods, like Cora Perry's, to the cheap, rotting tenements of the inner city.

Two weeks filled by conversations with friends and neighbors of the old women, aged 63 to 92, all murdered.

The weary words of Lt. Ron Lewis echoed:

"I can't tell you anything. We don't know if we're looking for one rapist or more. We're not sure if he's black or white. We don't have any solid leads."

Lewis, head of a special Los Angeles Police Department task force which has spent a solid year hunting for the rapist, sighed. Several suspects have been released. The major problem, he said, is that the survivors all gave conflicting descriptions of their assailant. He was fat, skinny, tall and short, light-complected or very dark. Most, however, seem to agree he is young and probably black.

"And, with the exception of one Oriental woman, all the victims have been white, usually in their 70s or 80s," Lewis had added wearily. "Sure it's frustrating. Sometimes I even dream about it at night."

So do the survivors—the stunned relatives, the terrified neighbors, the heartbroken friends of all the old

women who have met such indecent deaths. People who now live in small colonies of terror.

The jogger had disappeared over the horizon and now the street where Cora Perry had lived was silent, caught in the fading glow of the warm afternoon sun. The effect was hypnotic, hard to shake.

But it was time to go, because it was easy to see a curtain in the apartment across the street fall quickly back into place. Someone had been frightened to see a stranger standing there for so long, apparently doing nothing.

Another day. Driving south on Western, past Beverly Blvd., past Third, crossing Wilshire—the LAPD's Wilshire area, where most of the assaults and at least five of the murders have occurred.

It is a depressing drive. Potential



ALONE IN A DANGER ZONE—A woman pauses as she walks her dog in the Wilshire District. Times photo by Ed Montney

victims are everywhere. Old women hobbling down Western, heading for the pharmacy to fill a prescription or going to the corner bank to cash a Social Security check.

And most are probably unaware of the danger surrounding them, because, judging from the way they shuffle with their eyes riveted to their feet, some are half blind, others so deaf perhaps that they couldn't keep up with the evening news even if they wanted to.

Not that the news is particularly enlightening. Old women who are raped rarely even rate a sentence in the local press. Those who are murdered merit little more.

Consider, for example, this item, printed in the Los Angeles Times Friday, May 23, 1975:

A 76-year-old woman was found murdered and probably raped Thursday. She apparently was the fifth murder victim and the 23rd rape victim of the so-called Wilshire area rapist, Los Angeles police officials said.

Mrs. Effie Martin . . . was found by friends who entered her apartment after she failed to answer the doorbell.

Police said all victims of the Wilshire area rapist have been elderly women living alone, and they all have been attacked late at night.

Effie Martin was 86, not 76, and police now believe she was the rapist's seventh victim, not the fifth.

She lived in a neat complex of eight white bungalows on a wide, busy boulevard not far from USC.

Now, most of the apartments are vacant and, of those who do remain, only one old woman will open her door even a crack.

She peers out suspiciously from beyond her flimsy security chain and says she doesn't want to talk about Effie.

But, actually, she does because, like most old ladies living alone, she seems starved for human conversation. Especially now that most of her old friends have moved away.

"You know what I think?" she says. "I think he watches his victims in advance, studies their habits. Because how else did he know that Effie went to church every single Wednesday night?"

She pauses, remembering that the details of Effie Martin's death are not

common knowledge. She gestures at a small clump of bushes in the tiny courtyard, not four feet from her door.

"See, that's where he hid. Because he knew that after church Effie always invited her friends in for coffee and then walked them to the car afterward. Naturally, she left the door open, so then he sneaked inside and waited for her."

The old woman's tone is curiously calm, matter-of-fact. Effie should have been more careful, she says.

The crimes continue to haunt relatives, friends and neighbors of the elderly women who were slain.

She'd been telling her that for 20 years.

"She was a small woman, about my size," she continues, "and for her age she was real healthy. Except for her eyes. She was mostly blind. When she walked, it was with her head down, looking at her feet. Like this . . ."

She demonstrates, backing across her living room floor.

"But she could still hear a pin drop. So he must have knocked her in the head soon as she walked in the door."

She pauses, frowning thoughtfully. "But what I'll never understand is why I didn't hear any noise. Our bedroom walls join and I never heard a sound."

With the next question, the old woman looks almost insulted. "Why, of course I didn't go to look when they found her! I wanted to remember Effie the way she was last time I saw her."

Then, fairly spitting in disgust. "But you should have seen the gawkers lining up, trying to get past the police that day!"

She did enter the apartment later to get Effie's rug.

"Effie didn't have any children—only a niece—and she always said that, if she died first, she wanted me to have the rug." The old woman opens her door a little wider and points with pride to the richly colored Oriental rug on the floor.

But she is growing weary of standing at her door. She apologizes for refusing to let any stranger inside. But, she adds, sounding almost angry, she's smarter than most old women.

"The police warn them time and again but it's no use. They still walk their dogs, even at night and never even look to see who's following them."

Lt. Lewis believes that Maye Scialesi, 72, was the first woman to be murdered by the West Side Rapist. That was Nov. 7, 1974. He doesn't

say why, only that the pattern is similar.

The rapist gained easy entry to Mrs. Scialesi's apartment through her first-floor bathroom window. Now the building, an old brown brick structure directly behind the Ambassador Hotel, has been converted into a virtual fortress. Iron gates on all first-floor windows. Names removed from the mailboxes. Not even an outside buzzer to call the manager or a tenant. Either you have a key or you don't enter.

The husky, middle-aged woman living in a brownstone duplex next door is less guarded. After demanding credentials through the window, she calls off her small, barking dog, and actually invites her visitor inside.

The neighbor—call her Alice—is very pleasant in a solemn sort of way. She knew Maye very well, she says, and "She was the nicest old
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Fear Shrouds Neighborhoods Where Victims Lived

names have, in some cases, already been forgotten even by their neighbors.

Lucy Grant, for example, at 92, was the oldest victim. "Oh, yes, that poor old lady who used to live across the street," said a neighbor, opening her door wide and inviting the stranger inside without any apparent fear. "I can't remember her name anymore—Grant?—but I'll never forget her."

The woman is middle-aged and attractive. "She couldn't even walk anymore. She'd just sit there on her porch and rock all day long. Sometimes I'd take my dog over there because it seemed to make her happy. She'd talk to him, sort of baby talk, you know?"

But the most memorable thing about Lucy Grant, she continues, was the way she fought Metromedia when they tried to buy her property to expand.

"Hell, the old woman had lived there for 50 years and she refused. She told them they could have it after she was dead."

And, sure enough, not two months after Mrs. Grant was murdered, her little white house was bulldozed to the ground.

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woman you could ever meet—the sort of person who'd bring you soup if you were sick."

Which was unusual, Alice continues, because Maye, of all old ladies, had more reason than most to be a bitter, sour person.

"Her whole life seemed to be so sad, one tragedy after another." Alice says, sitting on the edge of her couch, stroking the dog. "Her husband died two years ago with liver troubles, and he'd been really sick before that—cancer operations, one after another . . ."

"And Maye was always sick too, with emphysema. It was so bad she would always ask somebody to go with her to the Thrifty for her prescriptions because she was afraid she'd have an attack on the way, and she didn't want to bother strangers."

Otherwise, Alice says, Maye who had no children, didn't go out of the building much. Mostly, she stayed in her room and watched TV all day.

Alice rose, an expression of infinite sadness on her face, and walked to her window. She could see Maye's apartment from there, no more than 10 feet away.

"See that grill on her kitchen window?" She says, guessing. "Well, Maye had to pay for it herself, because she needed to keep a window open at night for some air, and she was afraid to without the grill. She said the owners wouldn't even split the cost with her."

Alice turns, looking disgusted. "And now that Maye's gone, they've put grills on all the windows . . ."

She tries to smile. "But I guess that's life. Hindsight." The smile fades.

"But it's so unfair," Alice bursts out, "that it's always the oldest, sickest, saddest people who get hit by these nuts!"

"Why, the only reason they even found her was because she didn't come to get her mail that day. And Maye was always one to be there on the dot when the mailman arrived. Even though the poor old thing never got much of anything except the circulars and ads."

Lillian Kramer, 67, a widow, murdered Nov. 14, lived in a low-rent apartment house on Van Ness, north of Wil-

Fear hangs like a tangible aura in neighborhoods where victims lived.

shire. The sort of place where the potted palms are plastic and the sunburst decorating the white stucco facade drips fresh rivulets of rust with each rain.

The building has about 12 apartments, all facing onto a small swimming pool. There is one plastic pool chair and one ashtray off to the side, next to a sign which warns that no lifeguards are on duty.

Now, at noon, every drape was drawn and nobody answered their doorbells. Sitting on the chair, staring at the corner apartment where Mrs. Kramer had lived, the silence was almost eerie, as if the entire building had been abandoned.

Suddenly, a door directly behind was jerked wide open. "You know you could get shot sitting there? Who the hell are you, anyway?"

She could have been an old 50 or a young 70. Either way, she looked as fearsome as she sounded, a tall, skinny woman with bright red hair, lips and nails, wearing a long Fuschsia robe.

"Why the hell should I believe that, anyway?" she demands next, peering at some credentials. "Now get the hell out or I'll call the cops."

But she didn't mean it.

"You people are all animals," she says angrily. "The day Lillian was murdered, you should have seen what all those reporters did to my house. They tracked mud, they used all the toilet paper and they left ink marks everywhere!"

And the police. "If they're so damned smart, why can't they catch one slimy little nut?" she demands.

Like so many people who knew the rape victims, this one was obviously eager to talk, even if it translated into abusive anger.

"I mean, I don't want to sound bitchy," the woman continues, her voice softening only slightly. "But, it's just that I'm for myself and everybody here. Who knows whether that maniac will come back or not?" Then she is shouting again.

"And it makes me so damned mad when I read what some reporters say—that this is a building only for old women. Hell, there are men here too. It's like they're encouraging him to pick us off one by one, like Lillian."

She hesitates, remembering Lillian.

"I couldn't speak too highly of her," she says then. "She was wonderful. Always so neat and well-dressed. She even kept her shoe boxes lined up in a neat row, with la-

Many see the attacks as a sign of society degenerating into violence.

bels on every box . . . That's the kind of person she was."

Her face stiffens. "And she was decent, too. No men around here at night. Not ever."

In fact, she adds, Lillian almost never went out unless it was to do some charity work with her two sisters. And she worked part-time with an insurance agency.

"That's how I happened to find her," the woman continues, her voice hardening. "She didn't show up at work one day, so I went over, and that's what I found!"

Suddenly, astonishingly, she is sobbing. "I mean, you don't know what it's like, finding someone you like, finding anybody . . . like that."

She turns away and shuts the door. Very gently.

The fear is not limited to women. Elderly men, too, are now afraid of the man, or men, the police can't catch. John Sims is one.

A thin, aging man who says he is ill without going into details, Sims is manager of a small apartment house on Oxford, near Western.

He lives in the same apartment where Ramona Gartner, a 74-year-old spinster, was murdered on either Dec. 4 or 5, 1974.

"Oh, no, I'm not superstitious about living here," he says, waving a slender hand about the room. It is light and airy, furnished with a couch of pale velveteen and green armchairs in the same soft fabric.

Ramona Gartner had been a very neat woman, judging from the furniture which looked almost new although, Sims thought, she'd lived here 5 or 6 years.

"In fact, if you want to know the truth, I felt like the apartment had a nice, warm spirit when I moved in—and even though I'm not superstitious, I think it's her spirit, still here."

What does bother Sims, however, is the fact that he is now responsible for a building filled with many elderly, sick women.

"What if I were confronted with the rapist? I'm hardly able to defend myself against a 10-year-old boy . . ."

Sims sighs. Maybe the psychological reassurance a male manager provides his tenants is enough.

"But, I tell you, all this violence makes everybody think twice about going out at night. I mean, I know I'm not going to be raped," he says, chuckling lamely, "but men get it other ways."

"I'm not ashamed to admit it. I won't go anywhere alone at night," he continues. "Just remember the Slasher, for instance. He operated in this area too, didn't he?"

"And about three years ago, I got mugged by some kids not far from here. It just makes you feel so helpless, whatever sex you are. And you read about people like that Manson bunch, just driving around, hunting for somebody to murder . . ."

Sims leads the way to the lobby door. "Vaya con Dios" is playing softly on the Muzak system. Sims asks, very politely, that his tenants not be disturbed. Some were very close to Ramona, he says, and the murder still upsets them.

"Lord, what's it coming to?" he asks softly, standing on the front steps. "Are we just going to keep on killing each other like this, like animals in the jungle?"

His sad, dark eyes suggest that, yes, he thinks we are.

And so it goes, all over town.

Other murder victims police are studying in connection with the rapist, Lewis says, are these: Lucy Grant, widow, 92, 11/8/74; Sylvia Vogel, widow, 71, 3/22/75; Una Cartwright, 78, widow, 4/8/75; Olga Harper, 75, widow, 4/17-23/75; and Leah Leshefsky, 63, 10/28/75.

And, like the victims already mentioned, there was something particularly unique, pathetically poignant about the deaths of each of these women, though their

West Side Rapist Trails Pall of Fear

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The neighbor stands, pointing out the window at the huge steel and glass building across the street.

"Her house stood right there on the corner, where that lawn is now," she says, then adds, "You'd think they'd at least have waited till the old woman was cold in her grave, wouldn't you?"

Una Cartwright, 78, was discovered by her neighbor, Rodney Cogswell, a realtor who lived in an apartment

three doors away in a well-maintained old building on Beverly Blvd.

"Nobody really misses Una, I guess," he said "because she was, well, sort of hard to get along with . . ."

"She was an old witch," his wife Pauline corrects. "And, although I'm sorry she had to die the way she did, I'm frankly glad to be rid of her."

"Now, dear, she was just a lonely old woman," he adds, embarrassed.

"Well, maybe," his wife agrees, wandering into the kitchen.

"You see," Cogswell explains, "Una only moved here about three years ago to take care of her daughter who was dying of cancer. The daughter died last year. Una's other daughter died years ago, and her husband committed suicide about 10 years ago, I think. So, you see, she had reason to be bitter."

"She was still an old bitch," the wife yells from the kitchen.

Cogswell discovered Una Cartwright after a neighbor noticed her door ajar one morning. "I walked in and knew right away she was dead," he said without emotion.

Also, he added, her TV was gone. But not her money. She always kept it in the bottom of a shopping bag.

"The worst thing about it," he continues, "is that the guy had dragged her into the bedroom. Una would have hated that because, ever since her daughter died in that bed, she refused to go near the room. She slept on the couch."

Leah Leshefsky's death was different in several ways. First, at 63, she was by far the youngest victim. Second, she lived near La Cienega and Pico, far out of the rapist's

usual range. Third, Mrs. Leshefsky, a widow, was the only victim living in a racially mixed complex, both black and white, both young and old. And, fourth, her neighbors in the four-unit complex included four dogs and nine children.

"The whole neighborhood is scared to death," says the pretty young black mother who lives in a front apartment. "Some people have moved. And I just hate to see night fall now."

She glances out the window, watching her children at play. "The kids took it worst of all, because they really loved Leah. She was the sort of woman who would bring them presents at Christmas, even though it wasn't her faith. Just small things, crayons and coloring books, but

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Pall of Fear Lingers Where Victims Died

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still . . . And she was always baking them cookies too."

Sylvia Vogel, 71, murdered somewhere between March 22-24, probably was the wealthiest of all the victims. She lived in an elegant old Spanish style stucco duplex on an elegant street near La Brea and Beverly.

Sylvia Vogel was also the only victim found, not in her home, but in her car, parked a block away. In addition, Mrs. Vogel, a widow with two children, had several relatives in Los Angeles so she was not, like some of the victims, an old woman totally alone.

Buso Santiago, 76, her gardener for 28 years, continues to keep the yard immaculate. The house remains empty.

Actually, he says, as he clips a hedge, he never knew Mrs. Vogel well, even after 28 years. "But she was a fine lady. It is so terrible, what happens nowadays," adds Santiago, a burly, grizzled old man with skin like leather and eyes as warm as the afternoon sun.

He glances across the street. His expression is serene, that of a wise old philosopher.

"But nobody says anything much about it. Because these terrible things are happening all over. People are so used to it now, to death."

He gestures at an apartment house. "There, they were robbed twice last year, I think. And even Mrs. Vogel, just last month as she was walking down the street, two boys robbed her, she said. They took \$200 from her purse." He shrugs. "So the murder does not surprise me. Nothing does anymore."

Perhaps most pitiful of all the victims was Olga Harper, 75, who was murdered somewhere between April 17 and 23, 1975.

That's how long it took for anyone to miss the old woman, a widow who apparently had no close friends or relatives.

Apparently the rapist's sixth victim, she lived in the heart of Los Angeles, in a low-rent building a block from the intersection of Wilshire and Western, an area where people normally do not remain for long, only until they get a better job offering a brighter future.

But, someone thought, Olga Harper had lived in the same tiny apartment for 8 years. Or more. But nobody seems to have known her personally. Unless it was the landlord, who moved shortly after the murder.

The new landlord will not open the door to discuss the murder. He only stands on the stairs and shouts that he is going to call the police.

At last a young, slender boy emerges. He is from Calcutta, a student who smiles easily and is astonished to

nothing to do, and dressed so poorly. It is not right, I think."

The Indian boy agrees. For a country as rich as America, he too finds it puzzling that old people are not treated better.

"Once, for example, I worked in a liquor store, delivering all over town. And everywhere I would go, the old women would answer the door without even questioning me. And what if I had not been from the liquor store at all?"

He frowns, genuinely puzzled. "I mean, how did they know I was not the rapist? They are so innocent, these old ladies . . ."

But perhaps, he adds, that's what happens to people if they get lonely enough. They get careless, or maybe they just don't care anymore.

The boy rises, kisses the girl lightly on the forehead and leaves.

Between them, the two young foreigners had just about said it all.

A particular pathos surrounded the deaths of each of the victims.

learn of Olga Harper's murder. He has a girlfriend, also 24, who just moved into this building.

The girl, Japanese, is dressed in a pale blue kimono, trying to get some sleep. She works nights at a Japanese restaurant.

But now she sits up, wide-eyed, horrified. She glances at her single window, which looks onto an alley. The screen is torn.

She is not comforted that the rapist apparently prefers women much older than she is.

"You must move someplace else," her friend says quietly.

A small silence fell over the stuffy little room.

Then the girl lights a cigaret, frowning as she listens to some details about the West Side Rapist.

"You know, I cannot understand America sometimes," she says, hesitantly. "I mean, the way you let your old people go their own way. In Japan it is so different. Because there, when you get old, they make you happy. They have clubs about the Buddha, they do flower arranging, and the old people live together and they are always fed well . . ."

"But here in America all I see are people so old and lonely, walking down the street, maybe with a dog, with