

Night stalker

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Ricardo "Richard" Munoz Ramirez born February 28, 1960, is a convicted serial killer and is awaiting execution on California's death row. Before his capture, Ramirez was dubbed the "Night Stalker" by the mass media.

Munoz's crimes stem from murder to rape and home invasion, his first victim was on April 10, 1984, 9-year-old Mei Leung was found dead in a hotel basement where Ramirez was living at the time. Ramirez's DNA was matched to DNA obtained at the 1984 crime scene in 2009. On June 28, 1984, 79-year-old Jennie Vincow was found dead in her apartment.

She had been stabbed repeatedly, and her throat was slashed so severely she was almost decapitated. On February 21, 1985, Sisters Christina and Mary Caldwell, aged 58 and 71, were found dead in their home. They each were stabbed dozens of times. On March 17, 1985, Ramirez attacked 22-year-old Angela Barrios outside her home. He shot her before entering her house. Inside was Dayle Okazaki, age 34, who Ramirez immediately shot and killed. Within an hour of killing Okazaki, Ramirez again attacked 30-year-old Tsai-Lian Yu, he pulled her out of her car onto the road. He shot her several times and fled.

The two attacks occurring on the same day sparked media attention and caused panic and fear among the public. On March 27, Ramirez shot Vincent Zazzara, age 64, and his wife Maxine, age 44. Mrs. Zazzara's body was mutilated with several stab wounds. Bullets found at the scene were matched to those found at previous attacks, and the police realized a serial killer was on the loose. Two months after killing the Zazarra couple, Ramirez attacked a Chinese couple: Harold Wu, age 66, who was shot in the head,

and his wife, Jean Wu, age 63, who was punched, bound, and then violently raped.

On May 29, 1985, Ramirez attacked Malvial Keller, 83, and her disabled sister, Blanche Wolfe, 80, beating each with a hammer. Ramirez attempted to rape Keller but failed. The next day, Ruth Wilson, 41, was bound, raped, and sodomized by Ramirez, while her 12-year-old son was locked in a closet. Ramirez slashed Wilson once, and then bound her and her son together, and left. On June 2, 1985, Edward Wildgans, 29, was shot and killed by Ramirez. His girlfriend was raped several times by Ramirez but survived.

On July 5, sixteen-year-old Whitney Bennett survived after being beaten with a tire iron by Ramirez. On July 7, Linda Fortuna, 63, was attacked and Ramirez tried to rape her but failed. On July 20, he again struck twice he shot and killed a 32-year-old man, Chitat Assawahem, and his wife Sakima, 29, was beaten and forced to perform oral intercourse. Later on the same day a Glendale couple, Maxson Kneiding, 66, and his wife Lela, also 66, were shot and killed. On August 6, Ramirez shot both Christopher Petersen, 38, and his wife, Virginia, 27, in the head.

Amazingly, they both survived. On August 8, Ramirez attacked a couple, fatally shooting Ahmed Zia, 35, before raping Zia's wife, Suu Kyi, 28. Ramirez then left the Los Angeles area, and on August 17, he shot to death a 66-year-old man in San Francisco, also shooting and beating his wife. The wife survived her wounds and was able to identify her attacker from police sketches as the attacker from other similar previous attacks. August 24, 1985, Ramirez traveled broke the apartment of Bill Carns, 29, and his fiancée, Inez Erickson, 27.

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Ramirez shot Carns in the head and raped Erickson. Munoz had stolen the couple's car and was found on August 28, and police were able to obtain one fingerprint that was on the mirror of the vehicle. The prints belonged to Richard Munoz Ramirez, who was described as a 25-year-old drifter from Texas with a long rap sheet that included many arrests for traffic and illegal drug violations. Two days later, his mugshots were broadcast on national television and printed on the cover of every major newspaper in California.

The next day Ramirez was identified, chased, surrounded, and severely beaten by an angry mob in East Los Angeles as he was trying to steal a car. Police had to break up the mob to prevent them from killing Ramirez. On September 20, 1989, he was found guilty of 13 counts of murder, 5 attempted murders, 11 sexual assaults, and 14 burglaries. During the penalty phase of the trial on November 7, 1989, he was sentenced to die in California's gas chamber. The trial of Richard Ramirez was one of the most difficult and longest criminal trials in American history, taking over four years to finalize.

Almost 1, 600 prospective jurors were interviewed. More than one hundred witnesses testified, and while a number of witnesses had a difficult time recalling certain facts four years after the crimes, others were quite certain of the identity of Richard Ramirez.

References:

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