

Clifford olson – the beast of british columbia

Sociology, Violence



Clifford Robert Olson got his first chance at publicity the day that he was born. It was on the first day of January in the year 1940 - New Year's Day. Like other babies born in St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver on that special day, he received a gift from Cunningham Drug Stores. Who was to know that later on growing up, the same store would be robbed by him - one of his many victims.

Clifford was the eldest child of Clifford and Leona Olson and, unlike most other serial killers, was raised in a stable home along with three younger siblings who all grew up to be law-abiding citizens. In 1945, the Olson family shifted to British Columbia and lived in a community built for returning veterans of the war.

As a school kid itself, Clifford used to get into fights and get beaten up. His father recollects him wanting to learn boxing so that he could get even with those beating him, and he ended up becoming fairly good at the sport, even winning a few prizes. He used his skills to bully kids and torment animals and by the time he turned 10 years old, he started skipping classes. He quit school completely in 8th grade to work at a racetrack but then began his life of crime.

His first arrest was for breaking and entering at the age of 17 and he was sent to a correctional center in Burnaby for 9 months. He escaped from there but was recaptured and sent to the Haney Correctional Center. For the next quarter century, Clifford kept up his games of hide and seek, being convicted nearly 100 times for offences as varied as forgery and fraud to theft, rape and finally murder, and managing to escape 7 times from custody.

Olson was a con artist and many described him as a charming man with the gift of gab. He did not have a temper but he was never known to back down from a challenge. Whilst in prison, he never hesitated to rat on his fellow inmates if it suited his purpose. Because of this, he was often attacked by the inmates and had to be moved repeatedly from one prison to another to keep him from being murdered. During one such move, he befriended a prisoner named Gary Marcoux who had brutally raped and murdered a young girl. After extracting the details of the crime from Marcoux, he assisted the authorities in convicting his " friend". This episode led to a new interest for Olson, that of child pornography.

When Olson was released from prison in 1978, he indulged in child pornography and would have been arrested for it had he not been arrested on another charge, rape this time, of a 16 year old girl in January, 1981. His lawyer and he managed to get bail for him in April, 1981 without the authorities realizing that he had murdered a 12 year old girl the previous year.

The girl, Christine Weller, had disappeared in November, 1980. Since she had run away from home before, her parents reported the crime over a week after she disappeared. Her mutilated body was finally found on Christmas Day with multiple stab wounds.

Olson murdered his second victim 8 days after receiving his bail in April, 1981. The girl, Colleen Daignault, was a 13 year old who had been convinced to get into Olson's car by what was to become his standard ploy. He would meet youngsters at video parlors or other places where they hung out or

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would even advertise for them on bulletin boards of the church. He would then give them an attractive visiting card showing him to be a construction contractor. He would then interview some of them on the pretext of giving them window-washing or other such jobs and then select a naïve one for the job. He would then ask them to accompany him to the construction site in his car. On the way, he would offer them a celebratory drink which would be spiked with chloral hydrate - a knockout drug. He would then lead them to a deserted place where he would rape and murder them.

He used the same ploy with his third victim, Daryn Johnsrude, who was 16 years old when he was murdered on April 21, 1981. With Daryn, however, Olson broke his pattern by going for a male teenager this time. This “change” made it more confusing for investigators as they didn’t yet realize that they were dealing with a serial killer but assumed that these were cases of runaway teenagers.

Another reason that Olson was initially able to avoid detection was that the cops thought of him as a resource and not a suspect given his previous dealings with him as an informant. Also, he had never been accused on any charges of a sexual nature prior to his first rape accusation in January, 1981. In that case too, the charge was levied on him by a prostitute who failed to appear in court and proved to be an unreliable witness. These charges against him were later dropped.

Olson had met a divorcee named Joan Hale in February 1980 whilst he was out of jail. She had suffered through a violent, abusive marriage and Olson seduced her and they had a son who was born in April 1981. A month later,

on May 15, 1981, the two got married in the midst of his killings. His new bride had no idea that her husband had already killed 3 children. He led a double life where he showed everyone that he was a family man and attended church while he made his living as a scam artist and thief.