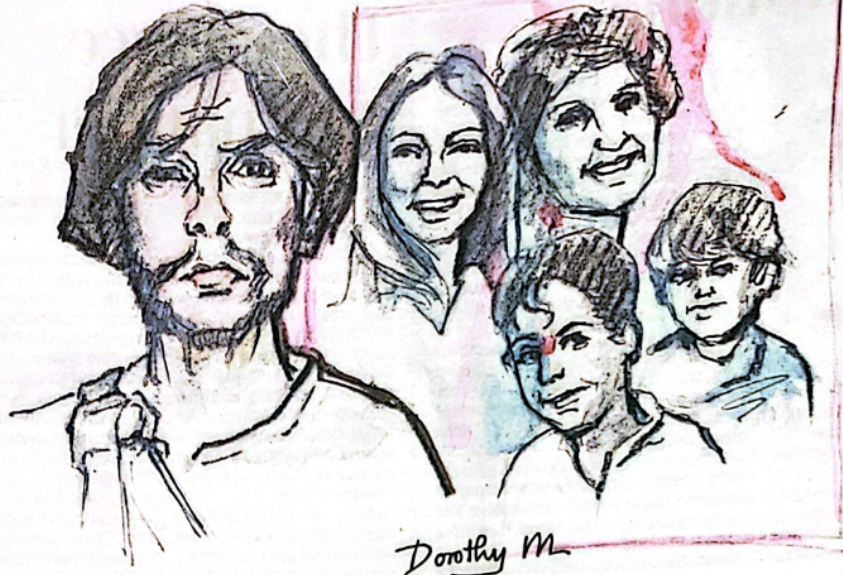




Dorothy M.

Crimes of insanity

Richard Trenton Chase was a typically disorganised killer; he picked his victims at random and left as much evidence as he could around his home and crime scene.

BY DR SYLVESTER ONZIVUA



Richard Trenton Chase killed six people in a span of a month, from December 29, 1977, to January 27, 1978. The first person he murdered was a 51-year-old engineer in a drive-by shooting. The second person he killed was a three-month pregnant housewife, who had left the front door of her house open, as she was in the middle of taking out garbage. He shot her three times, once in the hand and twice in the head, killing her.

The third murder committed by Chase was, in truth, a mass murder. His victims were of the same household and included a 38-year-old woman, her six-year-old son, a nephew she was babysitting, and a neighbour who had come to check on her. Chase shot all his victims at point-blank range. He also stabbed the woman at least half a dozen times. He, in addition, mutilated the bodies of all his victims. However, when he fled the scene, he left perfect handprints and perfect imprints of the soles of his shoes.

Chase was a typically disorganised killer; he picked his victims at random and left as much evidence as he could around his home and crime scene. When asked how he selected his victims, Chase said he went down the streets, testing doors to find out which ones were not locked. To him, a locked door meant that he was not welcome.

Chase earned the nickname "The Vampire" because he drank the blood of his victims and ate their internal organs. He did this as part of a delusion that he needed to prevent Nazis from turning his blood into powder using a device that they had planted beneath his soap dish. At one point, Chase admitted to another

inmate that he drank the blood of his victims because he had blood poisoning, and he needed blood, and he had grown tired of hunting and killing animals.

On August 3, 1977, police found a bucket full of blood in his car. He, himself, was naked and screaming and in the sand, soaked from head to toe in blood. When questioned, he claimed the blood was his own and that it had leaked out of him through his flesh.

In 1979, Chase stood trial on six counts of murder. The defence team entered a plea of "not guilty by reason of insanity", but the prosecution lawyers were determined to show that Chase knew the difference between right and wrong and that he was not compelled to murder. The prosecution emphasised throughout the trial that Chase had a choice, and mentioned several times that he had brought rubber gloves with him to the victim's home with the intention of murdering.

Several psychiatrists examined Chase. He admitted to one that he was disturbed about killing his victims, and he was afraid they might come for him from the dead. There was no evidence in his admissions that he ever felt compelled to kill. He simply thought that blood was therapeutic. One psychiatrist found him to have an antisocial personality and not schizophrenic. His thought processes were not disturbed, and he was aware of what he had done and that it was wrong.

Mentally impaired/challenged persons, such as Chase, have sometimes found themselves in conflict with the law, and this conflict may be a direct consequence of their mental illness. Such persons, in law, may not be found guilty by reason of insanity. There are typical characteristics of the so-called crimes of insanity.

The first pointer to a crime linked to insanity is a history of mental illness in the offender. Chase, in his teens, became an al-

coholic and also developed a penchant for killing and mutilating animals. In 1975, he was committed to a mental institution as a schizophrenic suffering from somatic delusions. That Chase had a mental disorder was, therefore, not in doubt.

The second pointer to a crime of insanity is the lack of motive in the commission of the offences; he apparently picked his victims at random. In all six murders that he committed, he acted alone; there was no evidence that he had any accomplices. When he committed the six murders, police was baffled; there was no apparent motive for the murders.

Crimes of insanity are typically bizarre and ghostly. Police investigating these murders were horrified to discover that Chase was carrying fast-food containers stuffed with human body parts and blood when he was arrested. A subsequent search of his apartment revealed extensive evidence of all the murders. When Chase murdered his second victim, he stuffed his victim's mouth and throat with dog faeces. He, in addition, mutilated the bodies of all his victims.

Chase took the stand in his own defence. He looked awful, having lost weight significantly. His eyes were sunken and lustreless. He claimed to have been semi-conscious during some of the murders, and he described in detail the way he had been mistreated much of his life. He admitted to drinking the blood of some of his victims.

He, however, did not recall much about some of the murders, but he knew that he had shot the baby in the head and decapitated it, leaving it in a bucket in the hope of getting more of its blood. He thought his problems stemmed from his inability to have sex with girls as a teenager, and he said he was sorry for the killings.

The defence asked for a verdict of second-degree murder, to spare Chase the death penalty, since he was clearly insane and had never been given proper help. The prosecution countered that Chase was a sexual sadist, a monster who knew what he was doing and who could not be salvaged. Court ruled that Richard Chase was legally sane and, therefore, guilty of the six counts of first-degree murder.

Chase took his own life a day after Christmas in 1980. He had apparently hoarded drugs, which had been given to him while in prison, to control his hallucinations and depression. The cause of his death was described as toxic ingestion. His cell was searched, and a strange suicide note about taking some pills was found. The prison psychiatrist noted that although Chase had been psychotic since the time he entered the prison, no one really bothered about the nature of his bizarre obsession with blood.

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