

# The green river killer



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I killed the 48 women listed in the states second amended information. In most cases when I killed these women I did not know their names. Most of the time I killed them the first time I met them and I do not have a good memory of their faces. (Seattle - From statement of Green River killer Gary Ridgway, read in court in November 2003 by prosecutor Jeff Baird)

Gary Leon Ridgway, known as the Green River Killer, dumping the first five bodies of his victims along the Green River in King County, Washington, pleaded guilty on the 5th November 2003, to the murders of 48 women from 1982 to 1998. He is considered one of the most prolific psycho-serial killer in U. S. history, having one of the longest cases ever to be solved, including other isolated murders.

In 1982, many young people had gone missing and this tolled up, over the years. A number of femail victims found dead in isolated parts of King County, Washington. In most cases, skeletal remains were found as the bodies took long to be discovered. Moreoever, most bodies were found nude and with no possessions thus making identification difficult.

The " Green River Task Force" was set up in consequence to investigate the killings and track the suspect. At first, due to the large amount of data recieved at the police station in a short period of time, the investigation was delayed and there was not enough resources for the data to be processed and thus some data was lost.

A common trait was identified from all the victims - most of the murdered girls had a history of prostitution. Investigators turned their attention to

interviewing prostitutes, working in the main strip in Seattle. Unfortunately, many of them were not ready to negotiate with the police.

Ted Bundy, another famous serial killer imprisoned at the time, was interviewed and asked to help give an insight into the mind of a serial killer. The results were infutile, and the killer could not be identified from the long list of suspects. The task force lost a lot of valuable time with wrong suspects. Furthermore, in those times, they had to rely on old-fashion police work to bridge clues together instead of the DNA analysis used today.

In 1983, Gary Leon Ridgway, a former truck painter, was added to the suspect list for the Green River Killings after his truck was reported to be similar to the one seen on the night victim Marie Malvar , disappeared. Ridgway denied having any contact with the victim and due to lack of further evidence the charges against him were stalled. Ridgway was also affiliated to prostitution. He was accused of strangling a prostitute , Rebecca Garde Guay but claimed that he only did so to stop her from biting him during oral sex. He was also caught solicitating with a police woman posing as a prositute. Although he pleaded guilty to the solicitation, all charges were dropped in both cases, espescially after having a negative polygraph (lie - detector) tests indicating that he never killed any women.

Suspisions of Ridgway being linked to the Green River Killings still ensued and in 1987, the Task Force issued a search warrant in his home. Many items were taken to the Washington State Patrol Crime Laboratory, for evidence comparing, such as carpet fibers, ropes, paint samples and plastic tarps. A court order also required

Ridgway to supply a saliva sample for future DNA testing. None of the evidence appeared to link Ridgway with any of the cases.

In 2001, the Police Major Crimes Division Detective, Tom Jensen hoped to use technical advances in DNA analysis to solve the murder case, advances which improved over the years and were before inaccurate. The biological evidence from several Green River Killings victims were reviewed at the state lab until a match was found - a profile was developed and this was positive to Gary Leon Ridgway.

DNA is the most accurate way to identify and differentiate one person from another. It is like an organic barcode, giving a unique identity for every individual.

The polymerase chain reaction (PCR) combined with short tandem repeats test (STR), was used to help identify a match between the suspect and offender, after a complimentary probe was used to find the match . A small amount of DNA, from any bodily fluid sample for example can be amplified many times to make it easier to be investigated using PCR. The sample should be uncontaminated, but it does not need to be recently collected - PCR tests can be performed decades later. The amplification of DNA allowed scientists to sequence and copy very short DNA fragments taken from the crime scene. A sample from the suspect and another from the crime scene were taken and matched.

Locard's Exchange Principle implies that " Every contact leaves a trace" and each time there is contact there is a minute exchange of particles that would

serve as a silent witness against the offender. In this case , samples which includes evidence of material used to strangle victims.

WSPCL Forensic Scientists analyzed the vaginal swabs from three victims and pubic hair on another and discovered that a partial male DNA profile on the swab matched with Ridgway's DNA profile, which was developed from a piece of gauze Mr. Ridgway had chewed on in 1987 and confirmed a match. There was also a match with the sperm fraction found in the vaginal swab.

In 2001, the King County Prosecuting Attorney charged the defendant Gary Leon Ridgway with four counts of aggravated murders of Marcia Chapman, Opal Mills, Cynthia Hinds, and Carol Ann Christensen. Over the next year, three more victims- Wendy Coffield , Debra Bonner, and Debra Estes- were confirmed being Gary Ridgway's victims, after a forensic scientist identified microscopic spray paint spheres on their clothing. The paint was identical to the highly specialized DuPont Imron paint used at the Kenworth truck plant where Ridgway worked. Ridgway claimed that no investigator had caught him but rather he was the victim of new technology: "...what got me caught was technology got me caught." (Mateng, 2003)

The guilty claimed that he had murdered his victims at his home or in his truck and then dumped the cadaveres in nearby parking lots, in the woods or in rivers. His trait was to choke his victims and denied using any other firearms except the use of ligatures such as towels, belts, ropes etc. to strangulate his victims.

Ridgway used a picture of his son to attract lonely vulnerable girls such as runaways and hitchikers involved in drugs and prostitution in Seattle,

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Washington. This made it difficult for victims to be found as they were not in contact with relatives and did not have a stable location.

Prostitutes all fall under victimization theories. The lifestyle theory suggests that individuals are targeted based on their lifestyle choices – prostitutes put themselves in danger by engaging in high-risk activities, who desperately would do anything in exchange for money. The deviant place theory reinforces this by stating that one is more likely to become a victim in crime when exposed to dangerous places (Seigel, 2006). Lastly, the routine activity theory explains that the typical routines of individuals are linked with the rate of victimization. These situations are: 1. The availability of suitable targets, 2. The absence of capable guardians, 3. The presence of motivated offenders. The risk of victimisation increases when one or all of these criteria are met.

On investigation, Ridgway claimed that he never cared for his victims.” I picked prostitutes as my victims because I hate most prostitutes and did not want to pay them for sex. I also picked prostitutes as victims because they were easy to pick up without being noticed. I knew they would not be reported missing. I picked prostitutes because I thought I could kill as many of them as I wanted without getting caught.” (State of Washington v. Gary Leon Ridgway, 2003, p. 7)

Ridgway liked to dominate and wanted to be in control. His hatred towards these women stemmed from the poor upbringing by his mother as a child. It is believed that through the killings, he was reinforcing his bruised manhood.

Looking at his background, from a very young age, Ridgway had conflicting feelings and sexual desires towards his overbearing controlling mother. This had a psychological impact on his life and way of living, always striving for satisfaction. Ridgway was mentally and verbally sexually abused by his provocative mother, who humiliated her sons. This eventually led to Ridgway having fantasies about having violent sex with his mother to scar her for life and to relieve his frustrations of never being able to please her. Gary Ridgway's criminal act can be listed under the social learning theory which holds that behaviour can be learned at the cognitive level through observing the actions of other people. The family has a large impact on what we learn and how people learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning and imitation.

His behaviour was further reinforced by his father's hatred towards prostitutes and his love for necrophilia. Ridgway grew up thinking there is nothing wrong with this act and he loved the idea of "having sex with someone who is dead because you wouldn't get caught. No feelings. She wouldn't feel it" (Reichert, 2004, p. 274). Ridgway had confessed in court to driving back with his son to retrieve one of his victim's body and having close contact whilst his son was close by.

After minor criminal offences as a young boy, Ridgway attempted to stab a six year old boy in the woods, for the purpose of knowing how killing felt. Yet police did not charge him and made him believe that he can get away with his killings. Ridgway displays a psychopathic personality trait with an id-dominated personality. He is defined as an "aggressive person with a dangerously maladjusted personality who craves excitement, feels little

guilt, and is unable to form meaningful emotional attachments to others (McCord & McCord, 1964). He also had an abnormally low IQ which resulted in difficulty at school. Hirschi's social bond theory claims that when there is no good attachment in personal and social life, unusual behaviour ensues due to broken bonds which may increase the tendency of criminal acts.

According to Time Magazine writer Terry McCarthy, "Ridgway had an insatiable sexual appetite." His two ex-wives and old girlfriends reported that he was a sex maniac and Ridgway himself admitted to having a love-hate relationship with prostitutes. He also shifted blame to his second wife claiming that there might have been a lot less people dying if he had a nice woman to go home to.

On December 18, 2003, as part of the plea agreement, Ridgway got 48 life sentences at Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla but spared death penalty in exchange to full help with other murder investigations and insight into his techniques, evidence and locations .

In my opinion , the Task Force should have investigated and evaluated a detailed background of Gary Leon Ridgway's history and lifestyle as soon as he became one of the suspects. Although he was under surveillance, he should have been detained into custody whilst being investigated due to his uncontrollable personality and violent traits. If a more thorough background check had been made to prove his uncontrollable aggressive personality, Ridgway could have been institutionalised until charged.

Nevertheless , the case was handled well, exhausting all the facilities and man power available during those times.

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It is proven that social experiences such as poor family environment predisposes one to violence and abnormal behaviour. I believe that no one is born a criminal - it is the experiences in life which guides decision we take. Unfortunately sociopath such as Gary Leon Ridgway, do not have the capacity to make the right decisions but are overwhelmed by their thirst of power and control. Ultimately, one is still to blame for his/her actions and it seemed unjust that the killer did not have a graver penalty despite all those victims he killed.