

‘What fear is like’:

The Legacy of Trauma, Safety, and Security after the 1977 Girl Scout Murders

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013

Chicago, Illinois

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There would be no soul to this particular history if it weren't for the Magic Empire Council Girl Scouts who I had the honor to meet and know in an entirely new way, beginning in 1996. Their wisdom and candor about this incredibly painful chapter in their lives as Girl Scouts, mothers, volunteers, and staff never ceased to humble and inspire me. I am honored to be the trusted collector of your voices. I hope I have done justice to your experiences and your words. Any mistakes are mine completely. I dedicate this project to *everyone* touched by the 1977 Camp Scott tragedy, especially the survivors, and to the memory of Lori, Denise, and Michelle.

My advisor, Robert D. Johnston, never ceased in his unwavering support of this endeavor. Many times I doubted myself, and many times he countered my doubt with new insights and encouragement. He truly understood what I was doing, even when I myself wasn't so sure. There's no better teacher and mentor than that. Thank you.

For their contributions on many levels as this project unfolded, I would like to thank my committee members John D'Emilio, Brian Hosmer, Susan Laird, and Kevin Schultz. I am grateful to each one of you for your support and critique of my work, as well as your encouragement regarding its future in the wider world.

To my precious daughters, Madeleine and Lucia, and to my dear husband, Andy Wright, please know that I could not have done this without your love, humor, and patience. The same goes for my parents, Richard & Paula, and sisters Linda and Maggie, and more recently, my Wright family in-laws—all of you have helped me in so many ways. I am blessed and grateful.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	American Camping Association
CIT	Counselor-In-Training
EMDR	Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing
GSUSA	Girl Scouts USA
MEC	Magic Empire Council
OETA	Oklahoma Educational Television Authority
OSBI	Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation
POMC	Parents of Murdered Children
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

SUMMARY

On June 13, 1977 at a Girl Scout camp near Locust Grove, Oklahoma, three young campers were raped and murdered on the first night of camp. Local and state authorities searched nine months for a local man, Gene Leroy Hart, a convicted rapist and jail escapee considered the most likely suspect. After his capture, he was acquitted of the charges and returned to prison, where he died unexpectedly of a heart attack two months later. The criminal case remains unsolved. The fifty-year old camp closed immediately following the murders and the Girl Scout council sold the property. They opened a new camp some years later with a secure, fenced-in sleeping area, partially funded by door-to-door donations for a barbed wire enclosure. A drawn-out civil suit brought by two of the three victims' families against the Magic Empire Girl Scout Council finally came to trial in 1985. The jury's verdict favored the council.

Both an oral history and a microhistory, this project examines the immediate and long-term aftermath of the tragedy on child survivors, the Girl Scout council, and the community at large. Centered within the broader context of changing notions of safety and security in the United States between 1975-1985, this story parallels the rise of more visible security measures in American life, leading to the now common notion that physical security measures are a requirement for safety. The Girl Scouts' decades-old feminist educational model—especially their understanding of and entitlement to autonomy in the wilderness, at camp, and in the world at large—changed forever as a result of the tragedy.

Narrative-driven and informed by interviews with survivors, staff, volunteers, attorneys, and investigators, this project tracks the arc of the event in the lives of

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survivors over the following thirty years. The consequences of this event are striking and vast. In the very decade that women's freedoms were expanding, the Tulsa council created what some long-time Girl Scouts considered regressive security policies for future camping. Over the next twenty years, they created a security rubric that was eventually accepted by both parents and girls alike and the council came to realize that they could not protect girls against every kind of danger all the time.

Many in the Cherokee community near Camp Scott believed that the suspect, a Cherokee man, was a scapegoat, and their impressions highlight 1970s race relations and cultural tensions in Oklahoma. Hart's story symbolizes the complex intersection of race, class, and culture in a geographic region replete with issues of identity and belonging.

This history—the aftermath of the Camp Scott murders and its impact on survivors—strives to make a meaningful contribution to the history of trauma and recovery in the United States. The near regular occurrence of mass acts of violence in the past twenty years situates Camp Scott survivors in an earlier era, when psychologists and social workers were just beginning to recognize PTSD in groups besides war veterans and battered women. As a microhistory, it is a window into the time just before private security guards, fenced camps, gated communities and a significant rise in crime in the 1980s. It is also a window into the minds and hearts of adult women and girls in the late 1970s who handled this crisis, rebuilt their camp, and flourished again outside, despite increasing acts of violence, rape culture, and the societal fears of late twentieth century America.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a country, we have been through this too many times.¹

...it is a sign of recovered strength, not moral frailty or intellectual feebleness, that I am able to incorporate this awful knowledge into my work.²

I was a ten-year-old Girl Scout at Camp Scott near Locust Grove, Oklahoma on the night of June 13, 1977 when three girls my age were raped and murdered during the first night of the camp season. Lori Lee Farmer, 8, Michele Heather Gusé, 9, and Doris Denise Milner, 10, were sleeping in the same tent when they were strangled, bludgeoned and sexually assaulted.³ The killer abandoned their bodies in their sleeping bags a hundred feet or so from their tent. Early the next morning, a young counselor spotted one of the girls and alerted camp staff.⁴ Once law enforcement arrived on the scene, the staff turned their attention to the 130 remaining campers and, incredibly, evacuated us without our learning anything of the tragedy until we were back in the arms our parents. We were bussed back to Tulsa by mid-afternoon, bewildered to be greeted by throngs of family and television crews. After a nine-month manhunt for one suspect, Gene Leroy Hart, the

¹ *The Washington Post*, 14 December 2012, “School Shooting: President Barack H. Obama’s Remarks on the Shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT.”

² Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (2002), 35.

³ *Tulsa Tribune*, 13 June 1977.

⁴ Carla Wilhite, Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol.1, 118-119.

Mayes County jury found him not guilty of the murders.⁵ Two months later, while serving in Macalester State Penitentiary on other charges, he died of a massive heart attack while jogging in the exercise yard.⁶ To this day, the Camp Scott murders remain unsolved.

This project reexamines the painful circumstances and haunting decades since that June morning from another viewpoint—primarily that of survivors—and gives the tragedy a much deserved telling in a scholarly historical narrative form. As an oral history, it is a testimony to the survivors’ perseverance as Girl Scouts in a saga that began as an intense violation of life and property, and then ever after, caused a distressing impact on the emotional lives and futures of the women involved. As a microhistory, it examines the crime in 1977, the criminal and civil trials in 1979 and 1985, and the long-term impact on the Girl Scout council as metaphors for larger social changes in the United States during the late seventies and into the mid-eighties. Within the social history of medicine and of childhood, this work examines trauma, child psychology and the eventual use of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on survivors of all kinds of trauma, not simply war-related.

If historians were asked about the role of transparency in their work, they would likely suggest that it is the careful citation of sources, the clear language of an argument, and the checking and critical review of their work by their peers. This dissertation is all of those things, but it also strives for more. By sharing the fact of my presence that night at Camp Scott here and in the Epilogue, I am “making the narrator-analyst relationship

⁵ *Tulsa World*, 31 March 1979; *Tulsa Tribune*, 31 March 1979.

⁶ *Tulsa World*, 7 June 1979.

visible,” and this is ultimately why my interview subjects trusted me with their stories.⁷ The parallel trauma and post-trauma experiences of survivors that I discovered through interviews emboldened me to situate my story here with theirs and to show on multiple levels how its impact on Girl Scout survivors unfolded over years, experiences, and landscapes.

For many of those years, my geographical proximity to the murders made me suddenly and immediately uncomfortable in the world. I was present at the camp but saw nothing of the crime. I was not physically harmed. Yet I became a fearful, anxious girl who buried the incident while still being forever marked by it. Twenty years passed before I discovered I was not alone in my suffering. In adulthood, I learned that one does not have to sustain bodily harm or see a violent incident to be traumatized. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), witness trauma, survivor guilt—these terms are now familiar to many people, regardless of whether they have been involved in a tragedy.⁸

For those who have, such naming or categorization gives meaning to having lived through the experience—but rarely does this offer comfort. In fact, the terms alone leave most of us feeling sheepishly guilty and achingly invisible. After all, we are still here. We *have* our lives. We are “lucky.” Carrying the awful knowledge of an unspeakable tragedy for decades before one is—rightly or not—named “survivor” raises provocative questions about the relationship between naming and experiencing. After all, many of us

⁷ Situating the listener/analyst’s relationship to the project also strengthens the work as a whole. “By making the narrator-analyst relationship visible throughout the process of collecting and working with personal narratives, analysts can make clearer, stronger, and more credible claims about their interpretation.” Mary Jo Maynes, et al. *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (2008), 125.

⁸ PTSD has enough social awareness now to merit its own volume in the popular yellow and black *For Dummies* series. Mark Goulston, M.D. *Post-Traumatic Stress for Dummies* (2008), specific reference to survivor guilt, 151.

one-hundred-and fifty-plus Camp Scott survivors did not have a name for our suffering. If and whenever we did, the terms depression or anxiety—and then eventually post-traumatic stress disorder—lagged decades behind emotional scars that had gone unnamed for so long.

The term “awful knowledge” that philosopher Susan Brison used to describe her mental and emotional recovery after being raped, beaten, and left for dead along a road in the French countryside on July 4, 1990 resonated with me personally and is conceptually relevant to this dissertation. Trained as a philosopher, Brison had previously found intellectual joy in taking obvious or familiar concepts and making them into something puzzling and strange. After her trauma, however, “philosophy was of no use in making me feel at home in the world.”⁹ The people she knew and loved wanted her to forget, to move on, as was the case with numerous Camp Scott survivors’ loved ones. She wrote *Aftermath* as a testament not only to her recovery, but also as an intellectual contribution towards understanding the relationship between violence and the subsequent destruction of self that has become all too familiar in our time. My project both echoes and offers evidence of her “feminist account of the relational self” that is both “vulnerable enough to be undone by violence yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of empathetic others.”¹⁰

Trained as a historian, I look for the events and social forces that cause change over time, and for clues that help those of us in the present make sense of the past. Ours is to be an objective rendering, inasmuch as that is possible given our human fallibility and emotional ties to our subjects (whether we care to admit those ties or not). As my

⁹ Brison, x.

¹⁰ Ibid., 38.

love of history grew, I realized that unlike Brison in the aftermath of her rape, studying history was actually of great use in “making me feel at home in the world,” especially with regards to my childhood experience at Camp Scott. I looked for signs of change over time in the history of violence against women and girls. I looked for the benefit in my time of the hard work of women in the past who righted the myriad wrongs against them. I looked for reasons behind the reasons given for male violence. I learned that regardless of whether it was random and brutal or intimate and domestic, this kind of violence originated from the same source. Ultimately, I found the feminist concept of “rape culture” a distressing, yet ultimately comforting, model that connected the unspeakable tragedy at Camp Scott to bigger stories in women’s history and in women’s lived experiences in my own time.

As a conceptual framework for this historical narrative, “rape culture” fits extremely well. Defined as one in which “women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself,” a rape culture socializes women to anticipate and accept these kinds of experiences as unfortunate, sometimes tragic, but nevertheless normal—something to be expected at some point in their lives.¹¹ In women’s studies theorization, this term has also been referred to as a rape continuum.¹² I argue that this concept is key to understanding how the Tulsa Girl Scout council responded when faced with the absolute worst of the rape culture continuum, and

¹¹ Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher and Martha Roth, *Transforming a Rape Culture* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1993), vii.

¹² Susan M. Shaw & Janet Lee, *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions*, 3rd Edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007), 554-586.

then, to understanding how their future security precautions were forever informed by the trauma and the trial itself.

Undoubtedly, girls and women active in Girl Scouting across the country, and throughout the organization's history, experienced aspects of rape culture *outside* of Girl Scouting—in their schools, their homes, and their workplaces. In an adaptation of Marianne Hirsch's term, postmemory—a trauma memory that is conveyed from one generation to the next—Susan Brison describes another kind, a postmemory of rape: “Girls in our society are raised with so many cautionary tales about rape that even if we are not assaulted in childhood, we enter womanhood freighted with postmemories of sexual violence.”¹³ These postmemories haunt the present but also “reach into the future in the form of fear, a kind of prememory of what, at times, seems inevitable: one's own future experience of being raped.”¹⁴ I found this to be very true for many of my interview subjects. The older women were shocked and disturbed by the violence against girls, some even wishing he'd gone after them instead, and the younger girls took the experience as the beginning of their own personal prememory of rapes to come. I use these concepts as a lens to magnify both the formal response of the Magic Empire Council and the informal lived experiences of Camp Scott survivors when they were exposed to the very worst of the rape culture continuum.

Women at Camp Scott felt protected from rape culture at their camp; they were at ease in that space, free to explore, roam, and sleep in a peaceful wooded world of their own making. Once the rape and murder of three of their own had whipped them out of such idyll, their response seemed extreme and yet completely understandable. Tulsa Girl

⁸ Marianne Hirsch, “Marked By Memory,” in *Extremities*, 74. Brison, *Aftermath*, 86.

¹⁴ Brison, 87.

Scouts survived using a two-prong strategy: they hushed all discussion about the murders and institutionalized a complex rubric against future danger through the implementation of new rules and requirements for outdoor activities. Anticipating another disaster became a critical component to their survival as an organization; they had to expect the very worst and were compelled to take measures beyond what other councils and children's organizations took at the time. They had to be vigilant and security-focused where they had previously been careful and safety-focused. The murders changed Magic Empire Girl Scout council emotionally as well. For eight years, due to the pending civil negligence lawsuit, silence became imperative on the grounds of the impending trial. After the trial, when they were found not guilty, the policy remained. By then it had become useful as a tool for their financial and psychological survival as an organization. Forgetting could not be managed and dictated, but silence could be.

A subtle shift took place in American society between the 1977 and 1985—the time between the Girl Scout murders and the long-awaited opening arguments of the civil trial. The nation seemed weary of the now numerous, shocking and tragic news stories—cults & mass suicide, mass murderers/rapists, child abductions, military violence, assassinations, and of course, the impact of the Vietnam War trauma on returning veterans—and free market capitalism rose to meet those fears.¹⁵ A booming business emerged with private security firms, professional security consultants, home-surveillance and alarm systems, and gated communities marking the beginning of an era in which the kind of security one had—especially the physical presence of someone with a gun—

¹⁵ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares* (2006); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (2011); Bruce Schulman & Julian Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound* (2008); James S. Olson, *Historical Dictionary of the 1970s*, 211; Andreas Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown* (2006); Paula Fass, *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America* (1997).

determined what it meant to feel safe in one's home, neighborhood, or shopping mall. One of the major themes arising from this era is how Americans, and especially parents, began to view the world as being a much more dangerous and perilous place for their children than previous generations. Phillip Jenkins argued that "by the end of the decade, not only were threats to children a familiar concept, but so was the imagined form of the danger: clandestine rings and secret organizations, evil predators seeking to seduce or capture them."¹⁶ Steven Mintz identified the mid-1970s as the beginning of a new phase in children's history when attitudinal, demographic and economic changes put children's wellbeing at risk.¹⁷ The ensuing era of "parental panics" may have been due to exaggerated fears of child molestation, abduction, and murders, but real crimes backed up their fears again and again. How could parents keep their children safe in a world wrought with such dangers?

Today, the public is accustomed to hearing directly from survivors of trauma almost immediately, perhaps while an event is still in process. Media outlets provide countless experts, continuous coverage, and babbling commentators ready to analyze and forecast the potential outcomes. In the 1970s and 80s, this was not the case. Children and adults witnessed and experienced plenty of crimes, but they were not labeled survivors. No one yet knew or had a name for the degree to which the trauma lingered in the lives and psyches of the witnesses.

Judith Herman observed that the study of psychological trauma "has a curious history—one of episodic amnesia," that at one moment bursts with active investigation

¹⁶ Philip Jenkins, "The Politics of Children: 1977," in *Decade of Nightmares*, 133.

¹⁷ Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 2004), 334, 336.

and then is followed by “periods of oblivion.”¹⁸ Although Vietnam Vets were slowly getting help for what was then called Vietnam Vet Syndrome, and the Battered Women’s Movement worked tirelessly to expose the victimization inherent in domestic violence, the idea that children could suffer long-term psychological effects from a violent incident was very new to researchers. This project examines the shared experiences of Camp Scott survivors as they went about living the rest of their lives. How did things turn out for them in the long run? A persistent feeling expressed by many women—that it could have been any one of us, so why those three?—haunts survivors to this day. After interviewing, corresponding, and analyzing their stories, they are clearly survivors, although that term did not enter feminist or recovery discourse broadly until well into the 1980s.¹⁹

But would they speak after all this time? When finally a few agreed to share their experiences with me, I could not help but grasp the depth of the contradiction survivors live between and came to understand that “the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.”²⁰ Adding their stories to the tragic, unresolved narrative about the Camp Scott murders became what Herman called a “survivor mission” that is “transform[ing] the meaning of [a] personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action...The trauma is

¹⁸ Judith Herman, *Trauma & Recovery*, 7.

¹⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 31. “Only after 1980, when the efforts of combat veterans had legitimated the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder, did it become clear that the psychological syndrome seen in survivors of rape, domestic battery, and incest was essentially the same as the syndrome seen in survivors of war.”

²⁰ Herman, 1.

redeemed only when it becomes the source of a survivor mission...making it a gift to others.”²¹

Initially, the challenge was to make this project, and therefore the tragedy itself, as historically relevant as possible. The stories, the pain, and the deep friendships would not bend to my efforts to distance myself or sanitize the power of their words. So I concurred with Martin Duberman, who so aptly described his intention in *Stonewall*, that “my intention [would be] to embrace precisely what most contemporary historians have discarded: the ancient, essential enterprise of telling human stories.” Like his oral history of several key figures in the early gay rights movement, I did not want to “yield to a ‘sociologizing’ tendency that reduces three-dimensional lives to statistical cardboard.”²² Neither did I want to simply collect and use their experiences based on outside categorizations of race, class, gender, politics, and sexual identity to prove some larger historical agenda. When Ginny Young says she is not a feminist but was angry about being fearful after the murders, and when Carla Wilhite had not come out as a lesbian but was being interrogated as a lesbian murder suspect, this makes for a much more nuanced understanding of a subject’s concept of herself in the context of her own time. My intention is to examine this event from the “inside,” as articulated by Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett in *Telling Stories*, and to use personal narrative in history scholarship in order to “bridge the analytic gap between outside positionalities and interior worlds, between the social and the individual.” Used in this way, such narratives allow the reader to better understand “key subjective dimensions of motivation—emotions, desires, accumulated

²¹ Herman, 207-211.

²² Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, xvi.

wisdom, acquired associations and meanings, clouded judgments, and psychic makeup—all of which are the product of a lifetime of experiences.”²³

This project is a glimpse into the lives of women and girls who had to move on without any public acknowledgment of their place in the experience or their years of achy, persistent memories. The recollections I have been entrusted to document and share breaks a long silence and reveals the strength and courage of many who never felt justified expressing feelings of fear, anger, or sorrow. They were Girl Scouts, sisters, friends, daughters, and mothers. They cherished the land and the beloved traditions of Camp Scott summers. Their hearts were broken and their sanctuary defiled. Their lives were never the same. I am indebted to the brave women who have agreed to share stories about their lives before, during, and after this tragedy with me.

Chapter Synopsis

Chapter 1, “A Summer Storm: June 13, 1977,” is a narrative rendering of the day before and short time after the murders at Camp Scott. Crafted almost entirely from accounts of several women who were there that day, my objective was to present the event in a way that historically redeems the “essential enterprise of *telling human stories*...so as not to seal off and silence familiar human sounds.”²⁴ From the adult perspective of Julia Ratcliff Brady, a camper in the 1940s who was then the fifth grade teacher of several girls present on June 13th, to the raw intensity of fifteen-year-old Michelle Hoffman’s realization that she spent the bus ride to camp comforting a girl who

²³ Mary Jo Maynes, et al. *Telling Stories: Using Personal Narrative in Social Science and History*, 16.

²⁴ Martin Duberman, xvi.

would be dead the next day, I seek to add depth, detail, and the personal perspective of survivors of the tragedy.

In Chapter 2, I examine the life of Gene Leroy Hart, the escaped convict/rapist who was the sole murder suspect, and how the nine-month manhunt, his capture, and trial reveal larger historical and cultural issues that surrounded the crime. Cherokee medicine men, Cherokee Nation leaders, American Indian Movement members, OSBI agents, and the insular local culture of northeastern Oklahoma circle the suspect's story like Redtail hawks above an open field. His acquittal and then sudden death in prison are both glorified and abhorred, depending on one's perspective about his innocence or guilt. His story symbolizes the complex intersection of race, class, and culture in a location long troubled by issues of identity and belonging.

The focus of Chapter 3 is the Girl Scouts' history of outdoor programming in relationship to the violence on the Tulsa council's property. I look specifically at how the women in leadership at the time tried to preserve camping in the years following the murders. Their own initiation into "rape culture" put them in a double bind of the worst sort—they continued camping at a huge cost to the historical traditions and values of their current Scouts, while forging ahead into a new security paradigm for the generations of girls to come. Before 1977, they roamed freely on their lush, wooded 410-acre property; afterwards, they moved camp to a sparser, open landscape where gates, security guards, vapor lights, and fenced-in sleeping quarters became the norm for Girl Scout camp in northeastern Oklahoma. Much of what the Second Wave women's movement accomplished in the 1970s paralleled what Girl Scouting had long taken for granted. Yet just as the world was catching up to recognizing girls and women as being strong,

capable citizens, the Girl Scouts in Oklahoma were suddenly compelled to take security measures that initially included contradictions to their very mission—such as having men along at every campout. It is worth asking: was the Magic Empire council overreacting with their intensive security measures after the murders? Or were they safety-and-security pioneers who foreshadowed the future of children’s organizations with fear-based regulations that parents today accept wholeheartedly and as completely normal?

The civil trial brought against the council by two of the victims’ families is the focus of Chapter 4. The 1985 trial represents the beginnings of a historical shift in thinking about the changing relationship between safety and security in the United States at this time. The Girl Scouts’ defense was based on the argument—common thinking then and now—that nothing could have protected the campers from an intruder bent on doing harm. The plaintiffs’ attorney argued that the Girl Scouts were living in the past and that signs of danger were there for years, and that the Scouts were negligent regarding security. The chapter also documents the beginning of the well-organized victims’ rights movement in the United States.

Chapter 5 examines the long-term history of the trauma in the lives of several survivors, most notably Carla Wilhite, the counselor who found the girls’ bodies. Carla’s proximity to the murders also happened to expose her nascent lesbian sexual orientation to late 1970s homophobia in some of its ugliest forms. The chapter also exposes the utter lack of understanding around how victims of trauma might find healing in a world that did not see them as victims or survivors for two decades. As a pre-history of PTSD and trauma studies, I show that a growing understanding of Vietnam Veterans’ mental

anguish finally laid the groundwork for a complementary diagnosis for the suffering of non-war traumas that was of particular use to the survivors of Camp Scott.

My own personal history with the Tulsa Girl Scouts and my presence as a child camper that night has provided me with generous access to people and materials that I otherwise would never have been able to obtain. My past affords me a certain measure of trust and sensitivity to the issue, and I have worked diligently and sensitively to write this history in the proper context and with the transformative hope of exposing the brutality of our rape culture—to *right* this history. My training as a historian has demanded that I pull back from the personal and examine the historical record. I am indebted to both kinds of storytelling—it has, I believe, made me a more nuanced scholar. Chapter VIII is my recollection of the day of the murders, my life after, and the evolution of this project.

CHAPTER II

A SUMMER STORM: JUNE 13, 1977

I began to go to Camp Scott when I was only seven years old. I loved the camp, the counselors, the bugs, the leaves, the snakes, even the ticks which are so much a part of the ambiance of Oklahoma's woods...Night was always the best time of all. Hunkered deep under the cover, and looking out at the stars, I always felt utterly safe and completely happy. If a shower blew up, it was even better.¹

Julia Ratliff spent her first week at Camp Scott in 1942 when she had just completed second grade. She attended every summer after that for two-week sessions until she was old enough to get a summer job. Located in wooded, hilly northeastern Oklahoma outside the town of Locust Grove, Camp Scott opened in 1928 and was named after H. J. "Scotty" Scott, who donated the first twelve acres to the Magic Empire Council. Over the years, various groups donated surrounding lands, which after a final donation in 1967 totaled 410 acres. Campers swam in Wildcat swimming hole, took creek hikes, and named the highest point Inspiration, where they held Scout's Own ceremonies. Keeping on the lookout for Copperhead snakes was as commonplace to the girls as the sound of the Chuck Will's Widow song at night.²

In a 2009 interview, Mrs. Ratliff, then in her mid-seventies, remembered the landscape, the chores, and the names of all the cabin units. Describing a feeling of complete independence in a safe environment, she related the memory of how the counselors were there but not: "It's hard to explain that we were always doing things on our own, and the adults were in the background." The girls had Caper Charts, and did the

¹ Julia Brady Ratliff, "Tragedy Cannot Erase Memory of Childhood," *Tulsa Tribune*, 21 June 1977. Mrs. Ratliff was a camper at Scott in the 1940s and a Tulsa public school teacher in 1977.

² Anna Lawless interview, March 10, 2010, 9.

jobs as assigned, but counselors were not telling them what to do; they just did it. “And cleaning the latrine was not the worst job!”³ She also recalled the most memorable last-night ceremony where scouts took little boats with candles to the creek, lit them, made a wish, and watched the boats drift down the creek at dusk. The girl whose candle stayed lit the longest would get her wish. Ratliff was one of many longtime Girl Scout campers who recalled the landscape, landmarks and intricate details of the trails by memory, even though she had not been on the grounds for decades.⁴

Located in the heart of the Cherokee Nation, Camp Scott’s seven camp units were all named after prominent Oklahoma Indian tribes: Arapaho, Cherokee, Choctaw, Comanche, Kiowa, Quapaw, and Seminole. In Ratliff’s time, there were five units, named after the Five Civilized Tribes, and they were cabin units with screens and wooden shutters.⁵ Similar to other Girl Scout camps across the country, Camp Scott featured rustic environs with an assortment of buildings, access to waterfront activities on Spring Creek, and both wooded and open field areas.⁶ By the 1960s, two more units were added, and canvas, roll-up tents on wooden platforms replaced the old cabins. All but one of the units had nine, four-person tent structures for girls with one for the counselors. Each unit was arranged in a horseshoe configuration around a grassy patch, a fire ring, and a rustic camp kitchen. The units had ages affiliated with them, beginning with Kiowa and Quapaw for the youngest girls and Comanche for most of the CITs (Counselors in Training). Waterfront, kitchen, and other miscellaneous staff stayed in

³ Julia Brady Ratliff, interview by Michelle Hoffman, May 19, 2009, transcript, 1.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Leslie Paris, *Children’s Nature* (2008); Susan Miller, *Growing Girls* (2007).

Seminole, Arapaho, Cherokee, and Choctaw were reserved for the rest of the campers. By the summer of 1977, Julia Ratliff was a grade-school teacher at Lee Elementary in Tulsa, and several of her students were campers at Scott that summer.

Fifteen-year-old Michelle Hoffman had spent the past five summers at Scott. In 1977 she was too young to be a Counselor-in-Training (CIT) but was too old to be a camper.⁷ She had asked around at the council office in Tulsa and landed a summer job as the special assistant to the new camp director. This assignment meant she would spend the entire summer at camp and even though this was not an official staff position, she was thrilled with the opportunity. Michelle arrived at camp the week prior to set up and attend orientation with the counselors; additionally, Barbara had given her some independent projects. One she took particularly seriously and spent considerable time completing: to put the younger girls in tent units together based on what she could learn about them from their camp applications. She worked hard to create comfort and diversity for the tent mates, and she spent hours “making it all just right.”⁸

On Sunday June 12th, after a weekend at home, Michelle arrived at the council office to help get the campers on the bus and to act as an extra chaperone for the ride to Scott. As the time neared for their departure, Michelle noticed a young girl crying and saw that her mother was trying to console her. She approached them and introduced herself, hoping to comfort the new camper. The sniffing girl introduced herself as Denise Milner. Michelle offered to sit with her on the bus, and although a bit shy,

⁷ “A Counselor-in-Training completes an outdoor group leadership course while apprenticing as a counselor in Girl Scout camp. The training includes regular hours devoted to classes, plus apprenticeship in camp units working directly with the children.” *YOU Make the Difference: Handbook for Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts* (New York: Girl Scouts of the USA, 1980), 27.

⁸ Michelle Hoffman, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, June 7, 2009, transcript, 6.

agreed. A few minutes after they'd chosen a seat, the girl's mother boarded the bus to ask Michelle if she'd help Denise make a call home if she needed to. She promised to keep an eye on Denise and assured them both that Denise would have so much fun at camp, she wouldn't want to leave. Michelle and Denise talked the entire trip, and Michelle told her everything she loved about Camp Scott, the activities, new friends she'd make, the beautiful setting. Quiet but attentive, Denise relaxed as they made their way east on Highway 412. When they turned onto camp property, Michelle explained how Cookie Trail (the road into camp) got its name, and pointed out other landmarks at camp, such as Great Hall, Red Barn, Staff House and the two units along that road. As they disembarked, she pointed her in the direction of Kiowa, Denise's unit, and promised to check in on her later. That evening after the girls were all settled in, Michelle went by Denise's tent to say goodnight.⁹

The intense storm is what everyone remembers when asked about the first evening of the summer camp season at Camp Scott on June 12, 1977. The heavy rain began sometime during the first dinner at Great Hall that evening, and the counselors decided to keep the girls inside until the storm passed. After cleanup chores, they gathered everyone on the covered patio adjacent to the building and sang songs until there were only dripping trees to deal with on the way back to their units. First camp session evenings would typically include a group activity in each unit and a run-down of the rules of the camp unit kitchen, latrine etiquette, and other community rules, but on this evening, due to the rain, counselors told the girls to go to their tents to write letters, play cards, or read until the bell rang for lights out. Anna Lawless, Counselor-in-

⁹ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 3.

Training Director, described it as a “drippy, squishy, wet, wet night,” when one rule—never sleep with the tent flaps down—was trumped by another one: when the canvas tent flaps get too wet, they have to stay down in order to dry. She remembered how quiet the ground was that night, too, with all the dry leaves on the paths soaking wet.¹⁰

The girls were not quiet, however, and despite the hushing and commands of counselors, the first night was just too exciting and always a bit noisy. They were not tired yet from the long, full days of activities to come. One eleven-year-old camper recalled their giddiness but shared a memory that still troubled her.

My tent mates and I were up later than we were supposed to be up because we were reading comics. Dawn and another girl left the tent wearing their raincoats to visit the latrine. They came back laughing because they thought someone was playing tricks on them. Something had pulled on Dawn’s coat, but her buddy was on the trail ahead of her. We heard things outside our tent...we saw flashlight lights. Our counselor came to our tent to check in. She told us the noise was probably just the younger girls in the unit near ours. We went to sleep.¹¹

The Kiowa unit was always Carla Wilhite’s favorite and this year, at eighteen, she was thrilled to be assisting Susan Emery and Dee Elder, two college-aged counselors in her beloved unit. Carla had been a Girl Scout camper at Scott for the past seven years, and she knew the routines, the trails, and the camp protocol by heart. The humid, still air was stifling to the three of them and so they decided to break the tent flap rule that night and rolled up the sides in hopes of getting a little breeze. She remembers how happy they were that no one was homesick yet, and that made the giggling, the flashlights dancing everywhere, and the latrine doors slamming a little easier to tolerate. Counselors gave

¹⁰ Anna Lawless, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, March 10, 2010, transcript, 3.

¹¹ SarahJane Hopkins Moutett, questionnaire.

each other two hours off each night, one at a time, and when Carla's time came, she went to another unit to see her old friends.¹² On her way back to Kiowa, Carla saw a very small light moving in the woods around the unit and shined her flashlight at it. It stopped. She waited and it started again. She flashed her light and it went out. Later that night, sometime around midnight, she was woken by a strange sound. "It was kind of intermittent, not continuous, something like a cross between a frog and a bullhorn, it was low and kind of guttural, it wasn't language. It didn't really seem human but it didn't sound like any animal I'd heard either."¹³ She woke Dee to ask if she'd heard the noise. "No," Dee mumbled, but Carla decided to go out and see what it was anyway. She began walking in the direction of the sound, and as soon as her light shone that way, the sound stopped, "kind of like when you shine a light on an animal and it stops what it's doing."¹⁴ Although frightened, she decided to check the tents one more time. After that, she went back to sleep.

At four in the morning, Nancy McDonald and her family were somewhere along Interstate 44, on their way home to Tulsa, Oklahoma after picking up their eldest daughter from college in Chicago. "And it was raining. I never will forget this. I remember the feeling. I was the only one awake—the rest of the family was asleep. We were late getting back and had decided to drive through the night because Joe had to be at work...I thought about the camp, and I thought about the girls; I wondered if they had all

¹² Carla Wilhite, interview by Amy Sullivan, June 9, 2009, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 3.

¹³ Carla Wilhite, *Someone Cry For the Children* (1993; Tulsa, OK: Barrister Productions, L.C.), video.

¹⁴ Ibid.

arrived that afternoon.”¹⁵ Once home, the rest of the family went to bed and Nancy, tired but still alert from driving, dozed on the couch. “Why I had that eerie feeling about four in the morning, I don’t know...I just remember that feeling, not why or what, I just remember thinking about the camp and the girls; not the safety, but did everything go off as we had planned? Were all of the counselors there?”¹⁶

As President of the Board at the Magic Empire Council of Girl Scouts since 1976, Nancy McDonald was part of a revitalization of the camping program. One new initiative for the girls, and a financial boost to the council, was a “cookie credit” that gave campers ten cents towards camp fees for every box of cookies a girl sold. The results of this incentive impressed the staff and the board. Camp Scott began its forty-ninth season on June 12, 1977 with a record number of girls signed up to attend over the course of the summer.¹⁷ With a dedicated new camp director hired in January and a facilities fundraising campaign about to begin, the board and staff were energized about a reinvigoration of the camp experience that year.

Barbara Day had been hired in January and worked hard to acclimate herself to the land and the customs of Camp Scott. Her husband Richard had grown up on property adjacent to Camp Scott and he planned to spend much of the summer with her in the Director’s cabin. Day knew it was going to be a challenge to follow in the footsteps of the much-beloved Smitty, known outside camp as Helen Gray, but she was also

¹⁵ Nancy McDonald, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, September 14, 1996, Tulsa, Oklahoma, transcript, 2.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷ Magic Empire Council of Girl Scouts, internal records. Four hundred and fifty-six girls attended resident camp in 1976.

invigorated. She and Richard combed all 400 acres of the camp, acquainted themselves with the community of Locust Grove, and made plans for a great first summer. The fiftieth anniversary of Camp Scott was just around the corner. The board, the executive director, and camp leaders saw the summer camp season of 1977 as the beginning of a new commitment to outdoor programming in the Magic Empire Council. Barbara had the insight to make use of the Girl Scouts who had been at the camp for years by delegating jobs and asking for their input. The summer ahead seemed promising. The first session opened with 140 girls on site.¹⁸

The morning sunlight had not quite reached her tent when Carla's alarm roused her at six. She knew from previous years to get up early for a shower at the staff house before all the hot water was gone. She gathered her things with the help of her flashlight and headed out of Kiowa. The torrential rain from the night before had cooled the grounds, but everything was still sopping, the trees were dripping, and the sky was overcast. As she walked along the path towards the road where she would turn left to go to the staff house, she noticed a pile of brightly colored sleeping bags just off the road to her right. Carla thought the camp ranger must have been delivering unclaimed luggage during the evening and that these few bags had fallen off the truck. She knew they would be very wet from the previous night's storm, so she decided to pick them up and take them back to the unit kitchen to hang them up to dry.

As she began to approach the bags, she saw a child, contorted, legs splayed open, naked from the waist down, and sort of awkwardly propped against a tree. Carla knew immediately that the child was dead. Stunned, she remembers trying to understand what

¹⁸ *Tulsa Tribune*, 14 June 1977.

she was seeing while at the same time knowing she had to get help quickly. The first thing she thought was that this camper must have woken up in the night, run into a tree, and somehow died. How could that be? But somehow, that was the only scenario she could imagine in that moment.¹⁹

She raced back to the counselors' tent and immediately woke Dee Elder and Susan Emery, the other two counselors in Kiowa. Dee was the first to wake. She and Carla quickly checked all of the tents for a head count. They were trained to do headcounts several times a day, and each night. They counted the sleeping girls several times and still came up three short. When Dee discovered a puddle of blood in Tent Seven—and no girls where there had been three—Carla ran to get the director and camp nurse. While she was away, Susan Emery emerged from their tent and went towards the area Carla described, where Susan was now standing. To Susan's complete horror, she discovered that there were bodies inside the two sleeping bags near the first child she'd seen—the bags that Carla thought had been dropped by camp rangers. She began to scream. Dee quickly tried to calm and quiet her so as not to wake the sleeping girls.²⁰

Camp Director Barbara Day and her husband Richard woke abruptly to the noise of someone banging and yelling at the cabin door. They jumped out of bed and found a frantic and incoherent counselor standing at their door. Barbara was unable to make sense of what Carla was saying, and once she recognized the distress, she asked her to repeat it, and yet even after hearing it again, she repeated everything back to Carla

¹⁹ Carla Wilhite, interviewed by Amy C. Sullivan, June 6, 2009, transcript, 3.

²⁰ Susan Emery, Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Transcript, Vol. 3, 654-58.

because she simply could not process what was being said.²¹ Barbara and Richard threw on some clothes, and the three of them jumped in the station wagon to get to Kiowa. The camp nurse, MaryAnn Alaback, had also just arrived at the scene because Carla had alerted her on her way to get Barbara.

Upon seeing Denise's body, Barbara knew this was certainly a deceased child, but where were the other two? "It took me a little while to realize that the sleeping bags that were crumbled yards away from Denise, who was fully visible to us, that they contained the other girls. These were tiny children and they were folded into the sleeping bags. The bags were folded but they were crumpled inside the bags and Richard determined that by feeling."²² Nothing made sense—not the counselors' words, nor the child on the ground, nor the other two sleeping bags everyone present pointed towards.²³ Once Barbara began to realize the enormity of the situation—that inside the two sleeping bags were two more bodies, and that she had three deceased children on the grounds—she knew she had to make some decisions quickly. She was very alert to the possibility that "whatever" caused this awful tragedy might still be lurking on camp property. And yet the whole scenario defied anything she had been trained to deal with in emergencies.

Just the week prior, she had called all of the area fire, medical, and law enforcement agencies as part of the camp season protocol to let them know that the Girl Scout camp would begin on June 12th. She was trained for fire, snakebites, broken bones,

²¹ Barbara Day, interview by Michelle Hoffman, November 8, 2008, Transcript, 6.

²² Ibid., 6.

²³ In seven consecutive sentences describing how she found out about the girls, Barbara stated six times in slightly different ways how the whole situation "did not make any sense." Barbara Day, interview by Michelle Hoffman, November 8, 2008, transcript, 5-6.

water accidents, tornadoes, and any number of other typical outdoor emergencies, but certainly not this kind of calamity. Nonetheless, she went on “automatic pilot” and took on “some sort of military attitude” to proceed swiftly and carefully.²⁴

She ran to her cabin and called the police dispatch number to order ambulances. When she told them she needed three ambulances, the dispatchers questioned her request. “They were grilling me and they didn’t want to, but they couldn’t buy into what I was telling them because they couldn’t process it either. And so I just told them they had to do it. I didn’t care where the ambulances came from. I didn’t care! [I] told them what I had. Told them it was the least of what I had. It could be more.”²⁵ At this point, Barbara was handling the crime scene and also trying to alert her counselors about what had happened. She knew that both demanded her immediate attention and yet could only deal with one at a time. She had to have the help of the Tulsa Girl Scout council staff but she also had to have specific details for them in order to pass along any responsibilities. “We spent a little bit of the morning hours trying to be absolutely certain which girls were the victims. We wanted to be very certain about identifying them before the Council called the parents. So, the Council representatives handled the adult aspect and the families and I focused on the [camp] staff and the children.”²⁶

The three slain girls were identified as Lori Lee Farmer, age 8, Michele Heather Gusé, age 9, and Doris Denise Milner, age 10. Lori was the oldest of four children, the daughter of an emergency room physician in Tulsa and a stay-at-home mom. She was very bright, and had been advanced a year in school, making her the youngest in her

²⁴ Day, 6-7.

²⁵ Day, 7.

²⁶ Barbara Day, 10.

grade and also one of the youngest at camp. She would have turned nine the following Saturday, and her family had planned to come to Camp Scott to celebrate with her. Michele had been in Girl Scouts since 1974 and had been at Scott the summer before. Her father was a corporate credit manager and her mother was a high school teacher. She had an older brother and lived with her family in Broken Arrow. She played soccer and was described by her mother as “a little shy, just enough to make her lovable.”²⁷ Denise was excited about camp, but also very anxious when the day arrived. She lived in Tulsa with her mother and younger sister. She was a straight-A student who had been accepted at a selective magnet school for the upcoming school year. Her father was a Tulsa police officer.²⁸

Once the bodies were identified and the police and other authorities were onsite, Barbara left her husband Richard and the groundskeeper Ben Woodward to assist the investigators while she directed her attention to the campers and staff. She immediately decided to assemble everyone at Great Hall, the only enclosed space large enough for the entire camp, so she could do a complete head count and assess any danger or related issues in the other tent units, which were spread out over a few acres or more. She devised a plan for a head count and what would follow as she drove her car to the units to wake the other counselors. Anna Lawless, the CIT Director, then in her twenties, was shocked to be woken by the sound of a car near her tent. Not only was a car in her unit, but in her haste, Barbara had hung the back axle of the camp station wagon on a tree stump. She told Anna what little they knew of the murdered girls and said she wanted the

²⁷ *Tulsa Tribune*, 14 June 1977.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

counselors to keep the news of the deaths from the campers.²⁹ She left her car where it was stuck on the stump and ran to the other units to alert the rest of the counselors. By the time the whole staff had been alerted to the emergency, every part of the camp was swarming with activity, and most of it involved the remaining girls. At the front of Barbara's mind was how to best keep the tragedy from the campers.

The girls in the Kiowa unit were the first to be woken and told to dress for breakfast. Despite her shock, or perhaps because of it, Carla took on the challenge of getting them out of the area without seeing anything of the crime scene. Carla had gathered a few other CITs and counselors to help get the girls ready, out of their unit, and off to breakfast as quickly as possible. The route they took to the Great Hall was circuitous and long, avoiding all contact with officials. She remembered that she joked the whole time with the girls and explained that their long route to breakfast was going to be a very special "latrine tour" since they had kept her up too late the previous night.³⁰

As the units of sleepy Girl Scouts slowly made their way to Great Hall and waited for breakfast, they sat on the Singing Porch and were led in song by Anna Lawless and other staff. Not all of the counselors knew exactly what had happened, but they knew something was amiss because the typical routine had been altered and remained as yet unexplained. While the girls were singing, "one by one, we pulled [the counselors] aside to tell them what little we knew so far and gave them a chance to pull themselves together and put on their 'game face.'"³¹ Even under such stress, they drew on Camp

²⁹ Anna Lawless, questionnaire.

³⁰ Carla Wilhite, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, 6 June 2009, transcript, 4.

³¹ Anna Lawless, questionnaire.

Scott traditions of singing, games, and hiking to maintain a peaceful morning and to plan how they would keep the news from the Scouts.

As the youngest camp staffer, Michelle Hoffman fell somewhere in between being privy to the crisis and protected from it. That morning, while she knew something was amiss, she did just as she was told until she could no longer bear not asking. Michelle was in the Seminole unit, and she had also woken early to take a shower. On her way, she decided to stop in to see some older counselor friends in the Kiowa unit when she noticed the yellow camp station wagon pulling out of the Kiowa and Quapaw unit, heading towards her. The camp director and her husband were driving—a very disorienting sight to see at the units. They stopped the car next to Michelle, and just as Michelle was about to ask her why she was driving around camp, Barbara asked her where she was going. Michelle answered, “Kiowa.”

She demanded I head for the Great Hall and stay there. I knew she was upset about something because her face was pale and she spoke to me in a tone I had not heard her use before. Being the devoted Scout, I headed for the Great Hall. I remember walking into the kitchen and Marty, the camp cook (also the camp ranger’s wife) was preparing breakfast and was crying, sobbing, really. I asked her what was wrong. She said that I would find out later.³²

A short time later, when she heard the camp bell, Michelle looked and saw Barbara ringing it—the third “break in the routine” that had happened—it was too early for breakfast! She asked Barbara what had happened and her answer again was that she couldn’t talk about it, but would Michelle go to the camp office and take phone messages for her? And please tell the callers that the camp director would get back to them later in the day. She did as she was asked.

³² Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire.

The phone was ringing before she got inside the office; she fielded calls from news agencies all over the country, with one surprising call from Australia. She did as instructed and made the calls short. Incredibly, she did not find out from any of those calls what had happened, either.³³ While she was sitting in the office, she noticed all the campers tromping towards Great Hall. After the girls were inside, she observed three ambulances circle around the camp office area on their way to exit the property. Michelle thought that someone must have been injured or that the ambulances had made a wrong turn and ended up on Cookie Trail.

Soon thereafter, Barbara came back and told Michelle she could now go to breakfast. “I went to the front porch of the Great Hall and found Dee Elder. I walked up to her and asked, “What’s going on?” She had tears in her eyes and her face was blank. She said...and I’ll never forget this moment...‘Three of my girls are dead.’”³⁴ That was all Dee said. Michelle remembers searching Dee’s face unsuccessfully for more information. At that moment she imagined they must have died from snakebites, but couldn’t fathom what the three girls must have done to have all been bitten, and she wondered to herself how they could have died so quickly from snakebites. Dee asked Michelle to be the Pourer at her table. She agreed and then kept the table entertained throughout the meal while Dee “seemed to be operating without emotion, [she was] almost robotic.”³⁵

³³ Michelle Hoffman, email correspondence with author, June 5, 2012.

³⁴ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 2.

³⁵ Ibid.

Once everyone had gathered in Great Hall, Day had devised a plan to get all of the girls, except the Kiowa unit, out of the immediate area—now a crime scene—until the busses arrived to bring them back to Tulsa. They would all go on a spontaneous hike to Wildcat’s swimming hole with sack lunches until the busses arrived. Despite the chaos and the physical challenge of keeping authorities out of sight, Barbara remained adamant that she did not want the children to know, and her entire staff concurred; she wanted the girls to learn about it only after they were home with their parents. As she remembered it, the counselors “fell right in line, every single one of them. It was an amazing experience because I was so new, first day tested...They were all very emotional having spent many summers there...but they did absolutely everything they were asked, and it was very synchronous—great harmony even in the middle of all the upset. It was astounding to me.”³⁶ Carla had a different take on the situation. “In unprecedented ways, I think everyone...was checking in, planning, improvising, checking in, planning, improvising.” She remembered that “on the ground” it really felt like confusion. However, “in the abstract, it looked like a choreography.” She acknowledged that the morning was overwhelming and confusing morning for everyone, but they rallied around the main goal of getting the girls removed from the camp with “as little alarm as possible.”³⁷ At that, it appears they succeeded.

Staff at the Tulsa Girl Scout Council initially had a hard time deciding what to do with the girls. But on the ground at camp, Barbara Day could see firsthand the potential for emotional pandemonium if the girls found out while still on site, and she convinced

³⁶ Barbara Day, interview by Michelle Hoffman, November 8, 2008, transcript, 8.

³⁷ Carla Wilhite, email correspondence with author, June 22, 2012.

the council to get the chartered busses back to camp as soon as possible. She was also told that some Tulsa staff and volunteers were on their way to Locust Grove. The busses, however, would not arrive until sometime after noon. The counselors prepared the gear, distributed sack lunches, and marched the whole camp down the path to Wildcat's swimming hole.

Once the girls were on their way to the swimming hole, Barbara returned her attention to her remaining staff and to assisting law enforcement with their needs. She remembers that she spent the day answering questions, one right after the other. "There were a million authority figures there with guns on their hips and a variety of uniforms and an airplane cruising overhead circling like a buzzard. And, it was overwhelming the amount of energy... We were always directing them... 'here is this and that' and there were a million questions."³⁸ Because area radio stations had picked the story up from the police blotter early that morning, some anxious parents drove directly to the camp. "Any parents who arrived at the front gate were brought to the staff house, reassured that their daughter was unharmed, and a messenger was sent on foot to bring the daughter back [from the swimming hole]."³⁹ Once the counselors had word that the busses had arrived, they began to gather the girls to head back and pack their gear for the ride home. Anna Lawless remembers their dismay and disappointment, but in order to keep the plan moving along, "we allowed the rumors to run rampant--holes in the canoes, bad water

³⁸ Barbara Day, interview, 10.

³⁹ Anna Lawless, questionnaire.

supply, food problems.”⁴⁰ Whatever rumor worked for a particular group of girls was considered a success under the circumstances.

Soon the camp property was overrun with officials and vehicles; even an airplane flew back and forth over their heads.⁴¹ Despite some inevitable noise and activity related to the investigation, Day insisted that the policemen stay as much out of sight of campers as possible, keep their guns hidden, and use no sirens or flashing lights. They complied with her request as best they could manage. Counselors would move their bodies together if an official appeared, blocking the man or men from the sight of the girls in their charge, offering distractions or directions towards the next activity or location. After breakfast, Michelle was asked to accompany the Kiowa unit girls to the craft hut for the morning. She did not know this at the time, but the investigators planned to use the craft hut to gingerly interview each girl in Kiowa to see if she remembered anything from the night before, while the girls ostensibly passed time making lanyards or God’s Eyes.

Barbara did not ever go back to the crime scene. She used her cabin as a central place to direct staff in the closing up of the camp, and made necessary calls and decisions there. She spoke many times that day to the staff in Tulsa, who were dealing with the crisis under a very different set of circumstances; parents, media, volunteers, and board members had converged on the single-story ranch style headquarters at 51st and Lewis.

Although the news of the murders had been aired very early that morning on Tulsa area radio stations, it was the phone that interrupted Nancy’s dozing around six-

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Barbara Day, 10.

thirty.⁴² Surprised and relieved to find Nancy at home, Bonnie Brewster, Executive Director of the Magic Empire Council, told her that a tragedy had occurred at camp. Bonnie told Nancy that she was on her way to the camp with her husband, and that the vice president of the board, Jo Eaton, had already left for Locust Grove because they all thought Nancy was still out of town. She asked Nancy to go to the council office as soon as possible to begin the process of contacting parents and preparing for the onslaught of activity that could not even be fathomed at that moment. Anxious parents, detail-hungry reporters, police officers and television crews filled the council office's lobby, grounds, and porch to capacity. To lessen the confusion and provide continuity, the staff decided early on that the only person who could talk to reporters was the public relations director, Ginny Young, who was also temporarily named Assistant Director due to the enormity of the crisis.

The media became a huge source of strain and would remain such for weeks. One especially vivid incident stood out in Ginny's memory. Late in the afternoon, a reporter tried to interview an eight-year-old camper who was sitting in the hallway of the Girl Scout office waiting for her parents to arrive. He was "sticking the microphone, this big, old microphone in this little girl's face...and I just went up to him...I hope I was somewhat tactful...and suggested that this was not appropriate, that he needed to leave this little girl alone...[he said] 'Well, I have a right to talk to her' and so on, and I said, 'No, you don't *need* to be talking to this little girl.'"⁴³ The reporter retreated. She

⁴² Former Girl Scout staff & volunteers, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, September 14, 1996, transcript, 41.

⁴³ Ginny Young, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, January 25, 1997, transcript, 2-3.

recalled the entire experience as “a trial by fire initiation into dealing with local and national media in a crisis situation.”⁴⁴

The fact that the girls were not told what had happened spread among the crowd waiting for the busses to arrive. The *Tulsa Tribune* referred to them as “bewildered campers” as they disembarked, and for the girls interviewed later, the scene was one of total confusion.⁴⁵ Why would all these reporters and such a huge crowd be gathered when they had only left yesterday, with parents and tag-along siblings to see them off? One eleven-year-old camper, SarahJane, remembers being told to be silent upon hearing the news.

My parents whisked me off the bus, hugged me so hard that it hurt, and took me to the car...[There they] told me what had happened and told me to keep it to myself. My mom, a troop leader, had to go see that the rest of her girls got off the bus and [were] with their parents. I went with her and did not say anything. I think I stayed silent the whole time we waited. Later after we got home, we got a phone call that Lori, the youngest girl in our troop, was dead. I don't know who gave Mom the news.⁴⁶

With the campers now back in Tulsa, the real work of the investigation and the closing of the camp began in earnest. The Girl Scouts' property was quickly overrun with officials. The Mayes County sheriff, the Locust Grove police, Oklahoma State Patrol, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, the District Attorney, the coroner, the EMT and photographers. The camp staff, counselors, and other Girl Scout-related people who remained on site began the work of closing up the entire camp less than a week after

⁴⁴ Ginny Young, questionnaire, 2.

⁴⁵ *Tulsa Tribune*, 14 June 1977, “bewildered campers were returned to their parents in Tulsa, unaware of why the camp was closed less than 24 hours after the youngsters arrived.”

⁴⁶ SarahJane Hopkins Moutett, questionnaire.

getting it ready for the first of many summer sessions. Michelle Hoffman stayed with the counselors, and was likely the youngest person there after the busses left. She remembers walking back to the staff house with a friend, Brenda Knox, accompanied by the Mayes County District Attorney, Sid Wise, who was a family friend of Brenda's parents.

Michelle heard him use the word "premeditated" when referring to the murders. She had never heard the word. "I stopped in my tracks and asked Brenda, 'what's premeditated mean?' She explained and I remember feeling nauseous and terrified."⁴⁷ This was the moment when Michelle fully understood that someone deliberately killed the three girls.

With a combination of fear and outrage, they all set to work closing up every unit, removing all of the canvas covers from the sixty-odd platform tents, taking down the temporary unit kitchens, closing the waterfront, the pool, the kitchen, the dining hall. Carla and a few others drove to the Arapaho unit in a counselor's VW Bug to close it up. They all had their Girl Scout issue pocketknives open. "We knew there was a killer loose...by this time we knew [the girls had been murdered] and here we are, we're supposed to be grown-ups, and we are back in this unit and we think this little Girl Scout pocket knife that we have is going to be enough protection from evil. But we did our job, and then we left."⁴⁸ Waterfront Director Mary Spangler was the last of the camp staff besides Barbara Day to leave the camp that evening. She was completely unfazed by fear of the killer being nearby. "I really did not want to go, I guess I knew that I would not be back there again... I would have stayed that night at Camp Scott."⁴⁹ Anna Lawless had

⁴⁷ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 2.

⁴⁸ Carla Wilhite, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, June 6, 2009, transcript, 4.

⁴⁹ Mary Turner, questionnaire.

yet another perspective. She felt emboldened by the staff's desire to keep the girls from seeing law enforcement, and was deeply angered by what had been done to these girls and to the property itself.

First of all, middle-aged men with guns do not belong in our place. And here they are, just cluttering up our—*our*—countryside, and every once in a while, with hands just going to their guns, just as a feeling of security. Because I know they were scared. Mayes County doesn't have stuff like this happen. I felt bad for them. But like I said, we were young and naïve enough, and not of the world [enough] to know the evil in the world. But we were mad enough; we wanted to find him...any one or two of us, we can take him down. That's how we felt that day. That's how I felt as we were blocking roads and doing anything else—were we scared? Pfft. Not at all. Bring him on. Bring him on. Look what he did!⁵⁰

At the end of the day, with the camp now closed—except for law enforcement officials who were setting up their own headquarters on site—Barbara and Richard Day decided that the drive back to Tulsa would be too hard, especially since they would have to return the following morning. They called some friends in a nearby town and spent the night in what Barbara described as a beautifully renovated barn-turned-home in Salina. After spending a day in constant motion, answering “a million questions,” covering the same ground at the camp repeatedly, she found herself in a beautiful bedroom. It was the first time all day she had been quiet. “I had time then to be frightened and I was...My heart beat so fast that I didn't think I would be able to go to sleep...My chest just pounded for hours... I was scared to death. Any noise—there were beautiful horses right

⁵⁰ Anna Lawless, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, March 10, 2010, transcript, 5.

outside our window—any noise made me fear for my own life and I kept thinking about those children and why was I so afraid? I was miles away.”⁵¹

The next morning, the Days returned to Camp Scott to continue helping the investigators and to complete the process of closing the camp buildings. They were formally questioned that day and fingerprinted. On the evening of June 14th, they returned to their home in Tulsa. Barbara continued to have nighttime anxiety, exacerbated by the fact that her husband worked a night shift as a surgical technician at Osteopathic Hospital. She was frightened to be alone in her house. “I questioned myself about where the fear was coming from and I got in touch with the fact that not only was it horrifying what we had experienced and sorrowful and all those tragic words, but it left me with a hideous sense of vulnerability.” She remembered that the week prior to the first session of camp, she slept alone in her cabin with the doors unlocked—she had not even latched the screen door. “The worst thing I had experienced [at camp] was a snake on my windowsill and I thought it could have been me, and those kinds of thoughts came automatically. I wasn’t expecting the fear to enter my life...And then I berated myself for feeling frightened. I hadn’t suffered anything.”⁵²

The autopsy reports were released to the press in early July. “All three girls were struck with a blunt instrument in the head. Two of the girls died from the blows, the third was strangled.” The autopsies, performed by Medical Examiner Neil A. Hoffman and released by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, also revealed that “one girl was hit once, another six times, and the third was struck three times. Two of the girls were

⁵¹ Barbara Day, transcript, 10-11.

⁵² Ibid., 12.

bound. One was tied with a thin rope. The other was tied with rope and tape. All three girls had been molested.” Semen was discovered in two of the girls’ bodies.⁵³

The shock of the tragedy was just beginning to sink in for the young women present that day. Michelle Hoffman remembered that it took her over three weeks to realize that Denise, the girl she’d comforted on the bus to camp that afternoon, was one of the murder victims.”⁵⁴ Camper SarahJane Hopkins said that Lori’s funeral was the first she’d ever attended. She would attend two more that week, in her full Girl Scout uniform. She still wonders if the murderer was after her and her tent mates because of the yank on her buddy’s jacket on the way back from the latrine. Counselor Carla Wilhite had her first of “decades of nightmares” when she finally slept that night. Counselor Susan Emery remembers a Valium-induced week of sleeping in her parents’ bed. She and her boyfriend were so hounded by police and the press that she took a trip to visit relatives in Louisiana.

On June 21, 1977, elementary teacher and former Camp Scott alumna, Julia Ratliff, wrote an opinion piece for the *Tulsa World* that described beloved Girl Scout camp rituals and concluded with a prescient foreshadowing of what would become of camp for Tulsa Girl Scouts. She wrote it in one sitting when she learned of the murders.

How hideous when I saw the paper on Monday. Three bright and beautiful children are gone. Some acts are so glaringly wrong, the reality will not become real to our understanding. Such sadness does not belong with campfires, cookie trails, and Scout’s Own, with wishing candles and singing porches. My heart breaks for the innocence which has probably left forever. Camp will become a prison as well as a playground. Armed guards and dogs to keep out the vipers of Childhood, the only Eden left.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Tulsa Tribune*, 7 July 1977.

⁵⁴ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 3.

⁵⁵ *Tulsa World*, 21 June 1977.

CHAPTER III

IMPRECATOR: GENE LEROY HART

I have no desire to be a hero. I can't help the way people look on me, but that's not my desire. Mainly, I just want to be left alone.¹

- Gene Leroy Hart, June 1, 1979

Fugitive

Within forty-eight hours of the triple murder at Camp Scott, the name Gene Leroy Hart appeared in Tulsa area newspapers. At first, investigators announced that they would like to locate him for questioning. Not yet “considered a suspect,” Hart was well known for several crimes. More than four years earlier, he and another inmate escaped the Mayes County Jail; they were caught after a week and returned to the penitentiary. On September 16, 1973, both men were transferred again to the Mayes County Jail for a post-conviction relief hearing, and incredibly, they escaped a second time. Hart's accomplice Larry Dry was captured, but Hart had remained at large ever since. A convicted rapist and burglar, he was a bona fide person of interest, and predictably, his whereabouts after nearly four years on the loose in the locale of the murders quickly became a primary focus of the Girl Scout murder investigation. According to District Attorney Sid Wise, Hart was “the only guy to escape [Sheriff] Pete Weaver's jail and get completely away.”²

¹ Gene Leroy Hart, *Cherokee Advocate*, “The Case of the Vanishing Fingerprints,” June 1979, 12.

² *Tulsa Tribune*, 15 June 1977.

Gene Leroy Hart, the oldest of seven boys, was born on November 27, 1943 to Ella Mae Sullatuskee Buckskin at the Claremore Indian Hospital in Claremore, Oklahoma.³ Raised in Locust Grove with his mother, stepfather, and younger stepbrothers, Gene never met his father, Walter Hart. Hart's mother and father did not marry, and his biological father never acknowledged him as his son. Gene did have a relationship with his stepfather, a heavy drinker, who he protected as best he could. Gene was known to go regularly into bars to make sure his stepfather didn't get into fights. After a brief, failed teenaged marriage, which included the birth of his only son, Hart soon began to get in trouble with local law enforcement. Officer Greathouse, a retired Locust Grove police officer, remembered one occasion where they looked in fifteen or twenty places for Gene and never did locate him. "He got clean away from us."⁴ This would be a longstanding skill of Hart's for the next twenty years.

By the age of twenty-nine, Hart had been sentenced to more than 300 years in prison. In 1966, he was convicted of kidnapping and raping two women—both pregnant—aged 18 and 19. He stalked them outside a Tulsa nightclub, forced them into the trunk of his car, and drove to an isolated area where he blindfolded, bound, gagged and raped them. He left them both in the woods, and tied each in such a way that if she struggled with the tape binding her wrists, she would asphyxiate herself with the cord connected to it around her neck. After a very intense time trying to release her hands from the binding, she finally succeeded. In a documentary interview, she credited their survival to God. "[I] popped the tape off and that's the only thing that saved me. God

³ *Tulsa Tribune*, 30 June 1977.

⁴ *Tulsa World*, 25 June 1977.

helped me. He broke the tape for me. I knew I was going to make it.”⁵ She freed her friend and the two of them found their way to a farmhouse. One of the women remembered the license plate number. When he was apprehended early the next day, Hart admitted the attack to officers and said he’d thrown their belongings off a nearby Grand River bridge. After pleading guilty, he was sentenced on October 14, 1966 to three ten-year terms at the Granite State Reformatory for two counts of rape and kidnapping. After the rape charge, his ex-wife changed the last name of their only son and cut off all contact with Hart.⁶ Twenty-eight months into his sentence, he was paroled in a unanimous decision of the Pardon and Parole Board and returned to the Tulsa area in March 1969.⁷

In early June of the same year, he was arrested on four counts of burglary over a four-day period, one of which included breaking into the apartment of a Tulsa police officer, Heather Campbell. All of the burglaries occurred while the residents of the home were sleeping. Officer Campbell just happened to have barely fallen asleep after her shift ended at two in the morning when she heard someone rattling the lock on her door. After yelling at him to leave, she called the police, who happened to have an officer on duty nearby. Within a few minutes, she and that officer cornered Hart in the hallway of her apartment complex; the evidence of the other three break-ins was found in the trunk of

⁵ *Someone Cry For the Children* (1993; Tulsa, OK: Barrister Productions, L.C.), video,00:34:00.

⁶ Wilkerson, Michael and Dick, *Someone Cry For the Children* (New York: Dial Press, 1981), 111.

⁷ *Tulsa Tribune*, 9 July 1977.

his car shortly thereafter.⁸ Hart was sentenced to 40-100 years on each count and was sent to McAlester Penitentiary.

On April 30, 1973 while back in Mayes County Jail for a hearing, he and another inmate, Larry Dry, sawed their way out of a cell and escaped. His mother had apparently hidden a saw in a Bible she brought him during a jail visit. He was captured on May 25, 1973 and charged with another Second Degree Burglary in Strang, Oklahoma. Before the Camp Scott murders, Sheriff Pete Weaver and his deputies may indeed have pursued him, but not consistently or vigorously. Hart escaped a second time from Mayes County jail on September 16, 1973 and remained at large until April 9, 1978. District Attorney Sid Wise officially named Hart as a suspect within ten days of the murders, and an infamous manhunt began in earnest on June 24, 1977.⁹

How did the story of the murders of three girls and the manhunt for a Cherokee unfold? Who did the telling, the reporting, and the reading? The complexity of the events was only made more complex by the historical moment in which it transpired. Identity politics of the 1970s intersected with fears that the world was going mad; increased violent crimes against children and women collided with the burgeoning women's movement; small town safety and the comfort of trusting neighbors dissolved with the presence of a killer on the loose, with dozens of law enforcement agents and scores of reporters. Was Gene Hart a victim or a hero or a child-murderer? How would it be remembered? In the end, who suffered the most for a good story?

⁸ *Tulsa World*, 25 June 1977; Wilkerson, *Someone Cry for the Children*, 60.

⁹ Wilkerson, 65-66.

Four different law enforcement entities—the Sheriff of Mayes County, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI), the FBI, and the Oklahoma Highway Patrol—were involved from the very beginning. Dozens of OSBI agents descended on the camp the day of the murders and set up a temporary headquarters in camp buildings. The District Attorney of Mayes County, Sid Wise, declared himself the spokesperson and began to hold news conferences at the gate of Camp Scott, sometimes up to three times a day. For the first two weeks or so, every aspect of the investigation—verified or not—made its way to the public through print and broadcast media, and much of it turned out to be erroneous and downright detrimental to solving the case. Reporters were so hungry for story leads and information that within 48 hours of the crime, they were interviewing anyone who would talk to them.¹⁰ This also appeared to be the case with the different investigative units where “one agency would say that a person was not a suspect and another agency would say the person was. One agency might be checking out the suspect’s alibi and the other agency might not know the results until that night.” As one OSBI agent recalled, “June 16th had all the makings of a circus, complete with dogs, men with funny hats, and cameras.”¹¹

The frenzy of reporters and investigators who descended on the Girl Scout camp property in the hours and days following the murders overwhelmed everyone involved, including the residents of Locust Grove. By Wednesday of that week, so many facts conflicted with others that, in the eyes of the reporters, they were being given the runaround. Much of their frustration with District Attorney Sid Wise had to do with the fact that he had named a local reporter, the *Pryor Daily Times*’ Ron Grimsley, as the

¹⁰ Wilkerson, *Someone Cry for the Children*, 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

main contact for the press. Playing local favorites like this did not go over well with reporters, especially when Grimsley's paper printed information about the case that other reporters never had access to. And on the other side, the numerous leaks about crime scene evidence were especially troubling to law enforcement; many of them believed that shoddy journalism could truly thwart the criminal investigation and its outcome.¹²

The timing of the first week's press chaos and leaks also coincided with the surfacing of Gene Leroy Hart's name, and the combination of these two things immediately cast a shadow on the motivation of investigators. News organizations seemed to have interviewed every Locust Grove resident, and most everyone quoted in the papers came to Hart's defense. They remembered him fondly as an average student and a memorable football star. A former classmate described teenaged Gene as "stout as a horse." During football games, "it would take five guys to bring him down when he got through the line." A woman who dated him in high school said he was always a gentleman. Others described him as being shy, quiet, and mannerly.¹³ The little town was overwhelmed by the mere fact of the murders, crowded by the surge in temporary residents, and both afraid of and insulted by the accusations that they were harboring a child-rapist/murderer.

Physical evidence found in and around Camp Scott included tape, rope, and a flashlight with a piece of newspaper from April 17, 1977, crumpled inside it to make better contact for the battery. Investigators found several pairs of women's prescription glasses in various locations around the encampments, and the owners' of these turned out

¹² Ibid., 82-83.

¹³ *Tulsa World*, 25 June 1977.

to be counselors and campers. A nearby farmer reported that his home had been broken into and when the items missing matched those found at camp, he was immediately considered a suspect. Jack Schroff agreed to a lie detector test and passed, but afterwards received so many threatening phone calls, he was admitted to a hospital for severe chest pains.¹⁴ Investigators looked for missing camp hatchets, because it appeared that one victim may have been bludgeoned with the thick end of one. A weapon like this was never found.

On June 20th, the District Attorney Wise announced to the reporters still loitering around the Camp Scott entrance gate that he had ordered a news blackout because some of their “erroneous reports have hampered our investigation.” He specifically cited a news story that suggested conflict and dissension among various investigative units at the camp and wanted to clarify that this was simply untrue. Wise also stated that they would not be issuing any further press releases unless the investigative staffs all agreed it would be somehow useful to solving the case. This new policy also extended to personal interviews with any member of the units involved.¹⁵

This so-called news blackout didn’t last long.

The very next day, Wise announced that investigators hoped to “muster 400 citizen searchers for evidence left behind by the killer.” Fifty National Guardsmen along with “adult male” volunteers would be searching the hilly terrain surrounding Camp Scott

¹⁴ *Tulsa Tribune*, 16 June 1977; *Tulsa World*, 20 June 1977.

¹⁵ *Pryor Daily Times*, 20 June 1977.

looking for the bloody clothes the killer must have discarded, possible weapons, and any other clues they could find.¹⁶

Two days later, in a cave not far from camp, OSBI agents found two photographs, a pair of women's underwear, and the other pieces of the newspaper from April 17th that had been found in the flashlight. The photographs were published widely in Oklahoma papers and within a day, two women came forward to say they were the subjects in the 1968 pictures. They were taken at a wedding in the Granite-Mangum area of Oklahoma.¹⁷ Agents traced the photos to Lewis Lindsay, a photographer who had used the assistance of Granite Reformatory inmates for darkroom processing work during 1967-69. Prison records confirmed that Gene Leroy Hart worked in the prison darkroom at that time.¹⁸ Referring to the photographs, the OSBI Director Jeff Laird was quoted as having said, "We want to know how the pictures taken at a wedding far away from Locust Grove came to where we found them, how this weirdo, psychotic, if it was, had these pictures out there."¹⁹ The murders clearly hit a nerve with investigators, even at the highest levels, and their standards of professionalism sometimes appeared insignificant compared to their anger and the frustration this crime unleashed. The "weirdo, psychotic" he referred to was none other than Gene Leroy Hart. Two days later the state issued an official warrant for his arrest.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Tulsa World*, "Location of Photos Puzzles 2 Subjects," 23 June 1977.

¹⁸ *Stillwater Newspress*, "Warrant In Scout Murders Readied," 23 June 1977.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The very same day, a Locust Grove area rancher Victor Auxier was checking fence lines on his property when he noticed a man sitting in a cave, not very far from where he was walking. He pretended not to see him, walked back home, and called the authorities. Dog handlers and deputies arrived shortly and began tracking the man. “The hounds picked up a scent and chased the man about a mile atop a thickly wooded ridge on Auxier’s property. ‘We thought we had him trapped when the dogs stopped at a tree, but he wasn’t there, [Sheriff] Weaver said. ‘He must have jumped from tree to tree like a damn coon because the dogs never picked up the scent again.’”²⁰

Hunted

This sighting and the now-identified photos galvanized official reasoning in favor of an all-out manhunt for a killer who authorities believed remained in the area. The ensuing days embodied two conflicting outcomes in the community. The presence of armed white men hunting an Indian unleashed historical memories in the Cherokee community, and also tapped into the latent, raging emotions of white men with guns who felt they were protecting their wives and children from a rapist/murderer still in their midst. On the day the candid wedding photos were released by the Crime Bureau, a revised announcement was made, now inviting able-bodied men to take part in a sweeping search for the suspected killer. “No guns, weapons or dogs will be allowed.” Women were excluded from volunteering; the reason given was that no portable toilets were being provided.²¹

²⁰ *Tulsa Tribune*, “Only 10 feet away!,” 24 June 1977.

²¹ *Tulsa World*, “Girls’ Murder Probe Takes Unusual Twists,” 22 June 1977.

Despite the fact that guns were barred from the searchers, officers confiscated more than fifty firearms on the two days the search took place. The decision to exclude property owners created resentment and animosity towards the law and hardened feelings among many local citizens that they were not good enough or trusted enough to take part in the search. One resident complained, “Any local man, any one of us would have been willing to take two or three weeks off and go up there and scout those caves. But they didn’t ask us. They wouldn’t let property owners out there. My cousin, they run him off his own property, told him they didn’t want him around the scene there.”²²

Within four days, the official plan changed from being a search for evidence to a search for a killer. Gene Leroy Hart was named in a warrant and would remain the sole suspect in the case. On Thursday, June 24, “A 650-man posse using forty trained tracking dogs tramped through the brushy hill country...During the night many of the volunteers formed a human cordon around five-square-miles of the rough terrain, using the headlights of their cars to illuminate the perimeter.”²³ The two-day search resulted in no new sightings and “was not as productive” as officials hoped it would be. Although the large search was called off, “three heavily armed tactical units of the Highway Patrol” remained in the area looking for evidence.²⁴ One local man believed that if Hart was in the area, “he’d be watching them,” and he would never be caught. A professional dog trainer who had come in from Pennsylvania said that 20 tracking dogs had picked up a scent but to no avail. “Whoever this man is, he knows dogs. He has backtracked on

²² *Tulsa Tribune*, 5 August 1977.

²³ *Claremore Daily Progress*, 24 June 1977.

²⁴ *Tulsa World*, 26 June 1977.

several occasions and has zigzagged us all over the place.”²⁵ Hart was believed to be in the area because of the logical assumption he’d remain in his “home territory where his presence could be easily concealed and sustained.” Sheriff Weaver, in his usual unadorned parlance, weighed in more explicitly: “It’s difficult to tie logic to a maniac.”²⁶ In the press, officials calling Hart names such as this did little for the facts of the case and a lot towards casting him as a victim of a racist, white legal system.

Is it any surprise then that Locust Grove residents remained particularly defensive of Hart and suspicious of how law enforcement handled this case? Although some of the officials lived in and called the area home, they were nonetheless considered outsiders by the mere fact of being affiliated with the law. The insider/outsider dichotomy of this case played out for many months to come. Among local Cherokee, the manhunt environment created fear and anxiety about their own safety in the community. The *Tulsa Tribune* interviewed Willard Stone, an Indian artist from Locust Grove along with his son Jason, a high school classmate of Hart’s, in early August. In a piece entitled “There Are Phantoms in the Woods,” the father and son explained that locals don’t usually fear the woods: “fear of the woods is for some of the ‘slaphappy fools’ who came into the woods to hunt the killer. His concern is for Gene Leroy Hart, a home-town boy who has been out there without bothering anybody since he broke out of jail about three years ago and has been allowed free run of the town and the area without bothering anybody until all the mess came up.”²⁷ Stone wouldn’t go into the woods because of all the FBI agents in

²⁵ *Tulsa World*, 25 June 1977.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *Tulsa Tribune*, “There are phantoms in the woods,” 5 August 1977.

there with guns—he was afraid of being shot. His son Jason remarked, “I haven’t talked to anyone who doesn’t think he’s being set up. From what I hear, they are looking for a scapegoat... As far as being guilty, I don’t know, but he’s getting a raw deal with everybody assuming he’s guilty.”²⁸ Hart’s cousin Ruby Leach told a reporter, “I think they are after him because he’s an Indian.”²⁹ Many Locust Grove residents saw a pattern: law enforcement always found a way “to blame Gene.” One of Hart’s stepbrothers said, “Every time something goes wrong, the law always goes to him—no matter what.” A woman at the B&B drive-in shook her head at the all-out manhunt. “When the killings first happened, a lot of people said that poor ole Gene will get it...that they’ll blame Gene. I don’t believe he did it, and most of the people who come in here don’t believe it either. They just want to get somebody in jail, I seen it happen before, I seen it happen to Gene.”³⁰ The community’s swift stubborn defense of Hart further emboldened the D.A., who was outraged by reports that “many area residents believe Hart is innocent.” In a loud, emotional tone, Wise continued: “For those do-gooders who want to make a Sunday school teacher out of Mr. Hart, let them ask the victims of the rapes he pleaded guilty to in 1966 when he forced two pregnant women into the trunk of a car and violated them. That man stood before God and his judge and said, ‘I am guilty because I did commit those acts.’” He reiterated that “the man we are looking for...is no exemplary citizen, and should not be considered a high school football star.”³¹

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Stillwater News-Press*, 26 June 1977.

³⁰ *Tulsa World*, 25 June 1977.

³¹ *Tulsa World*, 26 June 1977.

In stark contrast to the District Attorney's gruff manner, Richard Gusé, father of slain Girl Scout Michelle Gusé, took an understated yet involved manner, and participated in the manhunt during the second day. His gentle presence added a measure of restraint and composure to the circus-like atmosphere of the two-day manhunt. He said he was not "vindictive," however, and just wanted to "see the killer brought to justice." He did not assume that the one named suspect was necessarily the killer, either. Of the searchers, he said, "it is gratifying to think all these people would be out here doing this...I never thought it could happen...and now that it has, I want to be part of the search." Throughout the ordeal, Richard Gusé continued to take a profoundly humble and yet searching inventory of how authorities at all levels would deal with this crisis. His thoughtful but outspoken questions would appear again in the media over the weeks and months ahead. Their silence—in response to his pleas for action—are noteworthy and prescient.³² Gusé's sensitivity to the fact that there could be other suspects and that he only wanted justice brought to the actual killer was noticeably missing from others' accusations.

Six weeks into the investigation, agents abandoned their headquarters at Camp Scott. After interviewing hundreds of people and following as many leads, they decided nothing more could be gained by remaining at the murder scene twenty-four hours a day. The number of officials working the case was significantly reduced, but they stressed they were not letting up on the search for Gene Leroy Hart. Their frustration with the community was palpable. They had information that Hart had been living with his mother at her home and had been seen sitting on her porch as recently as June 4. Yet she and

³² *Stillwater News-Press*, "Father of Dead Girl Joins in Manhunt," 26 June 1977.

others questioned in a door-to-door search insisted she had not seen him since his escape in September 1973. One agent's comments to a reporter sums up how many of them felt after six weeks of non-stop investigating in the Locust Grove area: "I have never been lied to so much in my life...just absolutely no cooperation from the people we interviewed. If people around here think Hart is so innocent and are trying to protect him why don't they get him to turn himself in and show he's not guilty...we need to talk to him."³³

"The Laws" is a colloquial expression that referred to anyone who represents the white man's laws—the Sheriff, the deputies, OSBI agents, the police, the judges—and in this case especially, a derogatory meaning was also implied. The relationship between the Indians in northeastern Oklahoma and white officials was strained and suspicious on both sides. Ross Swimmer, the Chief of Cherokee Nation from 1975-85, explained that the community's ardent defense of Gene Hart was in large part due to his Indian heritage and yet was also a consequence of their historical conflict and the mistreatment by whites that Indian people had endured over generations.

I think that there were a lot of people in the immediate Indian community that believed he had not done what he was being accused of and because of a lot of history of strife—particularly between what I would call the white power structure and the Indian power structure—that he was, might not be, getting a fair deal. But I think as much as anything, Indians rallied around because he was Indian, because they knew the family, and they wanted to make sure he got a fair shake out of it.³⁴

³³ *Tulsa Tribune*, "Investigators abandon Camp Scott," 1 July 1977.

³⁴ Ross Swimmer interview, *Someone Cry For the Children* (1993; Tulsa, OK: Barrister Productions, L.C.), video, 00:41:00.

Savage Images

Historical relationships were one aspect of the conflicting attitudes, certainly, but the constant name-calling and overt racist descriptions of a “savage monster,” a “maniac,” a “full-blood,” and an “expert woodsman” who could live “undetected” for months, did nothing to allay the feeling among many observers that he was being convicted before he was caught. The media may well have just been reporting what they heard, but in at least one instance, they created it from scratch. In early July, their soul-searching, how-could-anyone-do-such-a-thing attitude reached a zenith with their own production of a titillating and disturbing “news” piece. The Associated Press-Oklahoma News Executives annual meeting featured Dr. Robert Phillips, a clinical psychologist who treated criminals and the criminally insane. The next day’s article, “‘Crazed Monster’: Psychological Profile of the Scout Killer,” began with the doctor’s description of the kind of person who would commit such a crime. He did not hold back. “The killer has gone too far. He has crossed the line. He is an animal.” Seven times, the words “monster,” “animal,” and “savage” appear. “Passion, hatred, anger, and inferiority complex” are also repeated. “Like an animal who scratches the ground trying to cover his tracks—in an almost ritualistic way—the killer tried to cover what he had done. He put two girls back in their sleeping bags and tried to wipe up the blood.” Diverging a bit from the psychologist, the article then focuses specifically on Hart himself, using several paragraphs to expound on recent interviews with five of Hart’s former attorneys. One remarked that Hart “was a very bitter and hostile man...It was like he was Geronimo and had declared war on a white world.”³⁵

³⁵ *Tulsa Tribune*, 9 July 1977.

According to the attorneys, Hart freely admitted to the burglaries but insisted he was innocent of the rape charges. Rather than accept plea bargains, he “took his lumps” and ended up getting the maximum sentences. “Hart was really bitter about the Tulsa police and all authority...Sometimes it seemed like he hated the whole world.” Despite the fact that this article and Dr. Phillip’s presentation seemed to convict Hart before he was even captured, the Doctor insisted it will be up to “the court to decide” if he is innocent or guilty. But then the article ends with a warning: Hart must be captured quickly. “He has already killed once and soon the savage passion instincts within him will rise again.”³⁶

The “savage instinct” and animalistic imagery also fit metaphorically with the way the terrain around Scott was portrayed in the press. Reading reporters’ accounts, one might never believe that generations of Girl Scouts had been traipsing and trailblazing these acres for nearly fifty years. Reporters described tick infestations, brambles that left deep scratches, and copperhead snake nests, all in a leafy, dense underbrush that made access and travel perilous. One reporter quoted a local man who affirmed their own fears when he warned, “The woods along Spring Creek are so thick you can’t see a white-faced calf across in the dead of winter when the leaves are down.”³⁷ The terrain, the crime, and the lone suspect hiding in the woods stirred the imagination not only of reporters hungry for a juicy story, but other kinds of people as well. Oklahoma City attorney Tom Kite offered to help in late July. He and his Vietnam Vet friends, who claimed they learned jungle warfare tactics in Vietnam, offered to search the area where Hart was being

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Tulsa Tribune*, 6/29/77; “There Are Phantoms in the Woods,” *Tulsa Tribune*, 8/5/77.

pursued. He predicted that “it would take them no more than eight hours” to find the suspect. Kite, 32, referred to his fellow vets as “spooks” and said they have kept their skills honed through National Guard duty since returning from Southeast Asia. “I call them spooks because we can do some pretty spooky things... We’re Vietnam Vets who have various and sundry types of jungle warfare.” Kite and his team announced in a press report that they were on alert and ready to move as soon as they receive summons from the sheriff.³⁸ This “summons” was more asking for permission than being invited to help. Despite his initial misgivings and safety concerns, Sheriff Weaver finally allowed the men to search a specific area during the course of one night. The next morning, they emerged from the woods empty-handed.³⁹

Why had Gene Hart been able to roam freely and be seen by friends and family for four years without being apprehended? Why hadn’t Sheriff Pete Weaver ever warned the Girl Scout Camp that a convicted rapist was in their midst? The Mayes County Sheriff was consistently portrayed as a folksy, Old West, good guy character who doggedly pursued the bad guys who had escaped his jail. An August exposé in the *Tulsa Tribune* described reporters following Weaver into the woods—thick with thorny branches, ravenous ticks, and rocky terrain. They were on an expedition to see a cave not far from the camp, one mile southwest of the murder scene and a half-mile from where Hart grew up. Less a cave and more like two boulders leaning together, the four-foot area had an entrance and a smaller exit. They followed the Sheriff to this location to see the writing on the rock face inside the sheltered area. In black marker someone had

³⁸ *Claremore Daily Progress*, “Search Help Offered, Jungle Training Tactics,” 26 July 1977.

³⁹ *Tulsa World*, “Future Civilian Hunts For Fugitive Ruled Out,” 13 August 1977.

written: “The killer was here, Bye-bye fools, 77-6-17.” He explained to the reporters that if the cave weren’t so remote and difficult to access, he “might believe some prankster wrote it...But why would someone come way up here to write a message that was only found by chance?”⁴⁰

Weaver’s rugged yet weary depiction in the *Tribune* article about the how the case was keeping him awake at night, and how he expected another crime as long as the killer was on the loose, reads a bit like a despondent regret at never having pursued Hart earlier. “I want to catch Hart more than anything in this world right now...Messages like this just add to it. The killer’s making fun of us, taunting us, telling us he’ll never get caught...But I am going to get him, I owe it to those girls.” The reporter was visibly moved by Weaver’s performance. He concluded:

Those words sound sincere coming from Weaver as he sits in the hot sun, sweats, pulls ticks off his neck and wipes blood from his arms. His face shows the strain. He has spent hours on this case. He has spent nights lying in bed smoking cigarette after cigarette wondering where and what the killer was doing. And the picture of those three dead girls—the scene Weaver saw that June 13 morning when he first walked down the small path leading to Kiowa camp—is etched in his memory forever.⁴¹

There were no tough questions for the Sheriff—just lots of sympathy for his plight trying to solve the case, which ultimately, he was not part of solving at all.

Several of Hart’s relatives met with reporters in late June to say that they felt Hart was being framed. They wondered why Sheriff Weaver hadn’t looked for him for four years, and why investigators never checked into Camp Garland, the Boy Scout camp

⁴⁰ *Tulsa Tribune*, 2 August 1977.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

across from the Girl Scout's Camp Scott. His mother, Ella Mae Buckskin offered the idea that her son was "out of state," and she claimed that she'd not seen him in four years. Both FBI and OSBI agents encountered problems with local folks cooperating. Her story did not corroborate with others, several of whom had seen him on her porch as recently as a Sunday in early June. But somehow these leads always fell flat. The agents conducted numerous interviews with relatives and friends of Hart's who at first would "say they have seen him, but when they pursue this [questioning] in greater depth, it develops they haven't seen him."⁴²

Besides the loyalty of family and associates, other town residents certainly felt pressure to not implicate Hart publicly. And yet if they dared, they knew they would pay for it in some way, knowing it would be dangerous to report his whereabouts. A woman who owned a bait shop south of Locust Grove for six years felt very frightened by what she learned of Hart's location in the days following the murders, but she resolved to turn him in at any cost, even if it meant the loss of her business. "One day the law came roaring in—that was right after they decided it was him. They came in about five or six cars and they all jumped out and started looking around. One of them told me Hart had hunted coon up and down this creek bottom for the last two and a half years. I felt like saying, 'Well, why didn't you come get him then?' I hope he doesn't come around here, because I'll turn him in. He's got time to serve. And then I guess I would get burned out in two weeks time."⁴³

⁴² *Stillwater News-Press*, "Mom Doesn't Know Where Gene Hart Is," 27 June 1977.

⁴³ *Tulsa Tribune*, 5 August 1977.

Reporters hung out in bars, convenience stores, and drive-ins looking for folksy, juicy public opinion on the matter. Using colloquial parlance, they quoted “young Indians,” “a burly contractor,” and “barber shop clerks” saying things like, “Boy, Old Gene sure has put on weight,” and “if all they got on him is what they let out, they sure ain’t got much.”⁴⁴ The depiction of Locust Grove residents eventually wore on the last nerve of Mayor Roger G. Anderson. In a letter to the editor of the *Tulsa World*, he implores the paper to offer the town an apology:

As Mayor of Locust Grove, I would like it to be known that the citizens of this community were deeply offended by the bush league journalism displayed by the *Tulsa World*. To an outsider, one would get the impression that Locust Grove is comprised of uneducated, tobacco-chewing, rednecks sporting about in our pickup trucks or lounging about in local saloons reminiscing about Pretty Boy Floyd and Bonnie and Clyde.

Contrary to the vivid pictures concocted by the press, Locust Grove is made up of well-educated, gentle, sensitive, employed people. We are just as concerned by the tragic events of last summer as everyone else; perhaps more so that the press has indicated, since it hits so close to home. We are sick of the adverse publicity we have been receiving and I feel we are due an apology.⁴⁵

“100 Warriors”

The presence of so many different law enforcement agents changed the ambiance of Locust Grove. The door-to-door questioning of residents, gatherings of armed officers and highway patrolmen, and the presence of too many unmarked vehicles congregating on roadsides and at businesses began to wear on the hospitality of the community. Their presence also evoked an uneasy fear, especially among Cherokee residents. When the

⁴⁴ *Tulsa Tribune*, “Locust Grove Beliefs Unshaken,” 7 April 1978.

⁴⁵ *Tulsa World*, “Mayor Raps *World*,” 20 April 1978.

case and its sole suspect came to the attention of the American Indian Movement, Gene Leroy Hart—as a concept, not just a person—quickly became caught up in local politics and AIM rhetoric. Whether Hart was ever directly in contact with AIM before, during or after the murders, manhunt, or trial is unknown. One report suggested that someone had called an AIM leader by phone on Hart’s behalf. Regardless of the truth of this rumor, AIM leaders believed that the racially based, “Indian manhunt” fervor demanded an official response from AIM in Oklahoma and elsewhere in Indian country. In much the same way that the crime investigators contradicted and confused reports, AIM leaders found themselves in a power vacuum as well. How would the organization effectively defend Hart’s civil rights while also distancing itself from his possible guilt? The messy combination of Hart’s local notoriety and his criminal fugitive status provided several opportunities for rumors to fly. Accustomed to being treated poorly by the media, AIM leaders also knew how to use this resource expertly to their own advantage when the circumstance required such.⁴⁶

American Indian Movement activists and authors Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior concluded in their book, *Like A Hurricane*, that AIM was on the verge of collapse in 1973, and notable to this story, the tiny hamlet of White Oak, Oklahoma had been the host site for the deflated movement. Two months after the dramatic stand-down at Wounded Knee, AIM held its annual convention in this tiny town forty-five miles north of Locust Grove, meeting for the first time in the state with the largest Indian population in the country. Smith and Warrior described the meeting there as “a poorly

⁴⁶ For a description of how AIM treated the press “like royalty,” see *Like A Hurricane*, 209-210; and *Claremore Progressive*, April 18, 1978.

organized and sparsely attended disaster.”⁴⁷ Despite the national unraveling, the authors also concluded that even though AIM did not accomplish the goals it had set out, the movement nonetheless had a profound impact on the morale of Indian people, regardless of their support of the organization itself.⁴⁸

Their morale may have been dormant for some time but quickly revived when Oklahoma’s AIM director Ben Hyatt called other AIM members shortly after the announcement of the warrant for Hart’s arrest. Suddenly, AIM’s presence in Oklahoma reappeared and stirred up a whole series of events described in local papers: the mistreatment of Hart’s relatives by investigators, the fear of an Indian protest, Indians storming the Governor’s mansion, and a rumor that Indian warriors were going to break Hart out of the Mayes County jail when he was finally captured. Nothing came of the dramatic rumors except a revived publicity around American Indian civil rights issues, which had been waning in the local media for a few years.

Ben Hyatt announced to the press that he called in six AIM representatives from around the country to ask for help because “Indian people were being harassed” in their communities, in taverns, and other public spaces.⁴⁹ He said that they came peacefully and helped to stop what could be a bad situation. They left the state without making contact with Hart. One of these leaders was Ramon Robideau, 27, a former Oklahoman who lived in Rapid City where AIM’s legal defense fund is based. “We have heard of vigilante groups and farmers going around looking for someone to shoot... If they

⁴⁷ *Like a Hurricane*, 269-70.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 274-75, 277.

⁴⁹ *Tulsa Tribune*, 30 July 1977.

(authorities) follow the white man's law, that will be alright." He then said he could "summon '100 warriors' to the scene in 'a day's notice.'" ⁵⁰

But in late July 1977, a *Tulsa Tribune* headline, "Furious Hyatt Denies AIM Helping Hart," describes the same Ben Hyatt publicly denying any AIM involvement with Hart. While he asserted that Hart was not receiving help from AIM, he did say that he received "a telephone call...from a man who is in contact with Hart." The man "was furious. He said the story is untrue. He said that Hart is terrified now because people will be swarming the area harassing other Indians...One or two AIM members may be helping but they are doing that on their own." ⁵¹ Hyatt reiterated his frustration with the accusations that the organization was officially helping hide Hart. "It's a bunch of lies...I'm stunned. These reports will just throw more gasoline on the fire of prejudice in this state." Hyatt's comment refers to a newspaper report printed the previous day that suggested AIM members met secretly with Hart and that a medicine man had given him a medicine bag to wear around his neck. Hyatt told the reporter, "No good Indian would ever tell secret of a medicine man. That's like Americans giving secrets to the Russians...We think some Indian has sold his damn soul in releasing such a story...This makes AIM look bad and all we are trying to do is make sure Indians are not harassed...We are not acting as a go-between for Hart." ⁵² Hyatt admitted that some key AIM leaders were indeed watching the situation closely, but that their public presence regarding Hart's situation did not differ from any other of the organization's activist

⁵⁰ *Tulsa World*, "FBI Called in to Search for Suspect," 25 June 1977.

⁵¹ *Tulsa Tribune*, "Furious Hyatt denies AIM helping Hart," 30 July 1977.

⁵² *Ibid.*

work; they used the media to highlight the mistreatment of Indians and to make their case for more equitable and just treatment for all Indians.

Although Locust Grove officials claimed that “folks in town” didn’t support the Indian political organization, that isn’t how it appeared. On August 15, 1977, a staged photo of Hart’s mother, Ella Mae Buckskin, and AIM leader Ben Hyatt reading a copy of a pamphlet entitled “American Indian Civil Rights Handbook” appeared in the *Tribune*.⁵³ On the same day, the *Stillwater News-Press* reported that Ella Mae Buckskin had asked AIM to protect her from “police harassment.” She said she and her family had been persecuted and harassed, stopped by police for no reason, and “officials once threatened to shoot her if she didn’t tell them where Hart is hiding.” Hyatt’s frustration with the law had not subsided during the previous weeks. He warned, “We are giving authorities investigating the Locust Grove murders a 48-hour warning to immediately stop harassing Mrs. Buckskin and her family. If that doesn’t happen, we will move in and protect her ourselves.”⁵⁴

Three days later, Hyatt announced that an unidentified national AIM leader would be coming to Oklahoma to lead a protest about the handling of the murder investigation at the Governor’s mansion in Oklahoma City. AIM had heard that Governor Boren planned to meet on Friday with top investigators from Locust Grove. AIM planned to “crash” this meeting. Hyatt said that the person would remain anonymous “until he’s here, because if police knew, they’d set up road blocks to stop him.” Hyatt reminded the press that he had issued a 48-hour warning Monday of that week. “I tried to warn them to lay off the Indians, but they haven’t, and now AIM is moving in in full force...I am

⁵³ *Tulsa Tribune*, 15 August 1977.

⁵⁴ *Stillwater News-Press*, “Gene Hart’s Mother Asking Protection,” 15 August 1977.

washing his hands of this whole matter.” According to his sources, “AIM plans to bring in tents, drummers, dancers, the whole thing—just like at Wounded Knee.” Francis Wise, an AIM member from Oklahoma City, was named the coordinator. Wednesday she had told reporters that several meetings were being held across the state to see if a ‘statewide’ call can be made.”⁵⁵

The warrior symbolism, in combination with the suggestion that a large group of politicized and radicalized American Indians would converge on the Governor’s mansion, or anywhere in the state, did not dissipate over the course of the next several months. Months before Hart was even captured, AIM was mentioned many times as a potential safety concern. Sheriff Pete Weaver publicly appeared to believe the AIM “warrior” rumors, but more likely, he didn’t want to lose Hart for a third time under his watch; in late July when media sources implied a possible surrender, Weaver was quoted as saying, “ ‘I don’t want him in this jail...I dread to think of the responsibility of keeping him here...it’s too much responsibility.’ ”⁵⁶

Regardless of where or how he was captured, Hart presented a tricky paradox for the organization. In some ways, he appeared to have revived AIM’s presence and status in local politics, but AIM’s efforts to have Hart’s civil rights protected and justice served were consistently undermined by articles and rumors that continued to portray them as radicals open to using violence. That they brought this on themselves with the inflammatory threats they used seems clear on the surface. Nostalgia for their recent past fueled such threats, but again, here they were in Oklahoma, the place where AIM had fizzled and failed to inspire more action on behalf of Indian civil rights. Their underlying

⁵⁵ *Tulsa Tribune*, “AIM planning protest,” 18 August 1977.

⁵⁶ *Tulsa World*, “Accused Murderer Offered Safety But Still Running,” 31 July 1977.

anger and frustration during the manhunt and capture of Hart a was palpable reminder of all that was not achieved during AIM's moment in U.S. history just a few years prior.

Although Ella Mae Buckskin may have reached out to AIM leaders in Oklahoma, Locust Grove area Cherokee were not among the outspoken AIM members. Establishing or qualifying the manhunt for Hart as racially biased is not easy. The community was in some ways divided between White and Indian, but in many more ways it was not.

Assistant District Attorney for Cherokee County, and American Indian himself, Nathan Young III understood the nuance of race in Oklahoma as well as the political and historical significance of the particular moment, yet he did not accept racial bias as a reason Hart was being pursued so vigorously. He recalled Wounded Knee, the South Dakota incident with the FBI and the trial of Leonard Peltier as reasons some may see the manhunt in a racially biased way, however, "it is hard...to perceive the racial issue in Eastern Oklahoma. When you have a tribe like the Cherokee with well over 100,000 members, maybe 125,000 in a few counties, heavily concentrated in three counties, it is hard to find somebody whose [sic?] is not part-Indian, not married to an Indian, have a niece or nephew or some relative, or have strong Indian heritage in their background."⁵⁷

Young also called attention to the diversity of the Indian community itself, warning against broad terms such as "the Native American community. There is, in our area, a great deal of Native American involvement in law enforcement. We have lots and lots of Indian highway patrolmen, OSBI agents, deputy sheriffs, a lot of attitude that if he was guilty, he should be brought to trial, brought to justice."⁵⁸ The Tulsa papers may have

⁵⁷ Nathan Young III, *Someone Cry For the Children* (1993; Tulsa, OK: Barrister Productions, L.C.), video, 00:43:00.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Nathan Young III, 00:41:50.

been fanning the fire of AIM involvement, speaking to the outspoken, but in rural Mayes County, Nathan Young's assessment was a more accurate portrayal, and exposed the divisions between rural and urban more than between White and Indian.

Capture

AIM's agenda for Indian rights may have faltered in part due to Indian informants who worked for federal agents, and this pattern held in Oklahoma a few years later. OSBI agent Larry Bowles, one-quarter Cherokee and a lifelong resident of northeastern Oklahoma, "knew the local people well, both white and Indian" and "was able to function comfortably in either world."⁵⁹ Bowles, a father of daughters himself, was at the crime scene on June 13, accompanied the bodies to the morgue for the autopsies, and remained a key investigator throughout. Sometime in late September 1977, Bowles developed an Indian informant who was trusted by Hart's mother, and knew William Lee Smith, a medicine man, who lived near the Cookson Hills. Bowles promised the informant complete anonymity, the reward money whenever Hard was located, and convinced his boss, Ted Limke, that the only way to keep this "snitch" talking was to promise his name would never be shared with anyone. Although informant anonymity was against OSBI rules, the Director agreed.⁶⁰ The case was losing momentum every day and agents were beginning to despair. Yet Bowles patiently talked to the informant every day between October 1977 and April 1978. He moved carefully and deliberately in two worlds and fostered both trust and fear.

⁵⁹ Wilkerson, *Someone Cry for the Children*, 22.

⁶⁰ Larry Bowles, *Someone Cry For the Children* (1993; Tulsa, OK: Barrister Productions, L.C.), video.

Finally, after exhausting all other leads and a failed attempt to use Hart's escape accomplice Larry Dry, the agents decided it was time to put pressure on the one person they thought might break the location of Hart. Eva Smith, wife of the medicine man William Lee Smith, received a visit from Larry Bowles and Harvey Pratt on April 6. They knew the informant had just called her to say Hart should be moved from his current location because the authorities were on to him. They used this knowledge—suggesting that her home phone was tapped—to scare her into revealing Hart's location. Unwilling to lose the opportunity of catching Hart this particular day, Bowles added a bit more leverage, as the taped excerpt of their conversation reveals. In a kind but stern tone of voice, Bowles made his case to Mrs. Smith:

I want the man who killed three little Girl Scouts. We know you are hiding him and we are through playing games. We are starting to hand out indictments and we know all about you. Like I said, we are not interested in you all, we are interested in Gene Leroy Hart. If you don't cooperate with me today you are going to be indicted by a federal grand jury. If this is a game to you, I'll tell you it'll stop being fun right now. I'll tell you one more thing, that up to this point the three fathers of these little girls they are pretty uptight, even though it's been almost a year ago, they are pretty uptight. One's a police officer, one's a doctor, one is a businessman in Tulsa. They have been calling us repeatedly, they know that we know who the intermediary is and I can tell you before sundown they are gonna have your names and addresses.⁶¹

The bluff about the fathers may not have been necessary, but Bowles threw it in to add weight to his demands. Bowles promised he would never tell her husband that she told him where Hart was hiding. She agreed to lead them to Hart's location.

Bowles and Pratt called in the rest of their team and began the drive to a remote location in the Cookson Hills. They surrounded the area, approached the run-down shack

⁶¹ Ibid.

from all directions, guns at the ready. A large Indian man was there alone, wearing shorts, a black and white striped t-shirt and women's prescription glasses. When confronted at the back door, he began to bolt for the front door. When agent Jack Lay asked, "Do you want to die today?" he stopped abruptly.⁶² They took him outside and laid him on the ground face down to handcuff him. At that point, agent Pratt realized he "had better get his medicine back." He recalled, "Since I had used my medicine on him, the first thoughts that I had were, well—his feet, his soles were pointed towards me—I just went over and tapped his feet, because of the medicine I had used. I took my medicine back from him, my trail medicine."⁶³ Larry Bowles remembered that he reached down to help Hart off the ground as they took him to the car. "As I got him to his feet, I asked him, I said, "You killed those little girls, didn't you?" And he said, "You'll never pin it on me."⁶⁴ Dick Wilkerson winced when looked at Hart and remembered the few pairs of women's glasses that had been strewn about the camp unit and crime scene where the girls' bodies were found, because "it didn't escape anyone's notice that [Hart] was wearing women's glasses."⁶⁵

Hart was taken first to the Tahlequah OSBI office to be fingerprinted and questioned, and then on to the Mayes County jail. At Hart's arraignment on April 8th, District Attorney Sid Wise asked that Hart be transferred to the Tulsa County jail since he had broken out of that county's jail twice. Judge Whistler denied the motion. He asked,

⁶² Harvey Pratt, *Someone Cry For the Children* (1993; Tulsa, OK: Barrister Productions, L.C.), video, 60:00.

⁶³ Ibid., 01:02:16.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Larry Bowles, 01:02:25.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Dick Wilkerson, 01:02:50.

“Do you see anything wrong with the Mayes County Jail?” His defensive pride of the sixty-year-old jail was not much comfort to Sheriff Weaver, who intensified security measures and isolated Hart from other inmates, but Weaver had himself told the press just the day before that although “he doesn’t intend to put up with any foolishness,” he would be recommending that Hart be sent back to McAlester State Penitentiary.⁶⁶

Both sides—law enforcement and AIM—weighed in on Hart’s safety, and yet each accused the other of bringing possible harm to him. The day after the capture, Undersheriff Al Boyer said that he feared three primary elements in a possible attack on Hart—“the radical wing of the American Indian Movement, an area individual ‘with a grudge,’ or one of the slain girls’ close friends or family.” Boyer told the press that Hart would be under 24-hour surveillance. “You can’t tell, there are some radicals who would like nothing better than to see Hart hurt or killed and to make it look like it was our fault.”⁶⁷ His inflammatory remark incurred no commentary, but not so when the speaker was an American Indian and member of AIM. Described by the *Claremore Progressive* as being “outspoken,” AIM member Frances Wise of Oklahoma City contacted the press because she wanted “to help make the people of the State of Oklahoma aware Gene Hart may be murdered by persons within the system, not allowing him to make it to court.” Frances Wise felt that the constant moving of Hart from one location to another increased the likelihood of a “set up.” She was asked if she believed that the Sheriff and the District Attorney had plotted against Hart. “There is a possibility those two men could be

⁶⁶ *Tulsa World*, 8 April 1978.

⁶⁷ *Tulsa Tribune*, 7 April 1978.

involved in a conspiracy. I'm saying there is a possibility.”⁶⁸ Other articles cited rumors of AIM intervention, either by specifically naming AIM or by referring to “some radicals” or “a group of persons” who “may be planning to march on the jail in Pryor, possibly in an attempt to free Hart.”⁶⁹ Less than ten days later, citing compelling security reasons, the OSBI decided that for Hart’s safety and the safety of Mayes County personnel, he be moved. At ten o’clock on Saturday evening April 17, authorities escorted Hart sixty miles southeast to McAlester Penitentiary. This time Judge Whistler concurred. “I have no objection to that as long as Hart is back here Tuesday for his hearing.”⁷⁰ Gene Leroy Hart pled not guilty to all seven charges brought against him.⁷¹

Cherokee Medicine

When Harvey Pratt spoke of “taking his medicine back” or the Tulsa papers matter-of-factly describe Sam Pigeon and other Cherokee who harbored Hart, including the respected medicine man William Lee Smith, no evidence of romanticizing or exoticizing Indian religious practices revealed prejudices or racial judgments. In fact, the nonchalant way the topic appeared strikes this Oklahoma-raised researcher as quite normal, ordinary, and not unusual. In the only print interview Gene Hart ever allowed, *Cherokee Advocate* reporters asked him about his spiritual practices:

Cherokee Advocate: You also made a brief reference in that (televised) interview to your association with the Keetoowahs and your religious

⁶⁸ *Claremore Progressive*, “AIM Concerned,” 14 April 1978.

⁶⁹ *Tulsa Tribune*, “Hart Denies Killing Girls,” 7 April 1978 and “Hart in McAlester State Penitentiary,” 17 April 1978.

⁷⁰ *Tulsa Tribune*, 17 April 1978.

⁷¹ *Tulsa World*, 12 April 1978.

beliefs. Did this also play a role in sustaining you?

Hart: Well, the spirits always play a role in anything an Indian does, whether it be going to court, or mowing the yard, or whether he is out picking wild onions, or getting game for the table. I believe that. I've always felt like that.

Cherokee Advocate: Are you a Keetoowah?

Hart: I like to think I am, but you know, it's a matter (of)...do they accept me? Hopefully they do. But I believe in the religious society.⁷²

To understand this question, some background of Cherokee history is necessary. The genocidal 1838 Cherokee Trail of Tears from North Carolina to Oklahoma holds significant psycho-historical weight among Oklahoma Cherokee and still remains a critical aspect of their collective social memory and cultural place in the world, marked as it was by death, loss of home, forced removal, upended lives and families. Once relocated, the Oklahoma Cherokee drew on ancient creation rituals to sustain the fabric of their culture in a new and alienating environment. The Keetoowah branch of the Cherokee emerged in this context. "Full-blood" Cherokees turned inward to protect and nurture their religious heritage.⁷³ Conservative members of the Keetoowah dedicated themselves the preservation of traditional values and rituals of their forefathers, "particularly the maintenance of the 'ancient fire' ceremonies, the stomp dance, and an enduring belief in the efficacy of the old magic."⁷⁴ While a large number of Cherokee attended Cherokee Baptist churches and eschewed the old ways, in the 1970s the stomp

⁷² *Cherokee Advocate*, June 1, 1979, 12.

⁷³ *The Night Has A Naked Soul: Witchcraft and Sorcery among the Western Cherokee*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press (1997), 130-31.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

grounds were nonetheless important cultural gathering places.⁷⁵ The Nighthawk Society was the religious center of the Keetoowah branch of the tribe, and was comprised primarily of “full-blood” Cherokee. Anthropologist Alan Kilpatrick used the older word “conjuror” to describe the spiritual leaders that emerged “during the turbulent, post-removal period” of the late nineteenth century. He explained that the conjurors were displaced upon removal, and though they had once been an integral part of Cherokee ceremonial life, over time and distance, their public function no longer held power. Kilpatrick asserted that “as the Cherokee Nation was being dismantled around them, many conjurors found solace and fellowship by joining the Nighthawk Society, a branch of the Keetoowah organization.”⁷⁶

Until Hart’s capture, only one reference about medicine men appeared in the press, and it was in a story connected to whether AIM members were helping Hart evade capture.⁷⁷ When the names of two men who assisted Hart—William Lee Smith and Sam Pigeon—appeared on April 13, the relationship between Hart and medicine men became public.⁷⁸ Described as “a Cherokee medicine man and a full-blood Cherokee,” a deputy sheriff from Tahlequah said the two men were “only ‘following the code of the hills.’”⁷⁹ Even among some law enforcement, the exercise of bringing these two men to court seemed just that, an exercise. The “code of the hills” would go on because it was part of

⁷⁵ Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 128-29.

⁷⁶ Kilpatrick, *The Night Has A Naked Soul: Witchcraft and Sorcery among the Western Cherokee*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 130-31.

⁷⁷ *Tulsa World*, 1 August 1977.

⁷⁸ *Tulsa Tribune*, 13 April 1978; *Tulsa World*, 13 April 1978.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the Indian power structure of which Chief Ross Swimmer spoke. Sam Pigeon told at least four different reporters that he shared his home with Hart. The term “medicine man” appears in print without connotations of intrigue or judgment. Never defined, elaborated upon, or qualified in the articles, the meaning of the term was assumed to be common knowledge among Oklahoma readers.

Besides being a medicine man, William Lee Smith was also a 58-year-old railroad worker from rural Vian, Oklahoma in 1978. On April 14, 1978, Smith “voluntarily surrendered Friday after Cherokee Principal Chief Ross Swimmer provided him air transportation from his railroad job in Arkansas.” Chief Swimmer told the newspapers that the Cherokee Nation paid for Smith’s transport because Smith was afraid to drive back from Arkansas.⁸⁰ Despite the fact that Smith pleaded innocent to harboring a fugitive at a formal arraignment in Tahlequah, OSBI agent Larry Bowles later said that when he met with Smith and his wife after Hart’s capture, Smith admitted that he transported Hart about a week after the murders in the back of his pickup to a location within a mile of the home of Sam Pigeon. He gave Hart instructions to Pigeon’s place where he hid out for the next 10 months.⁸¹ Smith is identified in the article as “Chief of the religious and highly conservative Keetoowah band of the Cherokees.”⁸² A reference in a history of the United Keetoowah lists William Smith as a 1987 interviewee and “Chief of the Stokes Smith Nighthawk Stomp Grounds near Vian, Oklahoma.”⁸³ William

⁸⁰ *Tulsa World*, “Medicine Man in Hart Case Turns Himself In,” 14 April 1978.

⁸¹ Wilkerson, 166-67.

⁸² *Tulsa World*, “Medicine Man Denies ‘Harboring’ Gene Leroy Hart,” 20 May 1978.

⁸³ Leeds, Georgia Rae, *The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 284.

Smith descended from influential Cherokee healers and community leaders. His father was RedBird Smith, a Keetoowah medicine man identified as “a primary instrument in rejuvenating the old religion among the NightHawks organization... [because] RedBird wanted to ‘get back what they had lost.’”⁸⁴

When the *Tulsa World* interviewed William Smith, at his home in rural Vian, Oklahoma one day before he was summoned by the courts, Smith denied even knowing the suspect, but admitted to knowing his mother, Ella Mae Buckskin. According to Smith there are those who are jealous of his powers and who have accused him of aiding Hart, but he denies this.” Smith suggested that AIM members were trying to frame him. “I’ve been getting lots of letters from AIM,” he said, “and it is in violence every time. I tell my people to forget about it. AIM offered me quite a bit of money (to use my powers to do harm)...I said if I ever take the money I believe I am bought.” The article also explained his own use of medicine for healing as well as a terse description of Cherokee sorcery, which he disavows in the interview:

Smith says his father, from whom he learned all the secret of being a medicine man, knew a lot about such things as voodoo and witch doctoring. ‘He had instructions about them written in Cherokee but he burned them and said to never use that knowledge because it is evil,’ said Smith, who claims he knows people who can turn themselves into snake, birds, and other animals of the forest.⁸⁵

Sam Pigeon, the “quiet man” who harbored Hart at his cabin, did so because he believed Hart was innocent. Pigeon was a sixty-year-old Cherokee field foreman at Ozark Nurseries, who “speaks Cherokee better than English” and who could “neither

⁸⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁵ *Tulsa World*, “Cherokee Medicine Man Denies Giving Aid to Hart,” 13 April 1978.

read nor write.” He allowed Hart to stay in his three-room “dilapidated structure” that had “electricity but no running water” or bathroom. When asked if he knew Hart was a fugitive, he answered yes, and when followed with a question as to why he did not “notify the authorities,” Pigeon’s reply was, “Cause he didn’t do it.”⁸⁶ Pigeon was reportedly nonplussed about being prosecuted. ““They told me not to worry, that everything would be dropped and forgotten.”⁸⁷ He was correct; the State of Oklahoma never brought charges against him or William Smith for harboring a fugitive.

Pigeon was not a medicine man, but he was a member of the Keetoowah Band’s Night Hawk Society and he knew William Smith well enough to agree to hide Hart when he was asked to do that. Chief Ross Swimmer explained the cultural and religious reasoning behind the two men’s actions: “Generally medicine men...don’t judge a person. If an Indian needs help, or needs a place to stay, and that person is a believer generally, they just move in. There’s no questioning that if Gene Hart went some place and said he needed help, the medicine man would help him and I believe that is what happened.”⁸⁸

One medicine man, known only by the pseudonym Crying Wolf, was deeply concerned about the use of medicine in Hart’s hiding and later during his trial. He is most likely the medicine man that Harvey Pratt referenced because his insights later became integral to the Wilkersons’ book *Someone Cry for the Children*; Dick Wilkerson and Harvey Pratt were friends as well as co-workers. His concern for anonymity included having his voice altered and his face shadowed during segments of the accompanying

⁸⁶ *Tulsa World*, “‘Quiet Man’ Admits Harboring Hart,” 8 April 1978.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Chief Ross Swimmer, *Someone Cry for the Children*, video, 00:56:00.

video the Wilkerson brothers produced in 1985. Crying Wolf seemed certain that Hart was using medicine and that he had worked with enough medicine men to know how to use certain medicine to evade capture. For viewers of the documentary, he offered a simple explanation of how medicine is made and used:

The raw product of tobacco is brought to a medicine person with a request for a desired result...the breath of the person is involved, the energy or power of running water is involved. The particular location of the place where this tobacco is remade is very important. But most specifically, the tobacco is *remade*...and the medicine is given to the requesting party to accomplish the purpose they requested.⁸⁹

Harvey Pratt, the Cheyenne Arapaho OSBI agent mentioned previously, was the first to bring the possible use of medicine to his fellow investigators; he seemed certain that an Indian was involved in the crime. Ten days after the murders, he accompanied the rancher Victor Auxier to the cave where Auxier had spotted a man, the incident that turned the search for evidence into a manhunt. There, Pratt examined the front of the cave closely and picked up a piece of tattered cigarette butt that had the filter torn off. He knew then that Hart was using medicine. He noticed the remains of four small fires. Four is a medicine number. It denotes the four cardinal directions, the four seasons, and four significant colors: white, green, red and black. While he was considering his discovery, the other agents started shouting, panicked. They were covered with ticks. Pratt noticed his hand was also covered. He stepped inside the cave directly behind the four fires.

There were no ticks to be found! Not a single tick!...Hart used the medicine to ward off ticks. He remembered talking to an old Indian in the area who said that

⁸⁹ Crying Wolf, *Someone Cry for the Children*, video, 48:48:00; this explanation is corroborated in Alan Kilpatrick's *The Night Has A Naked Soul* (1997), 12. "To ward off *unayehi:sdi* ('frightful') *iyanaadawedehe* ('sayers') as they are called in these texts, it is recommended that a rarified species of ancient tobacco be rolled in the hand while one recites the appropriate lines. The ritual is to be enacted early in the morning on the bank of a flowing stream."

Hart was counseled by a powerful medicine man who had given him the ability to turn into either a cat or a bird to elude his captors. As a twentieth-century man, he should scoff at the idea, but now a certain uneasiness was creeping into his consciousness.⁹⁰

Pratt's opinion that Hart was using medicine to evade capture never faltered during the entire ordeal, and as time passed, he seemed even more certain. Early on, his brother joined him in undercover searches on the property, away from other investigators and the press. They also visited with a medicine man for advice and protection because Pratt felt certain an Indian was somehow involved. "We were concerned about things he'd said to jailers, laughing at them about [how he was] eluding them from above and below."

During one instance when tracking dogs were hot on a scent for a long time, they arrived at a field and just stopped, right in the middle of the field. The scent had just vanished.⁹¹

Pratt recalled one evening in particular when he felt certain Hart was nearby.

One night my brother and I had a small fire going, more for the comfort of fire, so we didn't have to sit in total pitch darkness. I was sitting there, and a cat pounced into my chest and onto my lap, and hollered, and broke away and ran away into the darkness. It startled me—it frightened me! Because of all those things we'd heard about him being able to change into flying creatures or animals. It shook both of us for the night. We hardly had any sleep at all.⁹²

Crying Wolf attended Hart's trial and recalled seeing several medicine men at the Mayes County Courthouse that week. He later admitted that he felt concerned enough to make

⁹⁰ Wilkerson, 85-86.

⁹¹ Harvey Pratt, *Someone Cry for the Children*, video, 00:52:00.

⁹² Ibid.

use of “The Old One,” the ancient tobacco said to have come from the original Cherokee of the Southeast, the night before the case concluded.⁹³

In a 2010 visit with retired agent Harvey Pratt, in his cluttered and captivating office at the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, the “Renaissance man” portrayal of Pratt by his good friend and fellow agent Dick Wilkerson in *Someone Cry For the Children* still matched his description perfectly.⁹⁴ As a forensic artist for over thirty years, Pratt’s office was filled with drawings from investigations, his own traditional artwork, skeleton and skull models, and old drawings of suspected criminals.⁹⁵ When discussing the Hart case, he opened his desk drawer and pulled out an eagle feather, beaded at the end with leather and beads, and explained that he had relied on his spiritual tradition then and ever since, both in and out of the office. Such integration of two seemingly different worlds is not unique to Harvey Pratt. An interview subject of Circe Sturm’s in *Blood Politics* explained, “Me and my family, we visit with the medicine man and the little people. I know the difference between good and bad medicine, even though I have a college degree.”⁹⁶ Pratt said he had no internal conflict practicing Christianity while keeping his Cherokee religious traditions alive, and this went the other way as well—the respectful manner in which the Wilkerson brothers wrote about medicine men

⁹³ Crying Wolf, *Someone Cry for the Children*, video, 1:07:27.

⁹⁴ Author visit with Harvey Pratt, March 2010, Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, Oklahoma City, OK.

⁹⁵ “OSBI Forensic Artist Wows Museum Goers,” *The Source*, OSBI newsletter, Spring 2010.

⁹⁶ Sturm, 127.

attests to a very integrated and reverent cultural exchange between whites and Indians, at least at the OSBI, and most importantly among these men during this particular case.

“Welcome to the Hart of Gene Country”

Nearly a year passed between Hart’s capture and his criminal trial due to political grandstanding, a book scandal, and back room deals. On November 22, 1978, a full five months before Hart was even captured, Mayes County District Attorney Sid Wise withdrew from the case when the public learned that he and *Pryor Daily Times* reporter Ron Grimsley had arranged to co-author a book deal about the murders. Wise had allowed him to copy a dozens of classified OSBI documents on the case to help him write the book. Earlier that fall, Grimsley had also been Wise’s campaign manager during his unsuccessful run for Attorney General. Wise fired him shortly after Grimsley “ran a classified advertisement in the newspaper for \$500 shares in the book ‘by the only newsman who covered the Hart case continuously from the inside.’” The telephone number listed was that of Wise’s campaign headquarters. The number was quickly disconnected and both men denied they were partners in the book deal.⁹⁷

Then, two months after Hart’s capture and arraignment, Hart’s lawyers offered to “hire Grimsley as an investigator and paid him \$800 to hand over the rest of the OSBI reports.”⁹⁸ This set in motion a series of events that culminated in the warrant for his arrest as a material witness by District Judge William Whistler in November. The murder case had been set for trial beginning that next week, but the trial “was thrown into

⁹⁷ *Tulsa Tribune*, 21 November 1978.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

a tailspin Friday when defense attorneys presented an affidavit purportedly signed by Grimsley which stated Wise had turned over OSBI reports on the case to the reporter for use in the book.”⁹⁹ These events delayed the trial for five months and cast a long shadow of doubt on the prosecution’s handling of the case. Wise’s campaign for Attorney General of Oklahoma had blatantly used the crime and the manhunt in ways unbecoming to a public servant, especially after the book deal emerged. His attention-seeking reputation and ethical carelessness also tarnished the reputation of investigators, no matter how hard they tried to distance themselves from him. In an interview after resigning from the case, Wise said that he “was only trying to assist a young man who wanted to be an author.”¹⁰⁰ The fact that their now public agreement had a 75/25 split, the bulk of it going to Wise, contradicted such benevolence on his part. The damage had been done.

Wise’s withdrawal from the case was imperative, but it left the trial date hanging. Although Tulsa County D.A. Buddy Fallis had been involved in the case since the previous July—back when Wise thought he would be winning the Attorney General seat—he was not sure he should remain after the scandal broke. After consulting with the families of the slain girls, he agreed to stay on the case. According to Mrs. Sherri Farmer, Lori’s mother, Fallis was “the only stabilizing force for the prosecution.”¹⁰¹

Garvin Isaacs and Gary Pitchlynn led Gene Hart’s defense. Isaacs was a young lawyer with minimal experience in criminal trials, and Pitchlynn, self-described as a

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ *Tulsa Tribune*, “Book was way to aid author, Wise claims,” 24 November 1978.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

“half-breed Choctaw,” had just graduated from law school in 1977 after a renewed interest in his Indian heritage.¹⁰² Experience did not matter—they were aggressive and determined to win Hart’s case. For jury selection, the lawyers hired psychologist Cathy Bennett, aged twenty-eight at the time, to help select jurors who “will be able to help Hart,” but she also wanted to “put jurors at ease in the courtroom.”¹⁰³ Jury selection lasted a record ten days. From a pool of 113 people, the attorneys finally agreed on six men and six women, not one of whom hailed from Locust Grove. Among the group were two former Boy Scout leaders and a former Campfire Girls leader. Not one person with American Indian heritage was selected, though two were interviewed. One admitted to being a distant relative of Hart, and the prosecution dismissed the other one. The jury was mostly “comprised of homemakers and blue-collar workers with a high school education.” Their average age was forty.¹⁰⁴

Large crowds gathered outside and inside the Mayes County courthouse during every part of the trial proceedings, the jury selection days included. But no one expected the atmosphere of revelry and certainly the families of the slain girls had no context in which to understand this outpouring of support for Hart in an excruciatingly painful moment for them and the memories they had of their murdered daughters. Dick Wilkerson observed that the scene outside the courtroom was “pandemonium.” After the families and press were seated, only sixty seats remained. Dick Wilkerson recalled that

¹⁰² Gary Pitchlynn Bio, Pitchlynn Law Office, PLLC, 14 March 2013, pitchlynnlaw.com.

¹⁰³ *Tulsa World*, 6 March 1979. Bennett was reprimanded by Judge Whistler for speaking to the press and was warned that if she did it again, she would only be allowed to watch the case separated from Hart’s attorneys.

¹⁰⁴ *Tulsa World*, 16 March 1979.

fistfights and arguments about available seats became daily occurrences.¹⁰⁵ Many of the 400 people at the courthouse on the first morning of the trial had been at a chicken dinner fundraiser the previous night for Gene Leroy Hart's defense attorneys.¹⁰⁶ In a 2003 interview, D. A. Buddy Fallis vividly remembered what it was like entering the courthouse every day when Hart's supporters lined the sidewalk. Every day of the trial as he approached the courthouse, he "walked the gauntlet" to get inside. By their presence, Gene Hart's supporters made it known that they "were very upset with law enforcement, with the prosecution, the family...It was a big crowd, no doubt about it...it was not a very comfortable feeling." Parents of the slain girls ate at local restaurants and saw donation jars on the counters for Gene Hart's Defense Fund. A familiar bumper sticker seen around Mayes County read: "Welcome to the Hart of Gene Country."¹⁰⁷

On the very first day of the trial, Hart made a "startling but unsuccessful attempt to address the jury" before testimony began. His lawyer had previously asked the court to allow Hart to make the statement, saying that he had approved it and coached Hart, but the judge "vigorously denied" this request. They tried again on the first day of the trial and Judge denied it, again, because it was against protocol. It hardly mattered. Garvin Isaacs arranged for Hart to make a much bigger impact on public opinion outside the courthouse walls the very next day when he organized a live television press conference moderated by Tulsa reporter Richard Dowdell. The *Tulsa World* reported, "Hart,

¹⁰⁵ Wilkerson, 241.

¹⁰⁶ *Someone Cry for the Children*, video documentary.

¹⁰⁷ S.M. "Buddy" Fallis, on "Stateline: Inside Oklahoma," OETA documentary series, October 2003, transcript, 5.

appearing calm and business-like in a three-piece suit made himself available to the news media in a press conference orchestrated by his attorneys in an effort to ‘humanize’ him before the public.” Flanked by his attorneys and set up in a legal library setting, Hart answered pre-selected questions submitted by reporters in advance. Hart’s attorneys showed crude drawings he’d made in prison, eliciting a comment from the press they may be worth something someday to an art patron. “Hart said he agreed to the mass news conference only after his jury was sequestered and because numerous reporters had made individual requests for interviews. ‘I gain nothing,’ he said.”¹⁰⁸

The use of crime scene photos and the testimony of the Girl Scout adult witnesses made for a harrowing day in court. During the next five days, Prosecutor Fallis focused on a few key pieces of evidence: sperm samples taken from the bodies and from Hart while in his jail cell matched, according to testimony by fertility specialist Dr. John McCloud; hair samples found on Denise Milner and from Hart’s head “were exactly the same,” according to OSBI forensic chemist Ann Reed. “A piece of masking tape found on the flashlight at the death scene came from a roll of tape located three miles from the camp in a cave-cellar area [near] where Hart lived as a boy.”¹⁰⁹ Photographs found at the cave had been processed by Hart when he was in the Granite Reformatory serving rape and kidnapping sentences. The modified flashlight found at the scene matched the same thing he had done to his flashlight after his 1973 jailbreak when he had also taken refuge at the same cave-cellar near Camp Scott. The last of the thirty-two witnesses to testify for the prosecution was Karen Mitchell, a teenaged camper, who had discovered two items

¹⁰⁸ *Tulsa World*, 21 March 1979.

¹⁰⁹ *Tulsa World*, 25 March 1979.

missing from her camp trunk, a blue mirror and a corncob pipe. OSBI agents found these two items in the shack where Hart was captured, but they did not confiscate them until weeks after his arrest.¹¹⁰ This fact became central to the defense's argument that law enforcement planted evidence.

Other things were planted, though, in that very courtroom. Buddy Fallis recalled one incident during the trial that he suspected was done to throw him off course and certainly for the jury's behalf. At one point during a call to the next witness, he walked over to use a blackboard "that had been covered with a paper."

I was going use the blackboard with the questioning of a witness—and the jury was in the box. I walked over to the blackboard to raise this paper, and somebody had written "FRAMED" on the blackboard, apparently anticipating that I would use that blackboard. I can't recall specifically what I said, but I began erasing that word, Framed. I am sure it was not done in an earlier trial. I rather suspect it was done for this trial.¹¹¹

The atmosphere in the courtroom was somber for the most part, but giggles and bursts of laughter were common.¹¹² Isaacs' courtroom style featured dramatic outbursts, and on two occasions, resulted in contempt of court charges from Judge Whistler.¹¹³ He clearly believed he was in a fight for an underdog—a folk hero of sorts. Hart may have been a smart man, but the words he read during a highly publicized press conference after the first day of testimony were clearly not his own. Hart addressed the hero label, albeit only

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ S.M. "Buddy" Fallis, *Someone Cry for the Children*, video, 1985, 1:10:38.

¹¹² *Tulsa Tribune*, 29 March 1979.

¹¹³ *Tulsa Tribune*, 30 March 1979.

to further embolden his cause as a casualty of being powerless: “I am not a hero. I have no desire to be a hero. But maybe I represent the fears and doubts that many people have about any system that has the means and the power to overwhelm each and every one of us.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, the defense used this concept, “raising fear and doubt,” to try to influence the jury’s decision.

In his opening argument, and in the days that followed, Isaacs instructed the jury to “follow the evidence, pay attention to who had the photographs, and how they came to the cellar area...watch the pictures, they will tell you a lot.”¹¹⁵ Intimating that the evidence was planted, fabricated, and circumstantial, Hart’s attorney used this assertion throughout the trial to cast a long shadow of doubt in the jurors’ minds to suggest Hart had been framed. Referring to the prosecution’s evidence of the blue hand mirror and the corncob pipe, Isaacs said, “Many people had access to the house [where Hart was arrested] and had opportunities to put things in that house after all of Hart’s personal belongings were gone.”¹¹⁶ Isaacs also called into question the reliability of “science-based investigative evidence” by suggesting to the jury that laboratory procedures were fallible, and certainly not trustworthy. In a 2003 taped interview Garvin Isaacs continued to dismiss the use of physical evidence tested by laboratory science in Hart’s trial: “The evidence they presented at the trial was based on science, a lot of it, and we were able to show that it was not reliable.” They simply brought in other scientists who cast doubt on

¹¹⁴ *Someone Cry for the Children*, video, KTUL Channel 8 file footage, 1:09:29.

¹¹⁵ Wilkerson, 249.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

the prosecution's testimony about the quality of the match of the samples.¹¹⁷ The defense worked diligently to discredit all of the state's evidence based on an unspoken presumption and a spoke assumption that this jury might not trust science nor law enforcement.

To darken the shadow of doubt further, Isaacs introduced the possibility that another person may have committed the crime, even though hair and semen samples from the man, Bill Stevens, a prisoner in the Kansas State Penitentiary, did not match samples taken from the victims at all. The OSBI had thoroughly investigated this potential suspect and found his story to be completely false. They were shocked when Isaacs introduced it, and even more incensed when in his closing argument, Isaacs suggested Stevens was somehow very involved. "Isaacs then began dramatically acting out a courtroom cross-examination as if Steven were seated in the witness chair. 'Mr, Stevens, isn't it true you were at Camp Scott on June 13?' and 'Mr. Stevens, Mrs. Payne and her three sons told us they loaned you the flashlight' ... ' Mr. Stevens, why is it that your fingerprint is on the reflector of that flashlight?'" Fallis objected to his imaginary witness performance—such suggestions could not be introduced at this point because there were no facts in evidence. "'He had his own experts examine that flashlight and the fingerprint does not belong to Stevens,' Fallis shouted."¹¹⁸ Objections mattered not; seeds of doubt had been sown. Isaacs closing arguments were peppered with "muffled outbreaks of giggling and hand-clapping."¹¹⁹ When Fallis was attempting to complete his closing statement, Isaacs

¹¹⁷ Garvin Isaacs, "Stateline: Inside Oklahoma," OETA documentary series, "Missing Pieces," October 2003, 00:12:40, transcript, 6.

¹¹⁸ *Tulsa Tribune*, 29 March 1979.

interrupted with “repeated and boisterous objections.” Buddy Fallis addressed everyone in the court when he said, “In my eighteen years of prosecution I have never seen such demeanor of lawyers, defense lawyers and their cheering section.”¹²⁰

The jurors reviewed the case for four hours on the day of the closing argument, but one member anonymously admitted that they had agreed Hart was innocent after only five minutes of deliberation. They decided to sleep on their decision and come in with the verdict in the morning. Sherri Farmer was sitting in the courtroom the next morning, thinking about everything she’d heard in court, and was very surprised when someone announced a verdict had been reached. The Gusé family was parking their car, Doris Milner and her mother were somewhere in the building, but all went quickly to the courtroom. When the three counts were read, one for each girl’s death, Gene Hart burst into tears and held his face. The victims’ family members left the court, crying, and made their way to the D.A.’s office. Meanwhile the room erupted. Attorney Pitchlynn held Hart’s shoulder, Isaacs pounded the table; Hart’s relatives and supporters shouted and applauded and ran hollering out of the courtroom.¹²¹ Juror Lela Ramsey affirmed the success of Isaacs’ defense strategy and her longstanding doubt that Hart acted alone. “There wasn’t a one of us that believed that evidence wasn’t planted. We all thought that it was planted...I’m not saying he’s not guilty, but I am saying that...he was not one person done it by themselves. We all twelve agreed on that, that there was enough

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *Tulsa World*, 31 March 1979; *Tulsa Tribune*, 30 March 1979.

evidence to show that it'd been more than one person.”¹²²

The prosecution and investigators present were stunned. Ted Limke, the chief OSBI inspector on the case who had also spent every day of the trial with the prosecution team, was asked if the case would be re-opened. “There are no plans to re-open it. Why should we? We had the right man.”¹²³ They had no qualms describing the trial as a travesty of justice. “There ain’t nothing I can say that’s printable,” Sheriff Weaver remarked. “It makes you wonder if it ever happened.” Weaver said he had not been able to shake the death scene image of one of the victims from his mind, and hearing the verdict made “it seem like we didn’t see anything that morning.”¹²⁴ Weaver and other officers escorted Gene Hart out of the courtroom. Hart was returned to McAlester State Penitentiary to serve the remaining 205 years he owed the state for his previous rape, kidnapping, and burglary charges.¹²⁵

“An Enigma in Death as in Life”¹²⁶

On Monday, June 4, 1979, as was his custom every day since returning to McAlester prison March 31st, Hart worked in the prison law library, ate in the dining room, and then exercised in the prison yard. Early that evening, a prison guard stationed

¹²² Juror Lela Ramsey, “Stateline: Inside Oklahoma,” OETA documentary series, “Missing Pieces,” transcript, 7.

¹²³ *Tulsa World*, 31 March 1979; *Tulsa Tribune*, 30 March 1979.

¹²⁴ *Tulsa World*, Hart trial verdict frustrates investigators, 31 March 1979.

¹²⁵ *Tulsa Tribune*, 31 March 1979.

¹²⁶ *Tulsa Tribune*, 5 June 79.

in a watchtower saw Hart collapse in the prison yard. He was taken to the prison infirmary for resuscitation, then to McAlester Regional Hospital where they continued efforts to revive him. Hart was pronounced dead of a heart attack at 7:25 p.m. He was thirty-five.¹²⁷

The largest funeral in Mayes County history took place a few days later. Nearly thirteen hundred people filled the Locust Grove High School gymnasium. Hart's relatives took up three hundred seats near the front, while hundreds of other attendees and onlookers waited outside in the humid June heat.¹²⁸ A local Christian minister eulogized him as well as another Cherokee Baptist minister who spoke to the crowd in Cherokee. Hart was buried at a cemetery located near the Camp Scott property.

Despite the official autopsy report that the cause of death was a heart attack, charges and rumors about the real truth of Hart's death began immediately. Some speculated that inmates who believed Hart was guilty had murdered him. The rumors appeared to gain credibility when it was learned that a large quantity of cyanide was confiscated from prisoners at the McAlester State Penitentiary the day Hart died.¹²⁹

Gene Leroy Hart will always remain an enigma. Both the hunted and the accused, the escape artist and the victim, he was adamantly defended as an innocent scapegoat and yet was known to be a convicted rapist, kidnapper and burglar. Crying Wolf explained this powerful loyalty to OSBI agent Mike Wilkerson when he met with the old medicine

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Wilkerson, 270.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 270-271.

man at Harvey Pratt's suggestion, during the early part of the murder investigation. It is a long quote but very important to read in his words because of the depth of his understanding regarding how Hart was both perceived and protected by his community.

Assuming that he did these crimes—and I am assuming only for the moment that he did—he committed something that was against the very nature of all Indian people—he violated little children. This is too horrible to think that a Cherokee would do, and all the Cherokee people being kin would not accept him. Because of this kinship, the Cherokees around him would not believe that a relative is a child molester and killer. So consequently, living a life of deception, which Hart is certainly accustomed to, is nothing new. He is accustomed to having his people and family rally around him and assist him in his escapes and help him do whatever he wants to do. He is almost like a pampered child. I think you can see it in his nickname Sonny. I don't think anyone who helped him could admit that he would commit such an act because it would make them partly responsible for the things that he had done.¹³⁰

The unresolved truth about Hart's guilt or innocence seems doomed to the shadows, to rumor, to personal opinion. For the hundreds of supporters in the community, the courtroom, and later at his funeral service, he was a scapegoat and a victim who prevailed over the injustices against him. For the investigators, and many of the Girl Scout staff, his guilt is obvious: he tied one of the murdered girls in the identical manner of the two 1966 rape victims; the photograph found in the cave near Camp connected him, as did a counselor's corncob pipe and women's pocket mirror found in the cabin where he was hiding; he had bad eyesight and was obsessed with women's glasses—he stole Carla Wilhite's that night and was apprehended wearing another pair of women's prescription glasses in the cabin in the Cookson Hills. For the Girl Scout council staff and campers, and the victims' families, all of the evidence pointed to Gene Leroy Hart as the guilty culprit of a brutal crime that changed their natural world forever.

¹³⁰ Wilkerson, 211.

In her usual poignant and reflective musings on the tragedy, Carla Wilhite, the camp counselor who discovered the girls' bodies on June 13, 1977, distilled the mystery of Gene Hart in a manner that is analytical, sympathetic, consoling, and redemptive. Regardless of his guilt or innocence in this particular case, and regardless of the years his memory haunted her and hundreds of women, she let him go.

You know, they say Gene Leroy Hart was an animal, a monster. If we believe he was a monster, then "we"/society do not have to take any responsibility for the shape of man he became. If we say he is an animal, we deny our own evolutionary ascent from the hominid species and apes who make war, kill their own, and are predatory. But he was a man, shaped by his own internal experiences of living (maladaptive though they may have been), genetics, environment, and history. I find it a hard exercise to place him in a context. Rural culture, to be sure. Hunting, fishing, running through the woods and trees. Poor and without many prospects. Even poorer relationships with women. Mental illness? Probably. How many recluses do you know that have all their oars in the water? The Cherokee newspapers at the time talked about how articulate and intelligent he was, like those qualities should disqualify him from any stain of guilt...I find him...no longer to be enigmatic, martyr, or monster. Simply a sick man, bereft of any tethering to what is good and holy in the world.¹³¹

¹³¹ Carla Wilhite, email correspondence with author, May 7, 2012.

CHAPTER IV

KEEPER OF THE ASHES: 1977-1985

I hope that Scouts across the world have not had to suffer all of the indignities that we suffered as a result of the murders at Camp Scott, that [they] are able to camp freely, without the expectation of a male safeguard...I hope that Scouts are a part of their camp and that their camp is a part of them—that relationship has a powerful influence on a young woman's idea of herself and of the world.

- Michelle Hoffman¹

The Meaning of Camp

Soon after the murders, the Magic Empire Council embarked on what would become a long, critical, and introspective study about the meaning of camp for girls in northeastern Oklahoma. They would learn over many years how truly valued the organization was to the girls they served as well as how dependent they were upon the assistance of friends and supporters in the larger community. They would have to exist within a new security paradigm while trying to preserve the special relationship with the natural world that Girl Scouting provided for decades. The challenge of keeping these two priorities in harmony proved especially difficult during the early years after the tragedy, when so many girls and young women had vivid memories of what happened at their beloved Camp Scott. The pre-tragedy freedom to roam around on their own property, to sleep without fear, and to be relaxed in nature became part of their past and resulted in a mixed, complex emotional responses with regard to their future in the outdoors.

¹ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 7.

The council staff and board of directors made it their first priority to focus the remainder of that summer on the girls who had planned to attend Camp Scott any time that camp season. The leadership's steadfast resolve to continue outdoor programming reflected a long-standing historical commitment to Girl Scout traditions and experiences. Since its founding in 1912, the mission of the organization has always been to grow strong, capable girls into responsible young women by offering a wide range of challenging, educational experiences in their communities and at camp. Girl Scouting has focused on and provided girls with opportunities to become smarter and safer in the world while making friends and having fun.² The history of the organization's commitment to the outdoors added to the complexity of what a modern Girl Scout council now had to deal with. They tried to keep the spirit of Low's intentions alive while protecting their girls in this new, unwelcome but necessary security paradigm.

Juliette Gordon Low organized the first troop of girls in the United States in March of 1912 with the support and encouragement of her close friend Sir Robert Baden Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts.³ Although she initially agreed to call them Girl Guides, Low deliberately created an organization that resembled the Boy Scouts. While

² For more on the history of Girl Scouting in the United States, see Stacy Cordery, *Juliette Gordon Low: The Remarkable Founder of the Girl Scouts* (New York: Viking, 2012) and Gladys Denny Schultz and Daisy Gordon Lawrence, *Lady from Savannah, The Life of Juliette Low* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1958); Juliette Low and W.J. Hoxie, *How Girls Can Help Their Country, Handbook for Girl Scouts* (New York: G.S., Inc., 1913); Juliette Gordon Low, "Girl Scouts as an Educational Force" (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1919, Bulletin 1919, No.3.; *Woman's Being, Woman's Place*, ed. Mary Kelley (Boston: Hall Publishers, 1979), 252-264.

³ The name change from Girl Guide to Girl Scout happened in 1913 with great effort on Low's part. The first troop in Savannah started taking on the name Scout and used their preference as part of her strategy. Scout sounded much stronger and evoked more fun than "Guide." See Stacy A. Cordery, *Juliette Gordon Low: The Remarkable Founder of the Girl Scouts* (New York: Viking, 2012), 221-223.

some of the activities she promoted were occasionally criticized, no lasting objections to her program ensued, likely because of the way the program integrated traditional domestic arts with non-traditional male-dominated adventures and sports. Her girls played basketball (albeit behind curtains), learned canning and homemaking skills, and earned the Swimmer badge by swimming fifty yards “in clothes, skirt and boots.”⁴ Low carefully planned activities in such a way as not to shock or offend parents’ notions of what was considered proper and yet stretched the boundaries of the girls’ worlds by devising programs and national campaigns that directly appealed to patriotism and the World War I concept of national “preparedness.”⁵ Despite the focus on traditional women’s tasks such as nursing the wounded, some skills—lifesaving, navigation, and camping—fell under the umbrella of preparedness and thus became a valid way to educate girls in non-traditional skills.

While the pendulum of girls’ education swung from the gender-role-divided to the equity-based-feminist and then back again to a 1990s revisionist-single-sex-education model, the Girl Scouts’ educational philosophy remained firmly in one place, steadfast and true to the heart of their original thinking.⁶ In 1919, Juliette Gordon Low wrote,

⁴ See Gladys Denny Schultz and Daisy Gordon Lawrence, *Lady from Savannah, The Life of Juliette Low* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1958), p.321; Juliette Low and W.J. Hoxie, *How Girls Can Help Their Country, Handbook for Girl Scouts* (New York: G.S., Inc., 1913), 136; Juliette Gordon Low, “Girl Scouts as an Educational Force” (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1919, Bulletin 1919, No.3, pp. 3, 8.

⁵ Juliette Gordon Low, *How Girls Can Help Their Country: Handbook for Girl Scouts* (Washington, D.C.: Girl Scouts, Inc., 1913), 11.

⁶ A plethora of books and research came out of the 1990s that focused on girls’ challenges in school and society, with many espousing the benefits of single-sex activities as a boost to girls’ plummeting self-esteem issues in 1990s culture. See *How Schools Shortchange Girls: A Study of Major Findings on Girls and Education*, commissioned by the American Association of University Women and researched by the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992); Judy Mann, *The Difference: Growing Up*

“The adolescent girl longs for a place of her very own, where she can be herself, and where she can do the things she wants to do. The Girl Scout troop fulfills this need, because it is the girl’s own creation, founded and managed by her in cooperation with comrades of her own age.”⁷ While Girl Scouting chose to highlight the increased access to opportunities that Title IX and other popular feminist activism manifested in the 1970s, they would not budge in terms of extending Girl Scouting to boys and persisted in their belief in the value of girls-only programming.

Given the history and consistency of the organization’s girl-centered philosophy, no stretch of the imagination is required to see how the Magic Empire Council and its Camp Scott staff functioned as if they were somehow outside of or even above commonly held gender roles, gendered fears, and behavioral restrictions typically fostered in girls. Yet despite Girl Scouting’s historical commitment to providing a wide range of traditional and non-traditional activities in an all-girl environment, the organization has never described itself as feminist. Girls were, and are, their singular focus. Ginny Young saw little connection between the two when she suggested that the organization existed independently from feminism as she understood its definition: activist, 1970s, NOW image of women fighting for equality with men.⁸ “I think Girl Scouting—I hate to say it is above feminism because that sounds snotty—but Girl

Female in America (New York: Warner Books, 1994); Peggy Orenstein, *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap* (American Association of University Women, 1994); Neera Sohoni, *The Burden of Girlhood: A Global Inquiry Into the Status of Girls* (Oakland, CA: Third Party Publishing, 1995), and the bestselling, reprinted, Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (NY:Ballentine, 1995).

⁷ Juliette Gordon Low, “Girl Scouts as an Educational Force” (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1919), Bulletin 1919, No. 3, 3.

⁸ National Organization for Women, Statement of Purpose, 1966, *Major Problems in American Women’s History*, p. 450-452; Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back* (2002), 47-57.

Scouting is just based on girls being capable human beings. Is that feminist?...Our whole reason for being was to help girls to develop into competent, resourceful citizens.”⁹

The Girl Scout value that girls should be free to be whoever they want to be and learn whatever they want to learn closely resembled liberal, level-playing field feminism.¹⁰ From its inception, Girl Scouting provided for girls the same kinds of experiences that boys had in scouting. The organization survived and thrived by steering clear of socially volatile issues that might cause political and social scandal, thus alienating the very girls they hoped to serve, yet persisted in challenging gender-role norms in every single generation. Feminist ideas could easily be teased out of Girl Scouting’s educational model, but it was not a given nor an objective. The Girl Scout relationship to feminism is like its relationship to nature and to the outdoors—feeling free and unencumbered in nature can change a girl just as feminism can change a woman.

Camping and the outdoors has always been an essential part of Girl Scouting. A 1920 scouting manual declared, “cutting the camp out of the Scout year is like leaving the yeast out of the bread.”¹¹ Indeed, the peer community experience so vital to Girl Scouting culminated at camp, where the natural environment, camaraderie, and camp rituals passed from one generation to the next. In an outdoor setting free from the restrictions society has historically placed on girls and women, “in camp...girls have the opportunity to express themselves along lines quite different from those used during their

⁹ Ginny Young, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, January 25, 1997, transcript, 32.

¹⁰ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open* (2000); *Feminist Theory Reader* (2003), 13-14.

¹¹ Girl Scouts, Inc., *Campward Ho!* (New York: G.S., Inc., 1920), 10.

ordinary daily life.”¹² Girls developed a host of skills they were not likely to acquire in gender-segregated, home-centered domestic responsibilities. From its inception, Girl Scouts engaged in the same kinds of activities as Boy Scouts while at resident camp: canoeing, trailblazing, water sports, wood lore, fire building, archery, ecology and camp crafts, to name the most common.¹³ The Girl Scout Laws governed camp life protocol, and each day offered opportunities to earn badges, play hard, and learn from each other. In a camp community run entirely by women without gendered restrictions from parents or society, girls freely explored nontraditional activities and learned important life lessons that stayed with them well beyond the weeks spent at camp.

Or, as Catherine Savage Brosman—French literature scholar, poet, and Girl Scout—concluded regarding her memory of the Flying-G Ranch, “Camp did not prepare me for life; it *was* life. To inquire about its meaning is like asking the purpose of life.”¹⁴ Brosman spent a few weeks each summer at Flying-G during the late 1940s. In her reflective essay “Prospecting,” published nearly fifty years later, she recalls the camp experience as having significant meaning because of the gems of what remain about it in her memory—its “significance in the present.” Certainly during those years she learned many practical skills and outdoor living techniques, “a way with people” and “just plain horse sense,” but after so much time, what she has “forgotten cannot be essential, for as the self bends over the past, it identifies what it responds to, vibrates with—what it

¹² Ibid., 26.

¹³ Low, Juliette Gordon, *How Girls Can Help Their Country: Handbook for Girl Scouts* (Washington, D.C.: Girl Scouts, Inc., 1913), 129-136; Girl Scouts, Inc., *Scouting For Girls* (New York: G.S., Inc., 1920), 497-533. The 1920 manual has a much-expanded list of badges, or “proficiency tests,” including Motorist, Electrician, Economist, Business Woman and Sailor.

¹⁴ Catharine Savage Brosman, “Prospecting,” *The Sewanee Review* (Spring 1993), v.101, n.2, 208-09. (Emphasis in original.)

recognizes; the rest is worth little...That is what memory teaches us—the discovery of the essential.”¹⁵

By its very nature, the camp setting provided an essential kind of atmosphere in which girls gained a heightened sense of self-worth and directly engaged with each other as important members of a peer community. Anna Lawless tenderly reflected on her younger self and the profound impact camp had on her life. Smiling, she said, “I was such a strange little twelve-year-old child—and weren’t we all! That’s why we all bonded [there] because it was a place where we *did* belong and we *were* accepted. It didn’t matter who you were, where you came from. It didn’t matter at all.”¹⁶

More than fifty years after Girl Scouts understood these concepts, outdoor education writers argued the benefit of “wild spaces” for children’s social and educational development. William Hammerman’s *Fifty Years of Resident Outdoor Education: 1930-1980* made no mention of Girl Scout or Boy Scout history, camps, or outdoor philosophy, despite both organizations’ trailblazing in this field. Perhaps in response to the blatant omission, GSUSA published its own outdoor education manual in 1984, *Outdoor Education in Girl Scouting*. In the 1990s, fathers and nature writers Gary Nabhan and Steven Trimble observed that time spent in nature provided a setting for personal growth outside the confines of restrictive gender norms because “the land can empower by providing neutral ground for leadership. The earth allows children to be themselves, to be active rather than passive, to take control of their play, their time, their imagination. These possibilities break through some of the walls built around us by

¹⁵ Ibid., 208-209.

¹⁶ Anna Lawless, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, March 10, 2010, 10.

gender roles.”¹⁷ Girl Scouts knew this from decades of operating hundreds of camps and facilitating thousands upon thousands of camping excursions.

And yet for the women of the Tulsa council, the murderous violation of their own Camp Scott—in that very natural setting—collapsed this well-known benefit and took the air right out of it. With the numbing that followed, the crime challenged everything they had come to understand about the world and their place in it. How would they proceed? Would they keep camping? What Girl Scout traditions would survive to keep the spirit of Camp Scott alive now?

“Some Kind of Experience”

Michelle Hoffman asked several Camp Scott alumna when the campfire ashes tradition began, and no one remembered exactly, but all agreed that to be named the Keeper of the Ashes from one camp year to the next was a great privilege that evoked fond memories. Among troops who camped together regularly, the tradition manifested from one campsite to the next. When the girls broke camp and the ashes cooled, someone would scoop a bit of ash into a jar or a film canister and give it to a fellow scout, usually one of the oldest girls, to keep for the next time the group made a campfire as a symbol of friendship and continuity between Girl Scouts from one fire to the next. In spite of the stress and chaos in the weeks following the murders, fifteen-year-old Michelle somehow remembered this tradition. When she and an older counselor, Linda Henderson, came back to retrieve and pack up supplies, she wondered if she would ever

¹⁷ Gary Paul Nabhan & Stephen Trimble, *The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 75. William Hammerman, *Fifty Years of Resident Outdoor Education: 1930-1980*, American Camping Association, 1980; *Outdoor Education in Girl Scouting* (NY:GSUSA, 1984).

be at Camp Scott again. She found a jar and collected ashes from the fire ring at the camp's special place for Scout's Own ceremonies, Inspiration Point, just before they left that evening. For the next eight years, Michelle kept the jar of ashes through high school, college, and after; she counted it among her most essential possessions.¹⁸

By late June, Michelle and some forty-odd Camp Scott staffers waited to hear what would happen regarding their seasonal summer employment with the Magic Empire Council. Some of the counselors from out-of-state went back home, others found jobs elsewhere. Of those who remained and were willing, they were offered work at an impromptu summer day camp created for all of the girls who had planned to attend Camp Scott. The council leadership, in great part due to camp director Barbara Day, decided that they owed some kind of outdoor activity to the girls that summer.

Within three weeks of the tragedy, families of the 800 campers who had planned to attend Camp Scott received a letter that offered an "Alternative Camping Experience" that would begin on July 18, 1977. The letter stressed this was not an overnight program: "This will be an extended DAY CAMP situation," the letter read, and assured parents that "the facility is new, modern and very well-equipped."¹⁹ Of the hundreds invited, a total of 162 girls attended the one-week sessions. Even though the expense nearly bankrupted it, the council transported these thirty-odd groups of girls in air-conditioned coach busses both ways from their Tulsa parking lot each day of the week and hired security guards to be constantly on site.²⁰ A July 6 Magic Empire press release stressed that "for the security of our girls and the peace of mind of their parents," they would not be disclosing

¹⁸ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 7.

¹⁹ Magic Empire Council, Letter to GS Parents, July 7, 1977.

²⁰ Nancy McDonald, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, September 14, 1996, 2.

any more information about the location or duration of this extended day camp.²¹

Secrecy had now become entwined with security in their changed world.

The natural environment of the temporary day camp could not have been more different than Camp Scott. An open, arid, and nearly treeless Boy Scout property northwest of Tulsa, Zink Ranch was seventy-five miles from Camp Scott but closer to Tulsa. Girl Scout staffers and counselors moved their camp supplies to the new location from Camp Scott and tried to make the new place feel like camp. The main building also served as the bunking quarters for the counselors and other staff. While the girls' activities kept counselors busy during the day, once they left after dinner each night, Michelle's new fears crept in. Even though security guards were present at all times, she feared being alone outside the main lodge any time of day, but especially at night. "I was always wondering if someone was waiting out in the woods...watching."²²

Michelle now had reasons to be worried anywhere she happened to be. The search for Gene Leroy Hart had produced no credible leads, and in addition to that, another Girl Scout-related crime had made the front page of Tulsa's papers. In the early morning hours of June 29th in a Sarasota, Florida state park, a man abducted 15-year-old Charlotte Grosse from her tent while her sister and another friend screamed in terror. Two days later, Charlotte escaped from the home of her kidnapper, Wilfred "Rusty" Bannister, a 33-year-old construction foreman who drove a Porsche and lived in an exclusive residential development called Siesta Key. Newspaper reports offered conflicting stories about her condition, and detectives in Florida said they hoped the kidnapper was "a thrill

²¹ *Tulsa World*, 9 July 1977, and MEC document, July 6, 1977.

²² Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 3.

seeker, not a killer.”²³ Investigators interviewed Bannister but did not immediately arrest him. They assumed the abduction was a copy-cat crime related to the Oklahoma Girl Scout murders. Lawmen and physicians who examined Charlotte reported that she was in “good” condition.²⁴

Girl Scouts in Oklahoma dismissed such a naïve and benign attitude as wishful thinking. They knew that Charlotte could not be good by any stretch of the imagination. They did not feel safe most places now, especially outdoors. In this changed environment, they worked to create new traditions in places where men were both a threat and a source of security, and where Girl Scouts were suddenly neither autonomous nor free to roam in nature. This new paradigm was not easily incorporated and took years to reconcile. Michelle refused to relinquish her jar of ashes from Camp Scott to any old place—it became a talisman and a hope for healing. She waited a long time for a campfire that felt right. In the meantime, the staff and volunteer adults affiliated with the Magic Empire Council moved forward with a new set of rules to keep camping experiences alive for their girls.

The speed at which the Girl Scout council regrouped that summer reflected their deep commitment to keeping Girl Scouting alive and outdoors. Executive Director Bonnie Brewster recalled in an interview twenty years later that they made the right decision at that moment, and she held firm in her belief that girls benefitted. “We wanted our girls to have some kind of experience that summer. It’s like getting behind the wheel

²³ Bannister was initially reported to be a man of dark complexion who drove a blue Gremlin. *Claremore Progressive*, 1 July 1977.

²⁴ *Tulsa World*, 2 July 1977.

of the car after a wreck—to get them through that—and I think it worked fine. I think it was good for the girls that did go.”²⁵

Brewster’s use of the word “good” so many years later whitewashed what was a much deeper, disturbing reality at the time. While they may have been there in body, their blithe outdoor spirit was gone. Michelle remembered feeling numb and exhausted the entire four weeks, not to mention missing the canopy of trees that kept Camp Scott cooler than Zink Ranch. A disconnect emerged almost immediately between the now overriding and compelling concern for security and the subsequent loss of old traditions and familiar scenery. Despite the council’s good intentions for Girl Scouts’ safety in the new setting, one of the consequences of the tragedy was that it put many girls at odds with nature itself. On some level, most everyone understood the abrupt paradigm shift regarding safety and security, but it would take years to accept it, and years more to integrate new security measures in ways that felt normal. For some older Girl Scouts, that new normal never manifested. They wondered what resident camp and troop camping would be like for Tulsa area Girl Scouts now and in the future.

Make New Friends, But Keep the Old

The Magic Empire Council board’s refusal to surrender the outdoor component of Girl Scouting after the murders necessitated both creative and strategic solutions on the part of the new camping committee. Although resident camp had been integral to the Tulsa council for decades, council board member Sue Looney noted matter-of-factly that no one would have blamed Magic Empire if they abandoned resident camp altogether

²⁵ Bonnie Brewster, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, September 13, 1996, transcript, 4.

after the murders. “There are councils that do not have resident camping and we could have easily said, ‘Well, that’s it, we’re going to do everything else, but we’re not going to do that.’”²⁶ But a group of committed outdoor enthusiasts active in the council at that time influenced significant decisions regarding the preservation of camping. “We talked to Jo Eaton, Wanda McQuiddy, and Helen ‘Smitty’ Gray...all of those people who were 150% campers...and how wonderful that they were there when this happened because they kept it all alive.”²⁷ Although initially they were not exactly sure what future outdoor programming would look like in terms of place or rules, the core leadership all agreed that girls should be able to continue camping immediately.

During the weeks and months following, the deaths affected the council on every level imaginable. Any previous routine at the council office was usurped by the crime, the manhunt, and the overwhelming publicity, especially in Bonnie Brewster’s life and work. Summer months were the busiest most years anyway because, in addition to outdoor programming, they were also preparing for the beginning of a new Scout year in September. Although the emotional reserves of the staff and board were drained by having to deal with the numerous dilemmas the situation created, they somehow carried out regular council activities and programs on schedule. Bonnie Brewster recalled that “along in July sometime, walking out in the hallway and saying, ‘Is anything getting done? Is anything happening? Have the [fall registration] forms been printed?’ The staff said, ‘Forget it. Go back to your office. It is all being done.’”²⁸

²⁶ Sue Looney, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, January 25, 1997, transcript, 33.

²⁷ Ibid., 34. These three women were actively involved in Girl Scouting for decades, Eaton and McQuiddy for more than 40 years, and Gray for at least 60 years.

²⁸ Ibid., 4-5.

In 1977, the council served approximately 3,500 girls and had to keep running despite the chaos the murders created. One of the predictable consequences of such a tragedy might be that the organization would lose a significant percentage of its registered scouts. But records from the Magic Empire Council, and confirmed by GSUSA data in New York, shows that, in fact, participation did not decrease significantly. Membership at the MEC is calculated on a quarterly basis and in the 4th quarter of 1977, only a 5% dip in registration occurred when compared with the same quarter in 1976.²⁹ Despite their organizational efficiency, few words adequately described the sadness and devastation the board and staff experienced. Sue Looney remembered that “the first couple of times we met [as a Board], all we did was cry and deal with the raw reality that three little girls had been murdered on...our campsite.”³⁰

Rather than losing Girl Scout friends in the broader community, the organization gained allies and supporters from all sectors. Suddenly, one hundred percent attendance became common at board meetings, and different kinds of people were invited to be members. Prior to 1977, the board consisted primarily of Girl Scout volunteers, most of whom were parents and troop leaders. After the tragedy, the diversity of the board expanded to include school board members, attorneys, psychologists, police officers, accountants, and attorneys, both women and men. Nancy McDonald believed that the tragedy ultimately caused a citywide change in non-profit organizations and their boards.

²⁹ *Magic Empire Council of Girl Scouts Annual Report to the Tulsa Area United Way*, 1978, and “Girl Scouts of the USA Year-End Membership Figures, September 30, 1970-96.”

³⁰ Sue Looney, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, January 25, 1997, transcript, 5.

“When you served on a board of directors in Tulsa after this, it was no longer fluff. You had to be responsible and accountable.”³¹

By August, a Camp Scott Task Force was created and quickly began to devise a plan to study the issues at hand: the future of the camp property, new security measures, and the council’s outdoor programming. By November, three formal committees had formed to address these concerns: the Property Committee considered the Scott property as well as others fitting for Girl Scout programs; the Security Task Force, the kinds of security that should be installed in a resident camp; and the Programming-in-Camp Task Force developed the “where and how” of future alternatives for resident and troop camp events. The work of problem-solving groups solidified the board in new ways and ultimately strengthened the organization as a whole for the future of Girl Scouting in Tulsa.

For Karen Morgan, the leadership experience she gained as an adult volunteer and board member led her to pursue a college degree as a returning adult student. She was empowered to further her education and to commit professionally to Girl Scouting through this experience. In 1996, as Executive Director of the Ozark Area GS Council, she remembered those board meetings vividly: “We listened to each other. We listened to the girls and what they wanted and felt. We postulated ‘what if’s’...Our belief systems were strengthened [and] the diversity of people we utilized made us richer as a working body.”³² Finding positive outcomes after such a tragic event took years to recognize, but in the moment, the actions the board took had a long-term impact on many non-profits

³¹ Nancy McDonald, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, September 14, 1996, transcript, 6.

³² Karen Morgan, October 5, 1996, letter to author, 8. In 1990, Morgan was hired as the Executive Director of Ozark Area Girl Scout Council in Joplin, Missouri. The westernmost boundary bordered the Magic Empire Council’s easternmost boundary.

and public service agencies. Nancy McDonald believed that as a result of the crime, volunteering on any non-profit board in Tulsa took on greater meaning. “What the Girl Scout Council went through was a wake-up call for other non-profit boards...As a result, this community grew...there is an incredible commitment [now] to non-profits in Tulsa.”³³ Campfire Girls, now simply called Campfire, the YWCA and the United Way learned a great deal from the Magic Empire’s experience at Camp Scott and later at the civil trial, when it became imperative that “they now had to protect their boards with liability insurance.”³⁴

A New Security Paradigm: Fathers, Roamers, Armed Guards

Though humiliating for older girls and necessary for some younger ones, the new security rules included a return to gendered, old-fashioned ideas about safety: that the presence of men protects women from other, perhaps more dangerous, men. The most immediate and dramatic measure taken by the new Security Task Force was to require that two males, preferably fathers of scouts, accompany all troop campouts. Many fathers were happy to be included. Bonnie Brewster recalled that “one father walked in to my office and said, ‘I am here, I want to be involved in my daughter’s troop; [Girl Scouting] has got to keep going, and if we as fathers can make it go, we want to.’”³⁵ The additional requirement that two adults must stay awake all night further increased their efforts towards safety but also significantly increased the need and number of adult volunteers for these trips to take place.

³³ Nancy McDonald, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, September 14, 1996, transcript, 6.

³⁴ Nancy McDonald, correspondence with Author, December 13, 2012.

³⁵ Bonnie Brewster, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, September 13, 1996, transcript, 6.

Feelings about the new security measures were mixed. Some leaders, especially of older scouts, resented these new protective measures and viewed them as annoyances, as well as unnecessary restrictions. One woman felt that they “became helpless women in need of protection.” She remembered that their long ten-to-fourteen day backpacking trips became impossible [to organize] due to the need to have a man stay up all night as guard.”³⁶ Others saw the measures as difficult but necessary. Pat Gregston, long-time volunteer and president of the board from 1984-88, acknowledged the challenge this compliance presented. She said that “although you had personal feelings about what was happening as far as the policies that were coming out about camping, and the men, and all of that, you still had to do it because you were part of the Council, and you were a leader of the neighborhood; you had to do it.”³⁷ But “security fathers,” as they came to be known, were not always particularly helpful. One troop leader recounted camping trips with fathers who came toting guns and beer. Other leaders recalled not being able to go camping as often as they wanted to due to the fact that it was difficult to find enough fathers who were willing to go camping as often as the mothers were.³⁸ One woman who was among the younger scouts at camp that summer shared:

The presence of my father or of another girl’s father gave me the courage to continue camping. As an adult, however, I realized that this requirement destroyed my confidence about camping *without* a man along, even though I tried several times. The inability to camp free from anxiety is a permanent reminder of how much of an effect the tragedy continued to have on me.³⁹

³⁶ Anna Lawless, Questionnaire, 2.

³⁷ Pat Gregston, Group Interview, 1996, 60.

³⁸ Group interview, 27-28.

³⁹ Colleen Tosch, Questionnaire, 3.

Cecelia Elliot, long-time staff member and mother of a young scout who was not at Camp Scott that summer but still changed by it, wrote, “As a consequence of the tragedy, my daughter thinks that the only way to camp is with a man and a gun.”⁴⁰

The security that men conveyed by their mere presence suddenly had currency in an organization that previously had no prior need for such dependence on men. Of course, outside of Girl Scouting, this was still a socially acceptable idea—that men provided more security and made dangerous situations safer—regardless of inroads by feminists in the 1970s. Such gendered safety was part of the social norm for women in Oklahoma. For a few years following the murders, the council changed course and fell in line with society’s more common thinking about safety. The Security Task Force created a council-wide checklist based on a point system that rated certain features of camping trips, overnights, and resident camp security measures that would now be required preparation for council-approved trips. Fourteen points was the minimum number. The location/facility, the “Level of Girl Maturity,” (her GS level) the “Prevention of Access by Intruders,” and “Adult Presence in Case of Danger” (adult/child ratio) all had to add up to fourteen. Under this last category, in one of the earliest versions of this list, an “adult female awake and in sight of sleeping area” ranks with six points. An adult male doing the same was worth eight points. A professional security guard scored ten.⁴¹

Security, in their point-system approach, weighted the place, the adults, and the girls’ ages in various combinations, and attached a value to every aspect of the outings’ potential for danger. Particular kinds of fencing were rated, as was the presence of a

⁴⁰ Cecilia Elliott, Questionnaire, 3.

⁴¹ MEC documents, “Security Rating Checklist/Roamers/MEC Security Position Statement” file, 1978-1994.

locked gate. A three-strand fence of barbed wire, like that marking Camp Scott's property, counted for a paltry two points. Even an eight-foot chain link fence with three-strand barbed wire on top counted for only four points. Scout leadership knew a fence alone did not provide adequate security. The proximity of a resident ranger added three more. Public camping areas and remote backpacking trips appeared to be the most problematic—these both diminished security levels with a two-point deduction. An undated revision of the security-rating checklist kept the requirement at 14 points but removed gender-based points. If two adults remained awake at all times during the night, it counted for the entire 14 points. This revision made backpacking trips heavy on adult participation, but made also made them feasible.⁴²

When resident camping was offered again in 1981 after a four-year hiatus, pairs of volunteer "Security Roamers" were used to offset the cost of having professional security guards at the camp twenty-four hours a day. The Roamers were to be "extra eyes, ears, and feet, not law enforcers." Their instructions were walk the perimeter of the camp from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. with a walkie-talkie and a note pad, arrange breaks as needed, and join the campers and staff in the dining hall for three meals. If a roamer were to "see a strange car, person or happening," their instructions were to write down the information and report it to the Director. If a conversation ensued between the roamer and stranger ensued on the property, the roamer was instructed to ask if the person needed directions, and if necessary, tell them that the property is private. Additionally, roamers were warned, "Do not have a discussion about it being a girl scout [sic] camp."⁴³ The

⁴² Ibid., "Relative Security Ratings" circa 1978-79; Undated, untitled security document from the 1980s.

⁴³ Ibid., "Resident Camp Security Roamers, Introduction," 1981.

council's exposure at Scott had already led them to retreat to a camp within a camp, yet they still felt that it was important to give volunteers instructions for anonymity about the girls in their care. Being a Girl Scout at camp was still a dangerous affair.

The total number of roamers who volunteered the first year is unknown, but the next year's spring edition of the council's *Lamplighter* newsletter offered a creative marketing and recruitment idea for Summer 1982. It seems that by the second year, eager pairs of volunteers were not lining up to cover resident camp security. The newsletter offered this to its readers: "Need help planning a fun, restful, inexpensive summer vacation or activities? Spend a day—or a week!—on the shores of Tallchief Lake as a day-time Roamer at Resident Camp. Commune with nature while helping to provide security for summer campers, just 30 min. from Tulsa."⁴⁴ By making security seem "fun" and "relaxing," the council attempted to convey a chipper attitude about their new security paradigm. They worked hard to incorporate these new policies as seamlessly as possible, and with as much Girl Scout cheer as could be mustered.

In the mind of Executive Director Brewster, the new stringent security measures were not up for discussion and were not to be disputed. Such rules had to be followed in order for outdoor programs to exist at all in their council. The initial response of the organization to the security dilemma was to take complete responsibility for girls' safety while they were on scouting activities and events. "The first reaction I had was to be like the mother hen who would pull all of the girls in and put my arms around them and make [their safety] all our responsibility."⁴⁵ Years later, when the board was ready to rethink their security requirements, Bonnie Brewster recalled an officer from the Tulsa police

⁴⁴ MEC of Girl Scouts, *Lamplighter*, Vol. 7, No.3, Spring 1982, 7.

⁴⁵ Bonnie Brewster, interview with Amy C. Sullivan, September 13, 1996, transcript, 6.

department who was invited to discuss security with them. “I remember him saying to me, ‘We cannot protect all these girls. You cannot take that responsibility away from their parents.’ [He and the board] finally convinced me that parents do need to sit down with the leaders [to review the camp or outing plans] instead of the Council having to say we sign off on everything.”⁴⁶ In 1994, the Security Task Force recommended revisions to the “MEC Position Statement on Safety and Security” in a memo to the board. The document slightly reduced the number of adults required in the adult/girl ratio and significantly changed the role of parental consent regarding every aspect of a troop camping trips and other outings. Parents now had to “agree upon the nature of the overnight particulars regarding the facilities, sleeping arrangements, number of adults, security plans, and rules of conduct” before signing permission slips. If a facility was being used for the first time, the leader had to have personal contact with at least one parent or guardian of each girl going, and if it had been used before and there was a girl new to the facility in the group, that parent had to be personally contacted by the troop leader. When sleeping outdoors or in an unlocked facility, the leader had to get complete parental agreement and also meet the minimum requirements of the security point system.⁴⁷ By the late 1990s, the council finally understood that it could not possibly protect all girls from all harm during scout events. The italics are theirs: “It is the *Council’s intention* that reasonable and prudent safety and security measures be observed

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁷ MEC documents, “Security Rating Checklist/Roamers/MEC Security Position Statement” file, 1978-1994. “June 9, 1994 Memo to Magic Empire Council President’s Team: Recommendation from the Security Task Group.”

at all times...Its *goal* is...to reach, as nearly as possible, the threshold of feeling secure while girls participate in the program.”⁴⁸

After the tragedy, and subsequent hours of deliberative work establishing new security measures for camping, the Magic Empire Council believed they had devised a model for safety and security that all Girl Scout councils would benefit from. They sent their new policies to every council in the country, at that time more than 300, and pressed GSUSA to incorporate this system into national policy. No such thing happened. Years later, when security start to emerge in national policy, the tone was heavy on liability, parental consent, insurance and information about any possible risk to girls. The new rules had an all-encompassing impact on every part of Girl Scout programming.

Their neighbor to the east, the Joplin, Missouri council, took the new safety implications to heart. When Karen Morgan became the Executive Director at Ozark, she learned that after the murders they put security measures in place immediately. They installed perimeter floodlights and security phones in every unit, and volunteers stayed awake all night until years later when they decided to employ security guards.⁴⁹

“The Threshold of Feeling Secure”

The leadership at the council post-1977 knew that a sad but inevitable consequence of the murders might be the loss of that generation of campers. Besides losing the three girls, and eventually relinquishing the land to the power of its tragic memory, it became evident that a generation of their girls would either abandon camping

⁴⁸ Ibid., “MECGS Position Statement on Safety and Security,” undated document, copied by staff for author, 1996.

⁴⁹ Karen Morgan, October 5, 1996, letter to author, 2.

altogether or would always struggle to regain their courage to camp. One woman, a ten-year-old camper present during the Camp Scott murders, wrote, “I remained active in scouts until the seventh grade. As an adult, I have been a Daisy and Brownie leader for my niece’s troop. From the time of the murders on, I’ve read every article, book and seen every television report I could [about it]. I still absolutely refuse to camp.”⁵⁰

Not only had an essential freedom to independent experiences in a natural setting been taken from them, the camp itself had been taken, as had the innocence that allows a girl to think she is safe from human harm in nature. At some point in their lives, all girls and women learn that they are not as free to move about in the world as boys and men. Usually this knowledge is directly related to living in populated areas—towns, suburbs, cities—and girls learn their boundaries. But Girl Scouting, and camp especially, allowed girls to move freely in settings that were not always open to them. Camp Scott had been such a place. The intrusion and the violation that took place outdoors at their camp sent a message to a generation of girls that they were not really safe anywhere. One camper, well in her forties, created a list of fears she still has:

I cannot stand the sound of someone walking on dried leaves.
I cannot stand the sound of voices in a canvas tent.
I am avoiding taking my 7-year-old Cub Scout on camping trips.
I dread the day he asks to go to summer camp without one of his parents.⁵¹

Many troop leaders took immediate steps to regain the confidence lost among their girls. Karen Morgan led Brownie Troop #442 in Sand Springs, beginning in 1972. After the murders, she participated on many of the focus groups around camping and security needs. She saw immediately the intense challenge of keeping camping alive in

⁵⁰ Kelly Tomlinson, questionnaire, 3.

⁵¹ Sarah Jane Hopkins Mouttet, questionnaire, 2.

the Girl Scout community. In late summer 1977, she had an idea to remedy this and approached Bonnie Brewster with a proposal to host a council-wide campout at a Monty Box Ranch near Tulsa. More than 250 campers and their leaders attended the October weekend event that she had playfully named the “Wilderness Wanderlust Weekend.” She knew that as a community, “we had to overcome the fear of camping in tents, or of just being Girl Scouts.” Morgan did not lose any of the girls in her original troop after the tragedy and by 1983, she still had eighteen [high school graduates] whose final Girl Scout goal it was to go camping every weekend, “...and we did!” Her troop camped their way to Washington, D.C. one summer and in other summers went to Tennessee, Wyoming, and Colorado.⁵² They camped in rain, snow, and blistering heat.

The depth of dedication to keep their Girl Scouts comfortable outdoors is evident in the “Philosophy for Camping” statement, drafted in early 1978. The document reflected the effort of several small groups who were interested in contributing to the council’s “next steps” related to camping. The mere creation of a “camping philosophy” document reveals precisely how stripped to the bone the Tulsa council felt after the murders. They went back their origins, to Girl Scout values regarding nature, and to the significance of a girl’s *right* to her place in it. They needed to convince themselves all over again that outdoor programs not only matter, but lie at the heart of the Girl Scout experience.

The two-page statement confirmed their commitment to the outdoor experience for girls and, while expressing the environmental importance at the time of outdoor programs, the overriding message conveyed was that girls have the right to move freely in natural settings. “Girl Scouting from its inception has made it possible for girls to

⁵² Karen Morgan, questionnaire, 7.

experience the freedom and joy of being in the out-of-doors. As we move toward the 21st century and acknowledge the environmental crises, we have a new sense of responsibility.”⁵³

The “environmental crises” mentioned in this document obviously refers to the ecology movement that blossomed in the 1970s, but a much larger crisis loomed, and it was also environmental: suddenly girls and women were not safe in an environment in which they had previously felt completely at ease. The new sense of responsibility emerged as an effort to do more than just react to the murders; it involved a more visionary and long-term approach to the problems they now faced as women trying to preserve girls’ safe access to the outdoors. The document continues, “It is imperative that Girl Scouting renew its commitment to girls and affirm that: inherent in the Girl Scout program is every girl’s right to know, enjoy, appreciate and preserve the natural environment.”⁵⁴

Camping must always provide girls an opportunity to develop and strengthen relationships with other girls.

Camping must always provide an opportunity for girls to explore and interact in the out-of-doors in order to develop the desire and ability to contribute to the betterment of their world.

Camping must always provide an opportunity for a girl to really look at herself and really see others in order for her to build her own values and examine those she already has.⁵⁵

The focus on building relationships, both with other girls and with the natural world, was not a new concept in Girl Scouting.⁵⁶ The national organization’s 1920 *Campward Ho!*

⁵³ Magic Empire Council of Girl Scouts, “Philosophy for Camping” (1978),1; also found in *Safety-Wise*, Girl Scouts USA, 1977, 32.

⁵⁴ Ibid.,1.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.

manual reads: “There are a few things which every Scout should know after living in the open for a few weeks. One is that we are dependent upon people, and that people are dependent upon us; therefore we must equip ourselves to give; another is that the great out-of-doors is full of interesting things which can give us far greater happiness if we learn to know them and try for a time each year to live with them...”⁵⁷ The Girl Scout Laws governed the camp community, and days were full of opportunities to earn badges, play hard, and learn from each other. In a camp community run entirely by women without gendered restrictions from parents or society, girls freely explored nontraditional activities and learned important life lessons that stayed with them well beyond the weeks spent at camp.

Closing Camp Scott

The permanent closing of Camp Scott was agonizing, yet in hindsight, inevitable. The long process of its closing was methodical and deliberate. Initially, the committees agreed that the camp property would be retained, but that it would remain closed during the summer of 1978 (the suspect was still at large at that point), allowing for a thorough redesign of Camp Scott for a 1979 re-opening. The report focused on the relocation of the camp sleeping units, a conservation plan, and an “improved human security system.”⁵⁸ The Redesign Task Force began meeting in January 1978 and worked with an

⁵⁶ See Girl Scouts, Inc., *Campward Ho!* (New York: G.S., Inc., 1920), *Leader’s Guide to the Brownie Scout Program* (New York: Girl Scouts, Inc., 1945), *Girl Scout Badges and Signs* (New York: Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., 1990), and *Cadette and Senior Girl Scout Interest Projects* (New York: Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., 1987).

⁵⁷ Girl Scouts, Inc., *Campward Ho!* (New York: G.S., Inc., 1920), 27.

⁵⁸ Magic Empire Council, “Summary of State of Camp Scott & Resident Camping Report,” 1984, 1.

architectural firm. Initially, the committee's vision for future camp programs referred to the Camp Scott property and described how it would be changed to accommodate the new security requirements. Under the "Camp Skills" heading are references to safety and security. The former camping units at Scott would be used primarily as activity centers; the girls would only sleep there "if the security force is sufficient." The use of "push-button type alarms" and "portable communications equipment" by the adults present is woven into a description of the basic camping skills to be learned by the girls.⁵⁹ Camp Scott was to be transformed—reorganized and remodeled—but it would still remain the council's place for future camping programs. The crisis loomed bigger than their efforts to resume normalcy, however. When Gene Leroy Hart was captured in April 1978, with a trial date set for late summer, the committee decided to put this project and their planned capital campaign on hold "until a more appropriate time" due to the intense media publicity they were again immersed in.⁶⁰

Between 1977 and 1981, the "Alternative-to-Resident-Camping" experiences took the place of traditional resident camp and came to include a few kinds of outdoor options: an extended day program (8 a.m. to 8 p.m.), a six-day sailing camp, a nine-day backpacking trip, two-week horseback riding sessions, and a one-week ecology day camp. Between 66-77% of registered Girl Scouts participated in these programs each year between 1978 and 1980.⁶¹ Parental and volunteer participation was much higher as a result, and not simply for security reasons; these activities required much more planning

⁵⁹ Magic Empire Council, "Philosophy For Camping," 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁶¹ *Magic Empire Council of Girl Scouts Annual Report(s) to the Tulsa Area United Way*, 1978-1982.

than a single-location resident camp and involved the logistical and volunteer services of many more adults than ever before.

By the late fall of 1979, a council report indicated that Tulsa area John Zink Foundation approached them about creating a new resident camp on their property in a different location from where the day camps had been held. The board approved this site as a place to offer the council's first resident camp experience since 1977. In 1981, some 137 girls attended resident camp—a noble but meager number compared to the hundreds during Scott's history. Meanwhile, the Camp Scott property languished. The expenditures for maintenance and security continued while the council struggled with what to do with the property. Caught between the reality of the present—who they had to be for girls in light of the tragedy's impact, and who they had been previously, when generations of women associated Girl Scout camp with that particular place and its particular traditions. Those who wanted Scott to reopen lobbied for a council-sponsored camping weekend in 1983. The board approved it and plans were made. At the last minute, the trip was cancelled on the advice of the council's lawyers. The civil trial was still pending; what if something happened on this property again? They would be perceived as reckless and irresponsible.

Board President Sue Looney oversaw the entire process during her tenure on the board from 1978-82, and she came to realize that her newcomer status with this group was a blessing at the time of the tragedy. New to the board in 1977, Nancy McDonald had recruited Sue due to her twenty years of work with the Junior League. She had never camped at Scott and had only very recently become involved in Girl Scouting as a troop

leader for her daughter. “I was a neutral person because I came in fresh.”⁶² But she soon found herself in a very delicate situation. A group who had deep ties to the camp and wanted to reopen it quickly found themselves at odds with others who, despite their deep attachment to the land, felt convinced that the camp could never be reopened. Looney was able to hear both sides of the arguments concerning Scott.

I knew that I had to be cautious. I was not quick to push the board at all. And I know I frustrated Bonnie terribly. Because Bonnie—never in all of her life could she allow the thought of going back there. Yet she was placed in this position to try to administer to us as we were coming to this decision. And she had a [board] president that certainly didn’t want to make a quick decision.⁶³

Two groups with opposing ideas about what to do with Camp Scott met frequently between 1977-82. Initially, the camp was only to be closed until it could be reorganized and made more secure. These plans continued unquestioned for several years even though the council began to offer summer programs at the Zink Ranch location and elsewhere. Among the volunteers and board members were many who felt strongly that the camp should be maintained and reopened as soon as possible. According to Sue Looney, this small but vocal group was instrumental in helping the board organize cleanup trips to Scott. Nature had quickly “regained what was hers...[and we had to] throw out and clean up and see how we felt about being back on the property...We would visit the site where the girls were murdered...still trying to deal with the reality of it.”⁶⁴

Another spring cleanup trip was organized in March of 1983 and was seen by the planners as a testament of strength and devotion to the camp, a kind of “take-back-the-

⁶² Sue Looney, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, transcript, 10.

⁶³ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 12.

night” weekend to reclaim the violated space. At the last minute, this trip was canceled because the group did not have adequate security and it was felt that such a trip might inflame pending legal issues. “Bonnie and I would meet with the attorneys to discuss certain possibilities—what if we went up there to do a cleanup, is there anything legally that would keep us from doing that? Nothing we ever did could we make a decision without a legal interpretation we were so strapped as far as anything that we did. We just didn’t want to do anything that would influence negatively. We had a horrendous lawsuit ahead of us.”⁶⁵ Others felt that the sanctity of the camp was violated so severely that it could never be opened again no matter what changes were made. One woman said that she has often felt that there were four deaths: the three girls and the camp itself.⁶⁶ Nancy McDonald felt in her heart the very day of the murders that the camp would never reopen and she committed herself to finding another site. Despite her personal opinion at the outset, she knew that it was going to be a long and difficult process for the council.⁶⁷

The final decision to close the camp permanently and sell the land came about at a memorable board meeting where one member—an attorney and father—stood up and announced that if the board decided to reopen Camp Scott, he would immediately resign his position. Craig Blackstock told the group that he was not only concerned as a father of young children but as an attorney. If they returned to Scott and something like the murders were to happen again, it would surely be “the kiss of death for the Council.”⁶⁸ After months and months of meetings, trips to Scott, straw ballots, and hours of

⁶⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁶ Anna Lawless, Group Interview, transcript, 69.

⁶⁷ Nancy McDonald interview, transcript, 4.

⁶⁸ Sue Looney, 13.

agonizing discussions, the board had finally come to this decision. On June 26, 1985, the board agreed to a motion to “liquidate Camp Scott property as soon as it is prudent.” An attached Property Committee report outlined “the seven years of studies, facts and decisions.”⁶⁹ The 410-acre property was sold, and, as it happened, in the very same parcels, the same way it had been acquired by the Council beginning in 1928, and to some of the very same landowners.

Although most troop leaders shared the council’s commitment to continue camping, the loss of the Camp Scott property remained a sore subject for women who spent formative, memorable summers there. By 1977, three generations of Girl Scouts had been to Camp Scott, so for many older women active in the council, their daughters and granddaughters had spent summers there. One interviewee wrote, “Camp Scott was a major part of my life as a girl—a source of success as well as a ‘safe place.’”⁷⁰ Another board member who was a counselor at Scott in 1951, and remained active in the Council ever since, jokingly yet seriously announced that when she died she wanted her ashes scattered over the former campgrounds.⁷¹ Camp Scott was a mental refuge for adult women as well, long after the property was abandoned. “Within those few strands of barbed wire, I felt safe. In my mind, if things got stressful, I’d think I’d run away to Camp Scott and be safe. [Years later when] I was having a bad marriage [I thought] I’ll just run away, go there, and get away from all this.”⁷² For two or three generations of

⁶⁹ MEC, Information Section II, Regular Agenda, June 26, 1985.

⁷⁰ Anna Lawless, Questionnaire, 1.

⁷¹ Group Interview, 76.

⁷² Group Interview, 23.

scouts who had come to associate camp with that particular place, the decision to close the camp permanently also represented a deep fissure in the continuity and traditions over time. Anna Lawless wrote eloquently of how the loss of that property signified a fissure not only of one of personal connection to the land, but also the end of a generational connection to that environment:

There is a link, knowledge, and comfort to be gained from walking the same ground of women who went before you...The sum of that knowledge and wisdom that should have been our daughters' was cut off forever. There are new traditions growing to be passed on to daughters soon to come, but there is a big break in the passing-on, and I feel that break like a knife in my heart.⁷³

Claiming Camp Tallchief

Plans to open the site at Zink Ranch began in the summer of 1981 when the Magic Empire Council resumed resident camping on the donated property. The girls slept in a locked lodge, but had access to swimming, sailing, canoeing and hiking. The rocky and open terrain at the new Camp Tallchief was very different from the woods of eastern Oklahoma, but to the younger girls who now had access to resident camp closer to home, these details were minor: they were outdoors again—sort of.

For the first several years of operation, the girls and counselors slept in the same building, upstairs, “in a concrete and wood A-frame lodge.” Although they did not talk about the murders, the stark physical environment deepened their nostalgia for the landscape of Camp Scott. They had no familiar places “with memories wrapped around them,” no familiar landmarks or smells. Tallchief had no leafy canopy, but lots of dry scrub oaks, not much taller than the adults; scorpions and rattlesnakes were among their new neighbors. Locked inside at night, they fell asleep to the sound of the air conditioner

⁷³ Anna Lawless, questionnaire, 3.

humming “versus the sounds of the woods” and the mingling smells of canvas tents, “pine, and earth.”⁷⁴

A man the campers called Ranger Ray lived just north of the property, and he, along with a security guard or two—dubbed “rent-a-cops”—kept watch at night. A few years later, Tallchief staff discovered that one of the summer security guards had been among the officers who tracked down and arrested Wilfred “Rusty Bannister,” the July 1977 Girl Scout kidnapper in Sarasota, Florida. Michelle recalled another guard, too, with another kind of irony—“a woman who was as wide as she was tall, with dyed red hair, long pink fingernails, gum-smacking and gun carrying.” She found it both sad and funny to think such a person would be able to protect them in an emergency. Whether male or female, armed guards and other new security measures did not alleviate her fears, no matter how persistently she faced them. “I was terrified most of the time, but not where anyone could see it. I wanted camping to work again for myself and for others. The addition of “security guards...actually served as a constant reminder that women weren’t safe...I understood the council’s decisions, and would probably have done the same thing, but it felt degrading and unfair.”⁷⁵ Her sentiments were common among the women in their twenties and thirties who had a childhood history at Scott. During those first few summers, “It became painfully obvious that we had lost the ways of camping that we had at Scott.”⁷⁶

Construction of a fence around the perimeter of the main camp area, where sleeping, eating, swimming, and most activities occurred, began in earnest in a capital

⁷⁴ Michelle Hoffman, email correspondence with author, December 2012.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁶ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 4.

campaign to “buy the fence by the foot.”⁷⁷ At eight dollars per foot for an eight-foot tall fence with three strands of barbed wire at the top, Girl Scout troops, volunteers, families and businesses donated to have the girls’ new camp enclosed in a prison-grade fence. The *Lamplighter* newsletter featured a list of troops that donated in its “Girl Scout ‘Green Fence’ Honor Roll of Donors” and it appears that soliciting for the fence was a hard sell. The first list included a bit of shaming with the information that “Ninety-two Girl Scout families of some 4000 have purchased 122 feet.” The bar was set low for troops to earn a “free camping trip” to Tallchief because it required that a troop only had to buy one foot and half of its families had to buy one foot. Five of those first 100 troops met the criteria. The newsletter made a plea for increased participation by explaining that \$33,000 was still needed for the fence, that participation of all troops and parents was “vitally important.” The next newsletter, in the fall of 1982, updated the list and simply stated that “**145** Troops out of **387** registered helped pay for the fence at Camp Tallchief.” Three more troops were added to the challenge winners and a note at the bottom announced: “Thanks to you we have successfully raised the \$188,600.” The newsletter then explained that the Outdoor Living Center and security lighting projects were completed and that later in the fall, the fencing would be up.⁷⁸ Who donated this large sum is not clear, but thanks still went out to all Girl Scout families, as if they had all participated fully.

Thirty years later, the memory of Camp Scott persisted in the very links of the fence that surrounded thirty acres of the now-renovated Camp Tallchief. While the younger girls slept in locked cabins, some called “tree houses” because they had lots of

⁷⁷ MEGS *Lamplighter*, newsletter, Summer 1982 and Fall 1982.

⁷⁸ MEGS *Lamplighter*, Summer 1982 and Fall 1982.

windows and were situated higher near the tree canopy, older girls graduated over summers to less confined sleeping quarters; one was modeled after an Old West wagon train circle. But all of the campers slept within the secure fenced area, with vapor lights and security guard included. A Tulsa Girl Scout leader from the early 2000s described the extra diligence required by adult volunteers as cumbersome. “The Troop House and Camp Tallchief, with their eight feet high fences and barbed wire, appeared to my eyes and those of other parents as a stark symbol of Fear. Locked camp gates frustrated well-meaning parents... The surprisingly extensive indoor and outdoor [safety] training was confidentially rationalized to me by our well-respected outdoor trainer as an artifact of, ‘you know—Camp Scott.’”⁷⁹

Michelle’s devotion to Girl Scouting remained stronger than her frustration with the new camp paradigm. In 1985, as she was finishing her last summer as Assistant Camp Director, her mentor and friend, Camp Director Wanda McQuiddy, encouraged her to put the jar of Camp Scott ashes in the summer’s last campfire. At that point, now well into her twenties, Michelle scattered the contents of the jar over the fire ring, finally acknowledging in some small way that for future Girl Scouts, this place would be the council’s “new summer camp home.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Former MEC Girl Scout Leader Mary Milliken, correspondence with author, October 2005.

⁸⁰ Michelle Hoffman, Questionnaire, 7.

CHAPTER V

GIRL SCOUTS ON TRIAL: SAFETY, SECURITY, AND LIABILITY IN A CHANGED WORLD

- Mr. Gaither: You weren't prepared from a security standpoint to protect those little girls, were you?
- Mrs. Brewster: We believed that we were prepared to protect those children from any of those kinds of things that we felt could happen in the Girl Scout Camp.
- Mr. Gaither: So you didn't feel they could ever be raped, murdered, tortured or abused in your camp, did you? You didn't think that would ever happen, did you?
- Mrs. Brewster: Not in our wildest imagination, sir, could we ever have believed anything like that could have happened in the camp.¹

Bonnie Brewster sat on the witness stand in a Tulsa County courtroom. With his jarring list of brutalities, Attorney Jack Gaither insinuated that the Executive Director of the Tulsa Girl Scout council and her camp staff were ill-prepared from a “security standpoint” to protect girls in their care, but the raw and shocking horror of his question ricocheted around the courtroom, landing on no one in particular. What Girl Scout camp anywhere could have anticipated such heinous crimes on their property, under their watch? Were they so naïve, unprepared, negligent? The civil trial intended to answer that question on behalf of two of the three victims’ families. Filed fresh on the heels of the June 13, 1977 tragedy at Camp Scott, on September 25, 1977, the agonizing lawsuit had finally come to trial.

¹ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 2, March 21,

Brewster's testimony came at the end of four long days of witnesses summoned by the prosecution on behalf of Plaintiffs Charles and Sharon Farmer and Betty and Walter Milner, Jr. The Farmers initiated the lawsuit just three months after their daughter Lori's death. The Milners agreed to be plaintiffs as well, but the Gusés declined. Richard Gusé had been very involved with the Girl Scout council after the murders, even participating in the manhunt. For seven years, Attorney Gaither had gathered witnesses and collected depositions to prove that the Magic Empire Girl Scout Council was negligent in the wrongful deaths of Lori Lee Farmer and Doris Denise Milner. They sued the council, as well as their insurance company Hartford Accident & Indemnity, for \$2.5 million dollars in damages to each family.²

The inexplicable murders and wrenching violation of Camp Scott had by this time almost completely disintegrated the council's previously assumed and historically earned sense of autonomy, confidence, and freedom of movement on their own property. The crime forced them to respond to a new reality and put them in a defensive, protective position. When the civil lawsuit became official during the fall of '77, not another moment remained for healing, public grieving, or reconciliation of any kind. Attorneys for the council advised them that they could no longer speak freely about anything related to the murders, their new safety measures, even their sorrow. To show any kind of public expression about the tragedy could have been interpreted as an admittance wrongdoing of some kind or another, no matter how small. Besides the trauma of the murders, the rules of tort litigation now deeply altered their actions and reactions to these new circumstances.

² *Tulsa World*, 22 September 1977. The initial amount of damages was \$1.5 million each, but the day before testimony began, the amount was raised to \$2.5 million.

“Living in perilous times”

Within the Magic Empire Girl Scout council and Girl Scouting nationally, safety measures and corresponding rules had by and large created a feeling of security; as long as one followed rules regarding safety, a sense of security in the world nearly always followed. Their 1977 *Safety-Wise* manual for leaders reminded them that “sound health and safety principles must permeate every Girl Scout activity” because “when safety is practiced” participants will feel more confident and relaxed.³ Safety for Girl Scouts prior to 1977 was a practice, not an outcome of having security equipment and personnel. Evidence examined in court transcripts, private papers, and interviews demonstrates exactly how the council came to operate within an entirely new safety and security paradigm, and notably, points to the beginning of a major cultural shift regarding the meaning of safety and security in both public and private spaces; put in the simplest terms, roles reversed as formal security was quickly becoming an imperative for public and private safety.

Changes in U.S. litigious culture between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s also marks this trial’s place at the beginning of a sharp rise in tort law and stricter rules and requirements for insurance coverage. The Tulsa trial represented a microcosm of the nascent shift in thinking and action regarding liability, safety, and negligence cases across the country, especially as the public became more and more frightened by lurid murders,

³ Girl Scouts of the USA, *Safety-Wise* (1977), 1. When this manual was revised in the 1980s and in 1993, the tone changed considerably, with the added caveat: “While one can never guarantee ‘total safety,’ it is possible to manage risk so as to reduce unnecessary risk.” *Safety-Wise* (1993), 7.

child abductions, and sex abuse exposés.⁴ Local, national and international events galvanized Americans' insecurity and unease regarding the safety of children during this period. Philip Jenkins wrote that 1977 was, unofficially, the year of the child, when "attitudes towards children and their rights changed radically, especially in matters of sexuality, as sexual abuse and molestation appeared quite suddenly on the political agenda." Previous attitudes about rape and molestation had often implied some guilt on the part of the victim, but with increased feminist activism around rape and sexual assault of adult women, "concern about child protection shifted from physical violence to sexual exploitation."⁵ Child protection and the increasing trend in tort law cases combined in the tense, lengthy 1985 trial. At what other time in history could a Girl Scout council be put on trial for negligence?

Between the Camp Scott murders and the civil trial, Pope John Paul II, President Ronald Reagan, and John Lennon had been shot in public in broad daylight. The lengthy hostage crisis at the end of Carter's presidency and the 1983 bombing of the marine barracks in Lebanon increased Americans' anxiety about their own safety and security abroad. And although the murders seemed like an isolated incident, Oklahoma, like most other states, experienced an increase in crime throughout the 1970s and 1980s.⁶

⁴ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, "The Politics of Children: 1977" and "Predators" chapters offer an excellent overview of the key incidents and the moral underpinnings of how feminism, gay rights activism and increased crime combined to create the beginning of a backlash against late 1960s social and political gains.

⁵ Ibid., 111-113, 115-116. Child pornography exposés and extravagant statistics about the prevalence of child sex abuse were difficult to contest at the time because "expressing skepticism ran the risk of appearing sympathetic to the smut peddlers and abusers." The tone of the discussion changed significantly during the middle years of the decade: Jenkins found that "in 1976, an 'abused child' had been battered; by 1978, he or she had been raped or molested."

⁶ Ibid., 135-147. Jenkins identifies the different kinds of criminals who gained notoriety during the Seventies and Eighties, and looks at both crime statistics as well as studies that

The incorporation of military-type security measures, while sometimes fallible, nevertheless entered both public and private spaces during this period. Deregulation of certain industries, Reagan era tax cuts, and the privatization of certain public sector services led to, among other things, a booming private security business in the early 1980s. Not only were municipalities hiring private firms, but neighborhoods and housing developments both hired and created their own “faux police” force.⁷ Home-security system sales were on the increase.⁸ The proliferation of gated communities—whether houses, condominiums, or apartments—offered an even stronger feeling of security to residents in affluent urban and suburban areas alike. Within the gates, developers often included privatized services previously considered part of civic responsibility, such as security guards, street maintenance, parks and entertainment venues.⁹

Nationwide, images of missing children appeared on milk cartons and were delivered to mailboxes in the form of ads. Advo mailings, with a missing child’s photo on one side and an advertisement on the other, became both commonplace and a source of “oppressive anxiety,” as Paula Fass explained in *Kidnapped*. By the mid 1980s, the images of missing children on flyers, billboards, and milk cartons became part of the landscape, “a scar rather than a wound in social awareness,” a constant reminder of

compiled large samples of individual encounters with crime. In *Kidnapped*, Paula Fass explores contemporary kidnapping and the emergence of a “missing children” crisis in the 1980s, 213-255. State of Oklahoma Uniform Crime Bureau Reports show that the state fit the national average rise in violent crime throughout the 1970s, peaking in 1982. *State of Oklahoma Uniform Crime Report, Annual Report*, compiled by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, 1977, 18.

⁷Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics*, New York: Free Press (2002), 247.

⁸ *New York Times*, March 31, 1981, A1; May 15, 1981, A1; “Where Are All the Missing Children.”

⁹ Edward James Blakely, Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States*. (1997) Brookings Institute, p.5-8.

danger and yet these efforts offered “no real means to defeat the enemy who seemed everywhere.”¹⁰ In this new context, the Magic Empire Council found itself operating in a new world but still having to defend its old ways on the witness stand. Killers and rapists and child abductors could be anywhere at any time. How could they have not known this? How could they be so innocent in a world as treacherous as this one was becoming?

In this new era, safety was beginning to mean something entirely different from security; in fact, for the first time, safety presupposed security. Only when certain conditions had been met from a security standpoint would the feeling of safety follow because in increasing numbers of venues, it was no longer possible to feel safe without providing site-specific security measures. The two terms would never be categorized similarly again. The leadership at the Magic Empire Council, now on trial for neglecting their own charges, had to swiftly incorporate this new security paradigm while simultaneously defending past actions. In a world that had begun to see security as imperative, these trial proceedings were a test of changing times as well a microcosm of changes in the country at large. Certainly, every one of their decisions in Camp Scott history and particularly the past seven years would be scrutinized, amplified, and cross-examined.

The Magic Empire Council’s formerly benign, autonomous, women-led camping trips dramatically changed to include permanent and diligent attention to security; camping programs now factored in an expectation that another dangerous human predator might always be lurking just out of view. With the trial looming over them for so many years, anything they did publicly to make their camping program more secure could be construed as admitting their own culpability. Even though technically the trial was not

¹⁰ Paula Fass, *Kidnapped*, 237.

about how or whether the council adapted its policies and programs in the aftermath of the murders, the impending day in court effected every decision they made from 1977 to 1985. Sued for their alleged negligence on the night of June 12, the plaintiffs sought damages for the pain and suffering the tragedy caused their daughters and their families.

The prosecution's strategy was to show that if the camp staff and volunteers had interpreted disparate incidents at camp differently and then operated with the expectation of a malicious intruder, then they would have been prepared to avoid such a calamity. Jack Gaither, the prosecuting attorney for the two families, argued that the Girl Scouts were living in the past: "It's time to [send a message to the Girl Scouts to] park the horse and buggy and face up to the world in which we live. We're living in perilous times."¹¹

His logic, as seen in his line of questioning with Bonnie Brewster, suggested that they had not factored in the possibility of such a tragedy and thus had behaved irresponsibly for the entire duration of the camp's history. To the contrary, the Girl Scouts continued to keep all aspects of their programming current with each passing decade, altering activities and badge books to reflect girls' changing interests from one generation to the next. But camping was in a category of its own. The rustic environs, the canvas tents, the dark, the swimming hole—these were the things that made Camp Scott a haven from the pressures of the "perilous times" adults obsessed over.

The Crime Revisited, The Grief Made Public

Testimony began in the Tulsa County District Courthouse on Tuesday, March 19, 1985 and concluded after seven full days. A total of thirty-nine witnesses took the stand and eleven depositions were read into the proceedings as additional evidence to prove the

¹¹ *Tulsa World*, 28 March 1985.

damages suffered by the families and the negligence that held the Girl Scout council liable. The plaintiffs' attorneys presented four days of witness testimony, and much of what transpired in the courtroom deliberately mirrored the 1979 proceedings against the accused murderer Gene Leroy Hart. Dan Rogers, defense attorney for the Magic Empire Girl Scout Council, believed that Gaither used the trial as a way to prepare for the civil case: "I know that Gaither attended every day of the criminal trial...he got acquainted, as a spectator, with a number of people he might use as witnesses...He actually investigated his case by watching the criminal trial."¹²

Dan Rogers and Jack Gaither were fraternity brothers who graduated from the same law school class in 1950. Rogers described him as "the smartest fellow in the class—a brilliant lawyer with a brilliant mind."¹³ Rogers said he was somewhere in the middle ranking of their class, but that "the Lord blessed [him] with the gift that people usually like me." He said he'd been sinful because he took advantage of this gift when practicing trial law. He won his first case against Jack, fresh out of law school. But Gaither had an outspoken style and used the media to his advantage whenever he could.¹⁴ This case fit the bill.

As Rogers predicted, Jack Gaither opened testimony by retelling the lurid details of the crime and explained that he would make his case by citing a list of nineteen examples of incidents over a fifteen-year period that should have alerted Girl Scout staff

¹² Dan Rogers, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, Tape 1 Transcript, 3.

¹³ Ibid., Tape 1 Transcript, 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., Tape 1 Transcript, 4-5.

to the potential for danger to the girls by malicious intruders.¹⁵ He focused on the alleged neglectful actions of the camp staff, outlined his plan to show what a secure camp would look like, one that would present a stark contrast to the leafy wooded landscape of Camp Scott. He called on the two victims' mothers to show the depth of their grief. He spent hours submitting to the court almost identical testimony about the murders from the 1979 criminal trial record of Gene Leroy Hart. Tulsa newspapers and television stations re-ran weary stock photographs of the army green platform tents, the Camp Scott sign, and the surrounding woods.

On the second day of the trial, the jury heard lengthy testimony from the victims' mothers. Sherry Farmer and Bettye Milner were called to the stand to answer questions about their daughter's personality and their pre-camp preparations. Each woman—visibly still grieving—was asked to identify exhibits for the jury, once known simply as Mother's Day cards, drawings, and elementary school progress reports.¹⁶ This moment of the trial speaks to many issues. Besides the alleged Girl Scout council liability, the exercise was also publicly cathartic. The way Gaither organized the evidence allowed for a testimony of sentiment and loss about the girls as girls themselves, before they became murder victims. No such catharsis happened at the 1979 criminal trial. The grief narrative was not, however, new to Lori's mother. Sherry Farmer, the mother of the youngest victim, had actively sought out media publicity every year on June 13th by inviting the press into her home to film photos, mementos, and Lori's preserved bedroom for the five o'clock news. Speaking to the press had become so regular for her that during the course

¹⁵ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 1, 59; *Tulsa Tribune*, 18 March 1985.

¹⁶ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 1, 95-142.

of the trial her lawyer had to reprimand her for speaking to the media. Although quieter and more reserved, Bettye Milner, mother of Denise, also wanted the jury to know her daughter was a loving, confident child who was missed terribly.

Jack Gaither asked Mrs. Farmer whether she had been assured by the council's camp brochure that Camp Scott was a safe place. She admitted that she was not overly concerned about her daughter's safety at camp, and that she had "placed a lot of confidence in the Girl Scout organization and brochures and the troop leaders." She knew her daughter would stay in a tent but "the words 'wilderness' or 'primitive' were never used."¹⁷ Gaither's strategy to discredit the council at this point was certainly enhanced by the raw emotional state of the mothers' memories. The families were escorted from the courtroom before the entry into the record of the description of the murders.

Eight years distance did not make much difference when the next witnesses were called upon to describe the girls' deaths in gruesome detail. Even with the antiseptic language used by the forensic pathologist and chemist, the brutality of the crimes against these girls' bodies could not be minimized. More than eighty pages of the testimony in the first day's trial transcript of 237 pages directly involve the murder scene and the autopsy reports. Dan Rogers objected many times during these long hours because he knew Gaither was focusing on the murders for as long as he could in order to elicit and reawaken the horror of the event and galvanize as much sympathy as possible from the jury at the outset.

To expose the negligence of the Girl Scout leadership, Gaither included the former Mayes County sheriff and several girls who were campers that night who had also testified at the criminal trial about sounds and strange men on the premises. In an

¹⁷ *Tulsa Tribune*, 19 March 1985.

unusual allowance by the presiding judge, he was allowed to call witnesses as he needed them for specific parts of his case.¹⁸ This afforded him considerable freedom to pick and choose witnesses as the trial progressed, and initially appeared to give him an advantage over the defense.

Corliss Oates, a woman who stayed in a Camp Scott cabin for two weeks with a girlfriend in 1970, described the earliest incident Gaither introduced. During the next to the last night of their stay, they heard something “scratching” and “picking at the screen.” They screamed and counselors came from two directions. Footprints were found in the dew the next morning, and although they reported it to Smitty, she told them not to worry other girls, as “She’d take care of it.”¹⁹ Troop leader Sue Harrington testified that in 1971 her troop became frightened when two girls spotted a man leaving a latrine, and when she went with another leader to investigate, they saw the man jumping the barbed wire fence. The same group later discovered food missing from their kitchen area.²⁰

Girls who had been campers that night, now teenagers or young adults, testified about screams they heard that their counselors allegedly dismissed. Merrilea Tennant, age eight in 1977, described seeing a man walking on the road near the camp. Johnna Wright, also recalled seeing a man near the Kiowa unit, and when she asked her counselor about it, was told not to worry, that he “was her boyfriend.”²¹ In fact, the boyfriend of counselor Susan Emery was on the property that evening, but this fact was never entered

¹⁸ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 1, 80.

¹⁹ Ibid., 253-256.

²⁰ Ibid., 242-250.

²¹ *Tulsa Tribune*, 20 March 1985.

into the record.²² The prosecution did read into the record numerous depositions collected during the years of trial preparation, including the 1981 deposition of Carla Wilhite, the camp counselor who had reported hearing a moaning sound that she investigated alone after midnight, and who also found the girls' bodies the next morning.²³ Another counselor discovered that the canvas flap of a tent in her unit had a large section cut out of it; two campers reported seeing a man on the road; one camper saw a man's feet near the latrine she was in after dark. According to a deposition taken in 1981, during a 1977 spring camporee, a teenaged Cadette Girl Scouts found a note inside an emptied donut box in their tent that, according to her testimony, read "something about Martians...and in capital letters it was printed, 'We are on a mission to kill three girls in Tent 1.'"²⁴ She thought it was a prank and later told the leader in charge.

In all of these incidents, as well as several mentioned during former camp director Helen Gray's testimony, Gaither tried to show a pattern of complacency by the staff over time of not being concerned, of dismissing the incidents as pranks, as minor trespassers, or perhaps as hunters moving through property on their way somewhere else. The camp property was located in a very remote, hilly, and wooded part of northeastern Oklahoma where land is used more collectively for hunting and fishing. The area is also home to many Cherokee whose familiarity with the landscape and their use of its natural resources for activities such as fishing or hiking, presupposed other kinds of ownership.] Helen

²² Emery's boyfriend was among the first suspects to be questioned and was cleared of any wrongdoing. Susan Emery, transcript, 5.

²³ Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. I, 155; and *Tulsa Tribune*, 21 March 1985.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 360-370.

Gray and other staff, such as the caretaker Ben Woodward, were familiar with the comings and goings of local people on the land, both white and Cherokee. Security at Camp Scott was more about that kind of familiarity: an awareness of one's surroundings combined with longstanding relationships with neighbors offered as much security as the camp felt necessary.

The prosecution tried to capitalize on local knowledge as well. He called on former Mayes County Sheriff Pete Weaver, who again made headlines. Weaver testified that if he had known the camp was going to open, he would have warned the Girl Scouts about a convicted rapist in the area. He also said that he would have been very alarmed to learn about the missing piece of tent flap discovered by a counselor the day before the camp season began. Weaver seemed to need to redeem himself in this trial. The irony of his motivation for testifying on behalf of the families was not lost on Dan Rogers, who took the opportunity to put another spin on Weaver's too-little-too-late performance. When Gaither had finished questioning Weaver about the murders, the camp, and its lack of security, he followed courtroom and said, "Pass the witness." As soon as Gaither said this Rogers did not skip a beat, did not allow the stenographer a moment's rest, jumped up for his turn with Weaver and said, "They damn sure didn't get any security from you, did they?"

And Weaver said, 'What do you mean?' And I said—I didn't know the answer to this and I didn't care what his answer was—'How many times were you out, ever out at Camp Scott before this occurred?' [Weaver said] 'I never did have an occasion to go out there.' How long have you been a sheriff of this county? Who is the chief law enforcement officer of Mayes County? You say that you didn't know girls were coming out there? So you're telling this jury that in all the years you've been the sheriff that on the first Sunday in June every year for forty-nine years that camp has been opened with one hundred girls...and you didn't know?²⁵

²⁵ Dan Rogers, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, Tape 3 Transcript, 5-6.

Rogers remembered that Weaver sheepishly and quietly admitted yes, he had not been to Camp Scott. In fact, in all his years as Sheriff, he had never once visited the camp nor warned the two camps in his jurisdiction of the escaped convicted rapist, the then unnamed but well-known Gene Leroy Hart, who had been on the loose for a full three years and whose mother lived less than a mile from Camp Scott.

Grief Psychology and Victims' Rights

To expose the long-term grief that the families were still suffering, close friends of the parents, the girls' fathers, a social worker, and a psychologist were called to testify. Dr. Steve Sunderland, a professor of Social Work, testified on behalf of the families and described the psychological ramifications of their losses as an on-going "wheel of pain." He explained that because their children were murdered, the normal grieving process was off-balance, and the victims' parents would continue "to experience larger and larger amounts of pain, whereas parents whose children die naturally or in an accident have seen their pain diminish in time."²⁶ Their daughters' violent deaths only increased the depths of their grief and their anger.²⁷ The Farmers had channeled some of this pain by forming a local chapter of a new national organization, Parents of Murdered Children (POMC). Sherri Farmer started a Tulsa chapter in the early eighties and testified that their participation had indeed diminished some of their frustrations. Established in 1978, Parents of Murdered Children is a national, non-profit organization founded by Charlotte and Robert Hullinger of Cincinnati, Ohio in response to the incredible grief and

²⁶ *Tulsa Tribune*, 23 March 1985.

²⁷ Dr. Steven Sunderland, Civil Trial Court Transcript, Vol. 3, 682.

loneliness they felt when their daughter Lisa was murdered by her high school boyfriend.²⁸

The presence of expert psychologist witnesses reflected the broader social acceptance of mental health issues during this period. Historian Ellen Herman argues that this was a product of a new understanding about the usefulness of psychology in everyday life. She noted that “psychology’s rise to power during the postwar decades changed ordinary Americans’ expectations of their lives by publicizing the pertinence of emotion, the virtue of insight, and the unavoidability of subjectivity in the conduct of private and public affairs.”²⁹ That the families were willing to expose their damaged emotional conditions on the witness stand speaks to the increased presence, legitimacy, and power of psychology in this period.

Dr. Sunderland likened the early POMC small group meetings to the “consciousness raising” sessions of an earlier era when people gathered around social justice issues. He recalled that the first time the group invited him to attend as an observer only, he was so deeply moved by the grief in their stories, he could hardly stop weeping. After attending a few meetings, he realized he had tangible grief support skills to offer them, they accepted his assistance, and the work began to create a national organization for families who had lost loved ones to murder.³⁰

²⁸ Parents of Murdered Children is a national, non-profit organization founded in 1978 by Charlotte and Robert Hullinger of Cincinnati, Ohio.

²⁹ Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1995), 305.

³⁰ Interview with Dr. Steven Sunderland, December 17, 2012.

The victim's rights movement emerged as a direct result of small groups of people sharing their stories—mostly painful—with the criminal justice system and how they were treated. POMC was the first organization in the United States to create both a support organization for grieving families and a public policy-making entity for what would become a national movement. The history of the group and its nationwide growth in a few short years reveals how victims gathered together to emotionally heal from increased incidents of personal violence, but how they also felt empowered as a result to organize, lobby, and eventually, win legislation on behalf of victims of violent crime. Steve Sunderland admitted that it took some time for him to make the connection between the grief the parents experienced and their role as secondary victims in a criminal justice system that appeared to be skewed towards perpetrators. Their childrens' lives seemed to be worth less than their murderers' when parole boards met. One of the first political acts of Parents of Murdered Children was to pressure state parole boards when a child murderer was up for early release or parole.³¹

Although the Gusés refused to join the lawsuit against the Girl Scout council, Richard Gusé became highly involved in this burgeoning victim's rights movement, and worked with the Governor and the Oklahoma State Legislature pass the Oklahoma Victims' Bill of Rights. For many years he served on the Oklahoma Crime Victims' Compensation Board, an entity that gained even more relevance after the 1995 Murrah Building bombing in Oklahoma City.³²

³¹ "Origin of POMC," *Parents of Murdered Children, Inc.*, 16 March 2013, <http://www.pomc.com/history.html>.

³² Fullerton, Robbie, "A Brief History of Oklahoma Victims' Rights Laws," Oklahoma Department of Corrections newsletter, Dec 2007, www.doc.state.ok.us/insidec/12_07/dec07.htm.

Camp Security: Flashlights vs. Vapor Lights

To show to the jury how a secure camp would operate, the prosecution included among their witnesses a security expert, an outdoor lighting technician, and photographs of a few seemingly safer camps in the area. He repeatedly portrayed Camp Scott as a highly dangerous place in every possible way and highlighted defects of care, “gross negligence,” “callous indifference,” and poor judgment on the part of camp staff.

Overgrown trees, abundant underbrush, and poor lighting, when combined with previous witness testimony about alleged incidents of “intruders,” painted a picture of the camp as a disaster waiting to happen. Gaither also presented film footage of the camp, taken after months of abandoned neglect, as if it were how the property had always appeared. Little did he realize that his effort to construe nature as dangerous, and that only through strict maintenance of foliage and underbrush could it be considered safe, directly contradicted the objective of outdoor programming in Girl Scouting.

A 1959 GSUSA manual, *Program in Girl Scout Camping*, highlights the “leave no trace” philosophy regarding the camp site itself: “Everything that grows or is static, that creeps or crawls, that runs or flies, that leaps or swims, attracts the imagination. Girl Scout camp leaders, wherever they may be, direct their attention to all that is on, under, around and over their outdoor home...going at night to the washhouse unfrightened by a prowling skunk gives [girls] courage to face more frightening encounters.”³³ As naïve as this quote may have seemed under the 1985 trial circumstances, it reflects the outdoor philosophy that Camp Scott staff embodied for almost fifty years.

³³ Janet Tobin, *Program in Girl Scout Camping*, New York: Girl Scouts of the USA (1959), 7.

Yet Gaither's evidence tried desperately to reveal that the Girl Scouts were not paying attention to the dangers of the real world. In his closing argument, Gaither suggested the very opposite: that the murders were a culmination of years of neglect on the part of the council. On that night, "every girl in Camp Scott was a target for a deadly game of death which was being played to its conclusion...in a perfect environment which had been provided by the operators of that camp over a period of many years."³⁴ What he did not understand was that for all those years, they *were* creating an environment perfect for Girl Scout camping programs, based on decades of experience keeping the land as unmanaged and yet as inhabitable as necessary for their girl-centered programming objectives, as some of his questioning soon exposed.

When Gaither cross-examined Helen Gray, known most widely in the council by her camp name Smitty, he was interrogating one of the women who most embodied the Camp Scott sense of fearlessness and autonomy on their property. His attempt to turn her initial testimony with Rogers into proof that the women in charge of the camp were callous and dismissive of alleged "intruder" incidents backfired completely. He tried to implicate her as being careless and covering up what he argued were dangerous incidents, and yet he did not understand that many of the examples of contact with strangers on camp property happened during other times of the year when she was not in charge or on the premises. The realization of this oversight during the testimony did not stop him. He mocked her "trusty flashlight," even when it was clear from an incident she recalled under oath that it was her flashlight that let some prank-playing Boy Scouts know she

³⁴ Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 3, 875.

was watching them.³⁵ A personal flashlight was required camp equipment and she believed made potentially dangerous, nighttime moments safer. Chiding her use of it as naïve illuminates the difference between the Girl Scout concept of safety versus the kind of safety envisioned in hindsight of the murders.

At the time of the trial, Helen Smitty Gray was in her mid-sixties. Born in 1919, she grew up in Tulsa and had attended Camp Scott during its second year of operation in 1929. She returned as an adult to direct it for more than ten years with her last year there in 1974. If any one person symbolized all that the camp represented, it was Helen Gray. She was not flustered by any question or insinuation Gaither attempted. The women who ran Camp Scott felt completely at ease on the grounds, believing they had the ability to deter trespassers themselves with a simple statement.

In stark contrast to Smitty, expert witness Sergeant Paul Thompson represented someone on the cutting edge of the new security paradigm. Called by the plaintiffs, Thompson provided a well-rehearsed, presentation-style testimony for the jury. He began with an extensive description of his career and described himself as a freelance “security and life safety” consultant who also worked as a security officer for American Airlines in Tulsa. He had extensive military training, and previously worked as a military police officer overseas and as a secret service agent for President Johnson after he returned to his ranch in Texas. After a lengthy and almost completely uninterrupted narration of his extensive security knowledge, he analyzed for the jury the aerial photograph of Camp Scott to show how dangerous and penetrable a place it had been.

³⁵ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 3, 831-852.

Dan Rogers interrupted Thompson's testimony by invoking what he described as "*voir dire* questions of the witness" concerning his qualifications. Judge Beasley allowed the brief questioning, and then the jury learned that Sergeant Thompson had actually designed security for military camps, never for children's camps. Satisfied that the witness was not qualified for this expert testimony, Rogers objected to it, and his objection was overruled once again. Thompson was allowed to continue at length with his own "ten-point plan for life safety and security" that would have made Camp Scott secure. He used the Kiowa unit where the girls were murdered as a comparative example to show how his plan would have made for a more safe camp facility.

Thompson's description of a secure camp included placing tent units closer to one another, removing trees and foliage that blocked the view of the tents, an integrated communication system that connected counselors to each other and to the director, a three-hour night watch shift shared by counselors, a security light at every unit, and an armed security guard with a properly equipped vehicle. His final suggestion was that the camp needed "perimeter security," and not the expensive "alarm device, electric eye, modern, man-made" kind, but something "as simple as stringing a wire among the trees and hanging tin cans or pie pans" that would "alert this wide wake, vigilant counselor to the fact that something is out there."³⁶ Although later taken to task by Rogers, Thompson included in his plan very simple security measures such as each girl wearing a whistle around her neck for emergencies only, a cowbell hanging on one of the poles of each tent, and regular bed checks by the counselors on night watch throughout the night. How a cowbell was any more of an advanced security technology than a flashlight remained unclear.

³⁶ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 2, 407.

Despite what seemed imperative for the council's security and safety paradigm after the murders—they were already implementing much of what Thompson's recommended—Dan Rogers still had to defend them for their actions in 1977, and he handled this witness deftly. During his examination by Gaither, Thompson mentioned that in order to create his plan, he had used documents provided by the Girl Scout council, including a September 1977 document written for the council by Peter Dailey, a property investment consultant and a Mr. Cowherd, a security consultant. After Thompson admitted that he had great respect for Mr. Cowherd, Rogers asked him to read out loud a portion of the letter itself. Thompson read, "It is impossible to secure a camp. Security becomes a thing which is relative. No amount of fencing or electronic devices is going to secure a site. The implications of attempting to secure a site which is secure to the Nth degree, as a military installation might be, means the end of camping." The excerpt goes on to suggest that one way to ensure some security is to use "common sense in design and layout" and have campers sleep in dormitory-type structures. Although safer, the consultants concluded that this kind of camp "defeats the whole purpose set forth in the Girl Scout Camping Program. If camping is to continue, we may just have to be willing to modify our programming to accept this."³⁷ Mr. Cowherd understood that camping as the Girl Scouts formerly knew it would have to change, and even though it seemed to contradict their previous objectives regarding outdoor programming, their current situation required that they modify camping rules to ensure the safety of campers now and in the future.

The testimony of Camp Director Barbara Day offered the most articulate awareness of how, as a result of the murders, the Magic Empire Girl Scouts learned to

³⁷ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 2, 413-14.

how to distinguish the difference between being safe and being secure in their changed world. A new face at the Tulsa Girl Scout council as of January 1977, the summer session was Day's first at Camp Scott. On the witness stand, she testified about her on-site training at the camp itself and about a course she attended at the national Girl Scout training center in New York. Previously unfamiliar with the camp property or the nearby community of Locust Grove, she met personally with local law enforcement agents, doctors, postal workers, and grocers who supplied goods and crucial services to the camp, especially during the resident camp season. Yet on the witness stand, her preparedness as camp director was overshadowed by the prosecution's portrayal of her as an outsider, and someone strangely ill-equipped to have run a Girl Scout camp safely.

With every witness, Jack Gaither always made sure they answered questions about where they were "from," but he had some information about Day that made that question all the more beneficial for his case. Playing on what he assumed was the provincial mindset of local jurists to hold regional biases and stereotypes associated with "city folk" versus people "from" Oklahoma, Gaither employed this tactic expertly with Barbara Day. Not only was she not from Oklahoma, she had been a "transcendental meditation" teacher in Tulsa for three years prior to accepting the Camp Director position. He made much of her meditation practice at the beginning and end of his questioning. His strategy was to portray her as a flaky, hippy-type, callous to the murder of children and incompetent in a crisis. Gaither continued with the meditation questions, and Rogers' objections were overruled. He asked Day, "What did you do after you were able to get away from the scene of the bodies and the law officers and all that was going

on there at Camp Scott? I mean, did you meditate?”³⁸ Transcendental meditation was neither well understood nor widely practiced in Tulsa in the mid-nineteen eighties. In fact, Gaither’s entire line of questioning about how often and with whom was finally sustained when Gaither asked, “Can you tell us who indoctrinated you?”³⁹ But the witness was marked. He tried to discredit her testimony by showing the jury that she was not from Oklahoma, and, even more foreign, she meditated with her husband twice a day. Gaither knew he’d succeeded and quickly moved on to discuss her Girl Scout-related training.

Barbara Day knew his entire line of questioning was aimed at discrediting her personally and professionally, yet her tenacity on the witness stand did not waver. She may have been new to Camp Scott, but her understanding of safety and security had been passed down from previous directors, and she demonstrated for the jury the continuity of their camp program, educational philosophy, and overall camp management skills. Near the end of her testimony, Day made a critical statement that became a theme of the entire trial: what exactly distinguished safety from security?

When asked about her orientation and training as the new camp director, Day explained that her boss, Bonnie Brewster “covered every possible aspect of the camping program as it related to us at Camp Scott,” and she instructed her to “always operate with safety, with the safety of the girls foremost in my mind.” Gaither persisted in his effort to untangle safety from security. “Isn’t it true, though, that your instructions were related to health and safety as distinguished from security?” To which she replied, “Sounds as

³⁸ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 2, 528.

³⁹ Ibid., Vol. 2, 469.

though it is a matter of semantics. Safety, I assumed, was security and only since this tragedy have we begun to differentiate the two terms.”⁴⁰

Day’s comment revealed just how uninhibited the women in charge at Camp Scott felt regarding their property and their ability to handle whatever may arise. Her instructions to counselors who came upon strangers on camp property was to identify themselves, and then “they were to ask the people if they knew that they were on private property and that this was a Girl Scout camp and it was in session. They were to state those facts and then remove the children and themselves to the main part of camp and contact me.”⁴¹ Gaither chided her by suggesting that she was anticipating “a peaceful and friendly intruder.” He asked whether they had instructions for dealing with an intruder “bent on doing harm,” to which she replied, “It had never entered our minds.”⁴² Day then explained to the jury all of the preparations she made with the hospital, the local police and fire department, and with her counselors.⁴³ In fact, on the first morning of the first session, the counselors knew to expect the main bell to ring because Day had planned an emergency drill with girls on site. After seeing the girls’ bodies—there was indeed a critical emergency—she had to ring the bell and then go around to every site so the counselors knew it was not a drill after all. Once the harm had been done, she acted quickly to evacuate the girls. Rogers’ defense later rested on the staff’s response after the crime.

⁴⁰ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 2, 489-90.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 491.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 491.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, 774.

The murders changed us, not the world

The historical relationship between Girl Scouts USA and its hundreds of councils across the country turned out to be useful in Dan Rogers' defense strategy. Whereas councils were required to follow standards and update programming as directed by the national organization, the national board was not required to change its policies due to local situations. In fact, much of the success of Girl Scouting during its first seventy-five years or so was due to the fact that local councils and even individual troops could offer Girl Scout programming without contradicting cultural, religious and social norms in particular regions of the country. The Equal Rights Amendment was one of the best examples of how this governing style played out during this period. The national organization may have supported the amendment, but it did not require local councils do the same. Taunted by the local paper, an October 1977 article in the *Tulsa Tribune* about the Girl Scouts and the Equal Rights Amendment reported that "the endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment by the National Board of Directors of Girl Scouts USA has raised some local eyebrows. Although Tulsa's Magic Empire Council has taken a neutral stand on the ERA, Council president Nancy McDonald has encouraged Scout leaders to 'deal with it individually.'"⁴⁴ What is unclear is whose eyebrows were raised, because McDonald simply deflected the issue by giving individual leaders the liberty to deal with it. Even though it looks like a hot-potato issue, the success of Girl Scouting nationally was due in part to the organization's respect for local differences in diverse communities across the country.

In a similar way, GSUSA distanced itself from the potential fallout caused by what it considered an isolated local tragedy at Camp Scott. They maintained that the

⁴⁴ *Tulsa Tribune*, 27 October 1977.

murders in Oklahoma, while tragic, did not change any national action or policy. They kept this position from the time of the murders until long after the civil trial. Dan Rogers was aware of their position and used it to the defense of the Magic Empire. He brought Frances Hesselbein, the Executive Director of GSUSA, to town to testify about the official position. On March 25, Hesselbein testified that no major changes occurred at the national level with regards to Girl Scout camp standards as a result of the murders. She also said under oath that “in all of our years, and we have searched the record, there has been no incident where a stranger came on to our camp property and injured a camper.”⁴⁵ This was technically true, but the facts themselves reveal a distortion of the truth, legal though it may have been. GSUSA had indeed searched the record, and because of what they found or already knew to be true, they had to carefully choose their words at the trial; property was again at the heart of it all.⁴⁶

On August 17, 1963, Girl Scout Peggy Beck, aged 16, was raped and strangled by a stranger at a primitive Girl Scout “ruff-it” encampment associated with Denver’s Mile-Hi Girl Scout council’s Flying G Ranch near Deckers, Colorado.⁴⁷ Beck was alone in her tent that Saturday night because her tent companion, Claudia Stride, had become ill and went to the infirmary at the main camp around eight o’clock that evening. After a campfire sing-a-long, Beck retired to her tent around midnight. The closest tent to hers was some seventy-five feet away. When her body was discovered the next morning, staff

⁴⁵ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 3, 713.

⁴⁶ GSUSA archive note. In fact, GSUSA did make changes to their camping standards in September 1977 as I discovered in a Magic Empire Council file. However, no such document could be found at the GSUSA archives. Neither was there *any* documents regarding Camp Scott itself, the murders, the criminal trial, or the 1985 civil trial.

⁴⁷ *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 19 August 1963,1.

called a local doctor who did not initially reveal to camp authorities that the death was not due to natural causes. The GSUSA report later stated, “The girls were breaking camp that day so they moved out without many having a knowledge of the incident. The girl’s things were packed and the tent area cleaned prior to the time that the authorities were notified that the death was not a natural one.” The camp caretaker was cleared of the assault by a lie detector test. Reports to the state police indicated sightings of “a man ‘skulking’ around other camps (non Girl Scout) in the area and reports of closed camps being broken into.” Important evidence was lost at the scene; and like Camp Scott, the case remains unsolved.⁴⁸ In contrast to what the Magic Empire experienced during the build-up to the civil trial, and the GSUSA report from 1963 conveys a dry and distant tone: “To date the family and the general public in Denver have adopted a very fine attitude, although there has been much publicity. The attitude generally has been that of sympathy toward the Girl Scouts. One recent article in a Denver paper was on the subject of Girl Scout security in Camp (sic).”⁴⁹

In June 1977, the Magic Empire Council received a card from the director of the Denver Girl Scout council where the girl had been killed in 1963, who openly empathized with what they must be going through because her Denver council had endured a similar tragedy.⁵⁰ Dan Rogers learned about the 1963 rape-murder during trial preparation, but his investigations about the case revealed that the encampment, and therefore the murdered girl, was not technically on Girl Scout property. He admitted that

⁴⁸ GSUSA Archive, New York City. Folder titled “Accidents-Disasters-Reports-Council’s Reports of Accidents and Fatalities, 1963-1984.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Magic Empire Council documents.

this was a slight-of-hand, but reiterated that it was perfectly legal for Hesselbein to testify as she did.⁵¹

The next day, Marge Scanlon, the American Camp Association's Director of Standards and Field Services, testified for the defense that the ACA did not change any of their policies either after the incident in Oklahoma. Scanlon explained that the ACA considered the entire tragedy, and then its governing board came to the conclusion that nothing could have prevented such a crime, and therefore no national standards would be changed.⁵² Under cross-examination by Gaither, she continuously replied no to his questions about whether night lighting, regular bed checks, armed security guards, and tree removal would deter criminal activity. He asked, "You don't think an intruder would think twice before he took the risk of accosting a guard carrying a firearm?" Scanlon replied, "As a Camp Director concerned about the safety of children, I would not want an armed guard walking through my property."⁵³ She countered his continuous line of questioning with a reference to a joint study between the American Camping Association and the Center for Disease Control that found camp to be a safer place for children in the summer than their home environment. Much like Helen Gray, she was unruffled by his attempts to play on fear.

Dan Rogers, an affable and gregarious man, vividly recalled that during the trial he employed an uncharacteristically subdued and low-profile manner. As a Tulsa trial lawyer well-known for his successes, Rogers said he reined in his usual dramatic style,

⁵¹ Dan Rogers, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, Tape 3 Transcript, 5.

⁵² Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 3, 800.

⁵³ Ibid., 804.

because “this case was awful; I’m not even mad at anybody. We don’t win, and we don’t make money.”⁵⁴ He took only two days presenting his arguments and called only seven of the thirty-nine total witnesses. He entered into evidence a few official documents that related to the safety standards of both Girl Scouts U.S.A. and the American Camp Association. Rogers’ entire defense strategy rested on one philosophical argument and two practical, technical arguments. He used the brutality of the crime to suggest that no amount of security would have stopped a killer bent on destruction. To the technicality-minded, he demanded that if the defendants were to be found guilty, the jury, as instructed, would have to agree “the proximate cause of this incident was the *callous indifference* of the Magic Empire Council of Girl Scouts.”⁵⁵ To show that this was not the case, he used every opportunity to inquire of his and the plaintiffs’ witnesses about the particularities and continuities of camp culture among Girl Scouts over decades of successful camp seasons. As to the practical evidence that proved the staff’s overriding concern for the campers, he argued that once the girls’ bodies had been discovered, the conduct of the entire camp staff was utterly courageous, sensitive, and organized. “It’s going to be hard to believe, but they rounded them up, took them on a hike, fed them, took them around to where they could sing a couple songs, arranged for transportation and got them home to Tulsa without finding out what happened.”⁵⁶

Rogers described the case as the most difficult one of his entire career as a trial lawyer and the only one that he still remembers in vivid detail. He recalled that he did

⁵⁴ Dan Rogers, Interview Transcript, Tape 1, 8.

⁵⁵ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 1, 89.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

not raise his voice once and that he kept his cross-examinations of plaintiff's witnesses succinct, reserving most of his fury for the security expert Sergeant Paul Thompson and for Sheriff Pete Weaver. In Rogers' estimation, Weaver testified for the plaintiffs in order to exonerate himself for the incredible lack of security he had provided for the camp when an escaped convicted rapist had been on the loose for four years prior to the murders.

As a combat veteran of both World War II and the Korean War, Dan Rogers used his veteran experience to show that he was familiar with how safety and security could be applied to dangerous situations. What he was not willing to admit in his arguments or in his heart, even twenty years later, was that those kinds of measures—at least in a just world that respects childhood—should never have to apply to a children's camp environment. His candid, engaged demeanor revealed an unresolved, long-term willingness to talk about this case again, twenty years later. Still astonished by the crime and emotional about it, Rogers reflected, "It was such a tragedy. In my closing argument—can you imagine the lawyer representing the defendant standing in front of the jury crying about this terrible thing that happened?—my god, it wasn't the Girl Scouts' fault."⁵⁷ In spite of his tears, and regardless of whether they influenced the jury, Rogers' tactic was to keep the tragedy itself at the forefront while also showing that the Girl Scout camp staff could never have been able to "protect against a maniac who was bent on death and destruction."⁵⁸ Rogers repeatedly showed the jury that it was only *after* this tragedy that the Girl Scouts knew they had to change their entire camp operation, and that they were certainly not the ones to blame for this incident.

⁵⁷ Dan Rogers, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, Tape 2 Transcript, 5.

⁵⁸ Court Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 3, 893.

Attorney Rogers played on the isolated incident debate in his final statement when he reminded the jury that prior to the murders, no one had ever been intentionally harmed by a stranger on the premises: “To see a stranger who may show up...and to assume this person is a sex-crazed maniac who may come in here and kill three girls in camp, that’s not a reasonable assumption.”⁵⁹ Yet he knew that when the jury had to look back at the incidents and combine them as building up to one culminating tragedy, the culpability of the Girl Scout leadership over time may have made sense from a liability and negligence standpoint. When jury members sequestered themselves to decide their verdict, whose side they would take in this highly publicized and emotional trial remained unclear to Rogers. He really had no idea whose side they would take.

The civil trial represented more than damages, neglect, and liability. The attorneys on both sides construed it as a cautionary tale for the future of Girl Scouting. On the families’ side, they wanted the Girl Scout leadership held accountable for what they saw as inexcusable negligence and unsafe camp conditions. On the council’s side, arguments in their defense centered on forty-nine years of successful resident camp seasons, and on the weighty suggestion that if the Girl Scouts were found guilty, “camping as we know it” would most certainly come to an unfortunate end. With an insurer named in the lawsuit—a very unusual allowance by a court—a verdict against the council would have ended their ability to offer or afford a resident camp program and would likely have made the cost of insurance prohibitive for the hundreds of non-profit organizations and churches that run most summer resident camps.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 890.

The closing arguments crystallized a pivotal moment. Dan Rogers connected the verdict to a much larger consequence for the future of camping in a world in which he portrayed the uncertainty of recent violent acts as being beyond any institution's ability to contain it, and yet, he simultaneously argued that the jury had the power to protect camping, however insecure its "security" may be. "You've got the most powerful opportunity you have ever had in your life on this jury. You can destroy camping-as-we-know-it...If this jury returns a verdict for any amount of money, you can only imagine what must be done. How much would the fence, the light, the armed guard have deterred a man such as this? That's been tried before." Then Dan Rogers used recent and historical world events to explode his point about the limits of even the tightest security forces: "The most protected man in the world is your President and mine. Surrounded by security guards, he gets out of a limousine and he's shot in the chest. The Pope, President Kennedy and his brother, a compound of over one thousand of our finest United States Marines, their security couldn't protect against a maniac who was bent on death and destruction."⁶⁰

The council had already been drastically affected by security changes, and yet its leadership had to sit and listen while their defense attorney brought witnesses to say that no national standards had been changed, no new rules implemented; this was an isolated incident that belonged solely to them. If the jury had ruled in favor of the victims' families, insurance concerns seemed to be the only likely deterrent that would change camp programming on a national scale. More than a decade later, Dannette Russell, public relations director for the Council during the civil trial, still believed, along with many others that the trial outcome "could have been the end of camping as we knew it in

⁶⁰ Trial Transcript, Tulsa County Courthouse, Case No. CT 77-779, Vol. 3, 893.

the United States.”⁶¹ Repeating verbatim Dan Rogers’ phrase a dozen years afterwards shows that the enormity of the civil trial’s potential outcome—the end of camping—was locked in the memories of past and current staff and volunteers. Had the Council been found negligent, the cost of providing security and liability insurance for camps across the country that are primarily run by churches and other non-profits would be too great for those organizations to bear. They took the jury’s verdict as a life-saving event in the history of the Magic Empire Council.

Both lawyers implied in their arguments that the world had become a more dangerous place. They agreed on issues of rising fear and increased violence and only diverged at who was to blame. Can society protect itself from someone bent on doing harm to others? And no matter what measures are taken, is there any guarantee of safety? The task of the jury was to agree on whether the Magic Empire Council of Girl Scouts had acted with “callous indifference” regarding the safety of the girls in its care that night. Their past was their ally. Their mistake was not expecting murder and rape on their property. From that point on, they always expected it, but the trial was only intended to be about their past actions regarding safety.

Verdict: 9-3

On March 27 at 1:20 p.m., the court was adjourned and the jury convened to deliberate their verdict. Just over four hours later, they returned their decision in favor of the Defendants, the Magic Empire Council of Girl Scouts. According to Dan Rogers, “There was no celebration at the Girl Scout office, I looked upon it as ‘justice prevailed today,’

⁶¹ Dannette Russell-Geren, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, transcript, 5.

but I didn't look upon it as a victory. I have a tremendous sense of relief that the jury agreed with us that this was not the fault of the Girl Scout organization.”⁶²

Years later, council staff member Ginny Young drew a blame-the-victim analogy when reflecting on the civil trial proceedings. “It is like a rape victim having to defend [her] previous behavior which, looking back on it you would say, well, that was provocative. But...if nothing had ever happened you would not have ever considered it so. When something violent happens, you go back and say why didn't you, why did you?”⁶³ On the witness stand, council staff members, counselors, and former camp directors were scrutinized and cross-examined for their every action just prior to the murders as well as for incidents that had occurred more than fifteen years earlier. Ginny Young's comment fits squarely with the sociology term “rape culture.” Defined as one in which “women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself,” a rape culture socializes women to anticipate and accept these kinds of life experiences as unfortunate, sometimes tragic, but nevertheless normal.⁶⁴ This concept is in fact central to understanding how the Tulsa Girl Scout council responded when faced with the absolute worst of the rape culture continuum, and then, to understanding how its future security precautions were forever informed by the trauma and the trial itself. They had been initiated into a culture that expected them to act from that day forward as if they were always in potential danger. Of course girls and women across the country, and throughout the organization's history,

⁶² Dan Rogers, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, Tape 3 Transcript, 10.

⁶³ Ginny Young, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, transcript, 20.

⁶⁴ Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher and Martha Roth, *Transforming a Rape Culture* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1993), vii.

experienced aspects of rape culture *outside* of Girl Scouting, but to experience it on this scale and to be on trial for negligence was previously incomprehensible and one for which there is no historical comparison to this point. The organization found itself at the center of the very worst of the rape culture continuum.

Analyzing Jack Gaither's arguments through a rape culture framework offers important insights into how infused the judgments of women's social behavior was with the double-bind of maintaining a certain level of fear of men while also recognizing their important role as protectors. During the entire course of the trial, he referred to every unidentified or unfamiliar man who entered the 410-acre property as "an intruder," and yet he repeatedly suggested that the only way the Girl Scout leadership could have best prevented this tragedy was to employ an armed security guard—almost certainly a male one. Yet this approach had been completely inconceivable to Camp Scott staff because the sense of autonomy and freedom that generations of women and girls felt there was embedded in the camp culture—there they had no reason to fear assaults or injustices that may have been reasonable to fear in their lives in cities and towns and homes.

Silence and Safety

In addition to the collective memory of how close they came to losing the ability to run a resident camp, an important and now characteristic attribute of the Tulsa council developed during the long, seven-year wait between the filing of the lawsuit and the trial. Once it was filed, the Magic Empire Council was advised by its counsel to not publicly express grief or sadness about the murders—and in fact, was advised to not discuss it all. Nancy McDonald described this "wall of silence" as being the most painful aspect of the

tragedy's aftermath. The staff was not allowed to talk about the case to anyone, and even if staffers knew nothing about the evidence being collected, they were explicitly instructed to leave the room if any discussion of the murders came up.⁶⁵ This did not stop them from passing around a copy of *Someone Cry For the Children*, the 1981 book written by two of the investigators.⁶⁶

Magic Empire Board President Sue Looney said that the civil trial “was the most painful thing you could have put any of us through because our hearts wanted to do one thing and yet we had to do all these other things...For eight years we did not do or say anything without consulting our attorneys.”⁶⁷ The degree to which the council had to limit its human inclinations towards the victims' families was best described by Looney, who recounted the day her position as board president ended in 1982, a full three years before the civil trial would even begin: “The next day, I found myself driving down the street by their [the Farmers] house, and it was as if I had no choice. I had to go in and introduce myself and meet these people and tell them that we cared and we loved them...I didn't want to ask an attorney how to do that, I just had to do that.”⁶⁸ She was welcomed into their home by Sherry Farmer. She recalls, “they were just wonderful and there were tears and all these things and all I could say was...that for four years we've done nothing but grieve for your children.” Looking back, she reflected, “We were so

⁶⁵ Multiple voices, Group Interview, transcript, 8-10.

⁶⁶ Cecelia Elliot, Group Interview, 10.

⁶⁷ Sue Looney, 18.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 18.

strapped with the attorneys, we were so controlled...and it didn't allow us to do the human thing.”⁶⁹

Long after the trial found it innocent of negligence, the Magic Empire Council continued to deal with the tragedy through a policy of silence. Although council leaders explained that this attitude began because of the impending lawsuit, the leadership ultimately found silence to be an effective survival strategy for its future. Although exonerated, their security rules and organizational policies immediately changed after the murders to assume more stringent responsibility for the girls in their care. It did not matter that the national organization did not follow suit; the Tulsa council had made every effort possible to keep such a tragedy from ever happening again.

Their vigilance over subsequent years had, in Bonnie Brewster's mind, effectively put the blame back in the hands of society itself. Because of society's dangers and ills, they had to implement strict security measures. When she granted an interview with a local television station after the council was exonerated, she recalled that the reporter wanted to get into the “security stuff.” He asked her what exactly their security measures entailed. She replied that if she told him, they would no longer be secure. To which he replied, “Do you think one of these days you will stop doing whatever it is you are doing?” and I said, “Will you promise me the day will come when this society will be a safe society and we will not have to be concerned about anybody hurting anybody? When you promise me that, maybe then I can answer your question.”⁷⁰

Although his own convincing portrayal of the killer as being a maniacal, long-escaped, convicted rapist was essential to Rogers' strategy, he admitted that the verdict

⁶⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁰ Bonnie Brewster, 9.

could have gone either way. The jurors could have easily decided that the Girl Scout Council acted negligently by not implementing safety measures that may have prevented such an event. But the jury was not ready—at this time and place—to hold an institution such as the Girl Scouts culpable for the deaths of three of their own. Times had indeed changed dramatically with respect to how Americans perceived security, but the verdict in favor of the Magic Empire Council revealed an unwillingness on the part of the jury to reward the families for hindsight that was only gained as a result of the tragedy, despite the quickly changing national understanding of what it truly meant to be safe and secure in the United States.

CHAPTER VI

‘EVERY STITCH AND STEP OF MY LIFE’: HOW TRAUMA CHANGED GIRLS’ LIVES

We would ask that this young witness be permanently excused so that she may go back to her normal life.¹

- Mayes County District Attorney Sid Wise

The summer that escaped convict Gene Leroy Hart’s preliminary criminal trial began in Mayes County, Oklahoma, nineteen-year-old Carla Wilhite was working the night shift as a waitress at a local Sambo’s restaurant. The day before this shift started, an assistant to the District Attorney drove Carla from Tulsa to the courthouse in Pryor. As a major witness to the crime, she had been called testify about what happened the morning of June 13, 1977. Early the next morning near the end of her shift, Carla recalled pouring coffee for customers at the counter who were discussing the day’s paper. “My regular coffee guys were talking about the murders and looking at the pictures and everything, and the picture was of me, and they didn’t recognize me! And they were saying, ‘Oh, yeah, I think probably one of those counselors did it.’ I was just stunned and speechless.”²

Out of Her Depth

Carla Wilhite grew up in Sand Springs, a small, blue-collar town eight miles west of Tulsa. Raised in the evangelical Church of Christ, she spent weekends distributing

¹ Mayes County District Attorney Sid Wise, June 7, 1978, Pryor, Oklahoma Courthouse Criminal trial transcript, 186.

² Carla Wilhite, interview by Michelle Hoffman, July 3, 2008, Ward, CO, 7; “Possibility of Lesbian Killer Studied First, Hart Hearing Shows,” *Tulsa World*, 8 June 1978.

Bible literature and church flyers around town with her brothers and sister. The third of four children, she was not popular at school. “In these settings, [home and school] I often felt lonely and incompetent, and I felt a suffocating destiny predetermined by birth order and small-town social rankings.”³ Girl Scouting allowed her to be her true self and to excel outside of the constraints of family and limiting social situations. Carla was eleven years old her first summer at Camp Scott. She remembered her parents driving her down the road into the camp that very first time, “feeling this incredible anticipation about how things were going to unfold...there were lots of girls there with parents saying goodbye, and my parents [had the attitude], ‘Here’s the kid, make a woman out of her!’” Joking aside, Carla has no doubt that Camp Scott was the place that indeed made an individual out of her. “I had the opportunity for the first time to be who I really was without being, you know, someone’s sister, someone’s schoolmate or anything. It was entirely liberating to finally get to be me.”⁴

Carla continued in Girl Scouting for her entire childhood and adolescence and attended Camp Scott every summer for as long as she could. She rose in ranks at the council, too; she earned her First Class Girl Scout Award and served on the Magic Empire Council’s Senior Planning Board. The summer of 1977 followed two previous summers when she had been a Counselor-In-Training. The C.I.T. program allowed older girls to spend extended time at camp, learning to be counselors and gradually taking on more responsibility with the younger girls while still being supervised. For Girl Scouts who were devoted to the camp, a natural transition occurred when moving from camper to counselor, one that included increased freedoms and decision-making among the older

³ Carla Wilhite Questionnaire, 1.

⁴ Carla Wilhite Interview, June 6, 2009, 1.

campers. “If you are going to have a bean hole dinner, you just do it. You know where the pick and shovel is, you know how to trim the lanterns, trim the wick, make the lamp ready to put at the latrine at night. You just know those things like you are breathing. It’s just a really great sense of accomplishment...to have the full run of the camp, to know where everything is.” She explained that being an older camper and C.I.T. was something girls were very proud of not only because they could share their knowledge with younger campers, but also that they were role models and leaders at camp. Carla described this passing along of traditions such as songs, rituals, games and ceremonies as fostering “an incredible sense of generativity” (sic).⁵

In 1977, Carla was one of three counselors in the Kiowa unit at the first session of the Magic Empire Council’s Camp Scott. On the session’s first full day, the morning of June 13th, she was on her way to an early shower before the camp bell would awaken the girls. Carla remembers the day vividly:

I wanted to get to the staff house and take a shower before all the hot water was gone ...so I had I set my alarm for six, and [when] my little alarm went off, I grabbed my towel and my clothes and set out to walk out of the Kiowa unit... I saw some sleeping bags in the road, and I thought the camp rangers must have delivered some luggage during the evening while I was gone, and these things have fallen off the truck and they’re going to be wet, so I’d better get them into the unit kitchen so they can start drying and, as I began to approach those objects—I saw a child, and it seemed very evident to me that she was dead—and oh my god, you know, what has happened? The first thing I thought [was that she] must have gotten scared during the night and ran into a tree and it killed her.⁶

Carla ran back and woke Dee Elder, one of the other two counselors in Kiowa, and they quickly checked all of the tents. Dee discovered a puddle of blood in Tent Seven—and no

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Carla Wilhite, June 6, 2009 interview, 3.

girls where there had been three. Carla ran to get the director and camp nurse. While she was away, the unit's third counselor, Susan Emery, discovered two more bodies inside the sleeping bags that Carla thought had been dropped by camp rangers. Susan screamed and the others tried to calm and quiet her, so as not to wake the sleeping girls.⁷

Law enforcement officials initially considered the entire property a crime scene and the camp director agreed to close the 410-acre camp that day. They did so with the help of counselors and other camp staff. The next day, OSBI agents asked the counselors to return to camp in order to identify and collect personal belongings as well as answer more questions about the day of and the days prior to the murders. On June 15th, Carla received another call from the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, and she assumed the investigators just needed more information. Although she described herself as feeling "bone-tired" and detached, "I was still trying to be...in my role as a counselor, trying to do the right things." She remembered her Dad asking her if she would like him to come with her to the meeting with the agents, but she did not think she really needed him there because they "just want to talk." In hindsight, she realized, "My God, yes, I do want you to go with me, Dad," because I did not know what was waiting for me!⁸

Little did she know then that her role in the investigation had shifted from that of witness to potential suspect. She learned from the agents that her glasses and guitar capo were found near the girls' bodies. A bloody handprint marked the towel hanging at the foot of her cot. The autopsy reports were not yet available, and for reasons as yet unclear to her, the female counselors—particularly Carla—were among the first suspects in the case. Much to her surprise that day, OSBI agents collected fingerprints, hair, saliva, and

⁷ Susan Emery, Preliminary Trial transcript testimony, 654-58.

⁸ Carla Wilhite, June 6, 2009, 7.

blood samples from her. The male agents asked explicit questions about her sexual identity that included sexual activity, dreams, desires, and specific sexual practices.

During the interrogation, I honestly admitted that I had doubts about my sexuality. I had kissed a girl, you see. Nothing went further than that: kissing and holding hands. Isn't that just "normal" adolescent behavior? But, you are supposed to be honest with the police, right? So, it was kind of sickening to then be asked if I had ever wanted to tie someone up for sex, gag them (they pulled out the gag used in the murder), or put things inside them. I honestly wasn't even clear about what "sex" was comprised of: the actions, the anatomy, the penetration. All I knew up to that point was that feeling of joyous, puppyish, foolishly optimistic thing called love!⁹

When Carla realized that she was being considered a suspect in the murders of three of her own Girl Scout campers, her belief in the inherent goodness of authority, and her own desire to help, suddenly conflicted with the confusion, anxiety, and panic she felt while being questioned.

And I began to really think I'm crazy, or something, because they think that I have done this. And then, of course, they asked if I *had* done it. And I was like, "No!" But in my mind I was thinking, gosh, these are the police, and they know what they are doing, and they think that I have done this? Could I have done this? I mean, totally ludicrous thoughts, but you want so bad to help them, because they are the people who have been sent there to help, and instead, they are destructing you...as a person.¹⁰

Almost exactly one year later, pouring coffee at the break of day to regular customers who didn't even recognize her picture in the paper they were reading, Carla felt that same shock again. The autopsy reports had been made public almost a year before. Semen was found in two of the victims' bodies.¹¹ Yet the day after she testified at Hart's preliminary hearing, the front page of the *Tulsa World* read, "Possibility of

⁹ Wilhite, correspondence with author, November 23, 2009.

¹⁰ Wilhite, June 6, 2009 Interview, 5.

¹¹ *Tulsa Tribune*, 7 July 1977.

Lesbian Killer Studied First, Hart Hearing Shows.”¹² Despite the nine-month manhunt and the mounting evidence against Hart, the headline persisted with the rumor of a “lesbian killer.”

The conservative backlash against gays and lesbians was well under way in Oklahoma in the late 1970s. One state legislator attempted to use the leak of an alleged lesbian killer as a ploy to garner anti-homosexual legislation in the state. Less than a week after the murders, State Representative John Monks of Muskogee stated publicly that “‘he wouldn’t be surprised’ if a woman killed the three Girl Scouts...and he urged Governor David Boren to sponsor an anti-homosexual resolution.”¹³ News about homosexuals had been in the Tulsa papers earlier that month. Dade County, Florida had just overturned by referendum an ordinance that would have included sexual preference in a list of non-discrimination laws for the county. Singer and celebrity Anita Bryant, an Oklahoma native and former Miss America contestant, was invited by local religious leaders and congregations to be the public face of Save The Children, Inc., an organization established to prevent implementation of the anti-discrimination policy. In less than six months, the law was repealed in a county-wide vote on June 7, 1977 by a three-to-one margin. Anita Bryant then took her anti-gay crusade to other cities around the country where similar laws were being enacted to accord homosexuals equal treatment under the law. Riding on the wave of the Dade County repeal, Representative

¹² *Tulsa World*, 8 June 1978.

¹³ *Stillwater News-Press*, 17 June 1977.

Monks blatantly used the timing of Girl Scout murders, less than a week later, to add political vitriol to a fellow Oklahoman's anti-gay crusade.¹⁴

All of this was out of Carla's purview but not unrelated to her treatment by officials connected to the murder investigations. Over the next two years, Carla would be asked three times, twice under oath, if she was homosexual, with much objection by the district attorney in the case, Sid Wise, who knew this question was intended as a juicy distraction from the actual suspect. Hart's attorney, Garvin Isaacs, could not link the counselors to the murders with evidence, but he could and did use homophobic public sentiment as a means to deflect attention from his client at time when being openly gay or lesbian was not safe in Oklahoma. At the time, Carla was horrified by the bizarre sexual scenario questions the first investigators asked her. Neither her innocence nor her honesty mattered; she eventually realized that Gene Leroy Hart's attorneys used her sexual orientation in court as a way to cast some doubt in the minds of the jury about Hart's guilt.¹⁵

Years later, Carla understood that she had internalized the "sin" of homosexuality as it was preached in her Church of Christ upbringing. For months after the murders, she resolved not to be sexually active and continued to deny her sexual attraction to women. "After I did become sexually active with women, I even tried to 'straighten' out by joining a charismatic church and eradicating that 'sinful self' once and for all. And I mean I tried earnestly and fervently...though ultimately I failed (or triumphed)."¹⁶ For

¹⁴ Fejes, Fred. *Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality*, New York: Palgrave-Macmillan (2008), 2.

¹⁵ Wilhite, correspondence with author, November 23, 2009.

¹⁶ Ibid.

some time, her sexual identity remained thwarted by the anti-homosexual teachings of her conservative Christian faith. Despite struggling to remain true to that on one level, she could not reconcile the murders with what she knew of God at that time. “To be completely honest, my faith failed me after the murders. I could not comprehend how something so devastating and horrible could happen to children and parents.”¹⁷ Besides being a witness to a horrific crime, her very identity came into question and she did not find peace for many years.

Carla’s first thought the moment she saw Denise Milner’s body—that the child had run into a tree in her sleep and died—has become a place-marker for her loss of innocence that morning. She reflected, “Your mind wants to believe everything else, and tries to come up with every other interpretation of what could have happened, but when it begins to dawn on you what has really happened, you’re completely out of your depth—you recognize that things have changed forever in that instant.”¹⁸ Despite the best intention of the prosecutor, with his kindly “let her return to her normal life” comment, the trauma changed her. There would be no going back, not for her or dozens of other women and girls.

“I was afraid of dawn”

Initially a maddening and frustrating intruder, fear would become a kind of tagalong companion for many Camp Scott ’77 survivors within a matter of weeks. Several women noted that fear became embedded in their understanding of the world,

¹⁷ Wilhite, correspondence with author, November 23, 2009.

¹⁸ Wilhite, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, transcript, 3.

regardless of their thorough Girl Scout education in self-reliance, confidence, and mastery of their surroundings. Sleeping in and being in darkness became impossible for many of them. Counselor Susan Emery remembers nothing but groggy days for more than a week after the murders. Her mother kept her drugged on Valium, and she slept in her parents' bed. "I do remember at one point waking up thinking... 'I could go crazy over this,' and then I decided, 'No, I don't think I am going to,' and then I went back to sleep. I remember that as clear as the day is long, making that choice—to go on."¹⁹ For Carla Wilhite, the nightmares began instantly.

I was afraid of dawn. I was afraid to sleep. I dreamed very vividly of the children being murdered, and then I dreamed I was being murdered. I was so hyper-vigilant about everything...I was always waiting for things, for the next shoe to drop, especially before they apprehended him; this killer is still out there in the world. Who is he looking for? Is he looking for me? Other scouts?²⁰

For fifteen-year old Michelle Hoffman, the only things she had ever feared at Camp Scott were copperhead snakes. But after June 13th, she "began living a very fear-driven life." She, like several others, slept with her younger sister for months after the murders and felt "extremely vulnerable and exposed to the world."²¹ Eleven-year-old Sarah Jane Hopkins, at camp for a second year in a row, knew that "now the world was not as safe a place as before." Her parents became "more protective and paranoid. My troop continued camping, but we had to stay near camp, wear whistles, and some adults had to

¹⁹ Susan Emery, questionnaire, 4.

²⁰ Carla Wilhite, questionnaire, 3.

²¹ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 3.

stay awake all night. Parents were nervous. Scouts were scared. We had to find other places to camp.”²²

Protective measures taken by camp staff the day of the murders exemplify the very best of intentions to do no emotional harm to the campers. The adults in charge, namely Camp Director Barbara Day, immediately set in place a plan that would keep all of the campers from ever seeing or knowing that a tragedy had occurred until they were safely at home with their parents. Although Girl Scout campers never laid eyes on the crime scene, several report ongoing “tapes” in their minds for years afterwards that recreated the murders from the bits and pieces they had learned about it from television, parents, friends and rampant rumors. “Seeing apparently dominates all other senses following trauma because it is the sense by which most horrible episodes are recorded and reviewed in the mind... Even in cases where a traumatic episode begins in an entirely blinded way—in other words, the child is prevented from ever seeing the episode—the event may eventually transform itself in to a “sight.”²³

The contagion of the trauma also played a role in the perpetuation of fear and anxiety among survivors.²⁴ Sarah Jane Hopkins is still not sure what she remembers herself versus what others talked about, but realizes that regardless of who owned it initially, the information has become part of her memory, too. For example, in late autumn of 1977, campers’ parents were contacted by the OSBI and asked to come to a motel room in Tulsa so that the girls could be asked questions and examine evidence. “I

²² SarahJane Hopkins, Questionnaire, 2.

²³ Terr, *Too Scared to Cry*, 133.

²⁴ Ibid., 311-340. Terr’s final chapter addresses many examples of how trauma is passed along to others, especially among children.

went to a motel at 41st & I-44. The OSBI had a couple of rooms there they were interviewing people in. They made my mom sit outside. I remember suits and cigarette smoke and a brown on brown Nike tennis shoe and that they wanted to know if I knew any of the counselors that wore that type of shoe.”²⁵ By this point, SarahJane wanted to put it all behind her, and in her recounting of it, suggests that she probably mixed up her memories with other information. Recalling the interview still “unnerves” her; she was anxious to leave and uncomfortable and said that “by the time they interviewed me, my head was so full of nightmares and stories other kids had told me, that I am sure my memory of the night was completely tainted.”²⁶ Although she doubts her own memories versus those of others, she was in the same unit as the girls who were murdered (Lori Farmer was in her Girl Scout troop), and she has distinct, vivid memories of noises and suspicious activities that evening that have been verified by other official court testimony. The fact she continues to doubt her own recollection of the event, or is not sure what she herself actually remembered, is characteristic of trauma victims. Lenore Terr describes this as “a transfer of perceptual impressions. Many trauma survivors “come to suffer bothersome, visual memories of what had never, originally, been seen.”²⁷

As a First Aid Responder for many years, Camp Director Barbara Day never hesitated to stop her car when someone was in trouble. Yet when the time came to renew her CPR training, she found she could not even look at the Resusci Anne training

²⁵ Michelle Hoffman, email correspondence with author, 19 November 2009.

²⁶ SarahJane Hopkins Moutett, correspondence with author, 2010.

²⁷ Terr, 178.

mannequin, so her certification lapsed.²⁸ For a long time, she could not handle seeing anything in movies or on television that resembled what she had seen that morning, and the inverse was also true—it was also a long time before she realized that even though she had a memory of seeing Denise Milner on the ground, she did not notice anything else around her. When Barbara was later shown crime scene photographs by investigators, she had no memory of seeing the roll of duct tape near her body. “I was so overwhelmed by her presence that I didn’t notice anything else. There was no frame of reference. There was no understanding.”²⁹

Jo Lynch, who was not at Camp Scott that particular session, but who was a close childhood friend of counselor Susan Emery, experienced what would today be understood as secondary trauma. “I took self-defense classes, not because it seemed like a good idea, but because I was suddenly afraid of simple things like leaving my evening classes and going into the parking lot.”³⁰ Magic Empire Council staff member Ginny Young, in her mid-twenties that summer, distinctly remembered when fear intruded her life. The night after the murders she had been at the office since 7:00 a.m., and she was the last to leave the building around 9:00 p.m. that night.

I was tired and wrung out...but the thing that catches me more than anything else about that evening was walking outside...and being afraid...I had never felt like that before. I would never again be able to go out alone in the dark like that and

²⁸ Day did not make this connection in her interview, but it is interesting to note that the face used on Resusci Anne was based on a famous mask, widely known as “L’Inconnue de las Seine,” the death mask of an unidentified young woman who died in the Seine in the late 1880s. Norwegian toymaker Asmund Laerdal developed Resusci Anne in 1960 to accurately simulate the human respiratory system in order to train people to use cardiopulmonary resuscitation. www.laerdal.com.

²⁹ Barbara Day, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, transcript, 13.

³⁰ Jo Lynch, questionnaire, 2.

not be afraid. To think that one person could not only do what he did to those three girls, but all the ramifications from that, down to me being afraid to walk out into the parking lot...I was used to feeling secure, [it] just really made me angry.³¹

Years passed before Carla and others understood exactly how the trauma changed and also have access to informed methods of treatment. Psychologists were just beginning to understand how trauma is processed in the human brain. As a result of the dogged, decade-long persistence of psychologically wounded Vietnam veterans, mental health professionals finally included Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the 1981 *DSM-III*. First named Post-Vietnam Syndrome because of its connection to intense exposure to the violence of that war, a similar disorder, “battered woman syndrome,” had been coined by psychologist Lenore Walker in 1979.³² “Only after 1980, when the efforts of combat veterans had legitimated the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder, did it become clear that the psychological symptoms seen in survivors of rape, domestic battery, and incest was essentially the same as the syndrome seen in survivors of war.”³³ The diagnosis could now validate the damaging effects of psychological trauma, but it would be quite some time before established and effective healing protocols would emerge. Talk therapy in both group and individual settings allowed sufferers to have an outlet for their feelings but often had little impact on alleviating the symptoms of PTSD.

Traumatized children as subjects unto themselves were not studied systematically until Dr. Lenore Terr began a comprehensive, child-centered examination of a group of

³¹ Ginny Young, interview, 36.

³² Walker, Lenore. *The Battered Woman* (1979).

³³ Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery* (1997), 32.

Chowchilla, California children who had been kidnapped from their school bus in 1976. Prior to this, the influencing role of parents predominated psychological studies because of the belief that children imitate their surroundings. If the parents were agitated about an event, their offspring would likely be as well. Lenore Terr was the first psychiatrist to study traumatized children over an extended period of time, as well as the first to examine the social and cultural perceptions of trauma alongside actual trauma research.³⁴ She looked closely at individual children's responses to the trauma and revealed, not surprisingly, that children's responses vary significantly, and although their home environment plays a role, the survivors' own internalizations and coping strategies influenced the healing or the suppression of the event. Terr concluded that although "defenses go up very fast after a trauma strikes"—people don't want to appear "abnormal, hurt, or changed,"—waiting to seek treatment turns out to be "the worst thing one can do."³⁵

Parents and other caregivers of the Tulsa area Girl Scouts were simply reading the signals of their daughters and had very little understanding of how psychological damage occurs. A June 30, 1977 newspaper article in the Claremore, Oklahoma paper headlined, "Scout Campers Adjust Better than Parents."³⁶ A mother who chose to remain anonymous in the newspaper story concluded that children "seem to have a built-in safety

³⁴ "The Chowchilla field study was the first research project on childhood trauma that was controlled, that was prospective (looking at the group forward from near to the beginning), that was directed at a single group that had experienced the identical event, that centered on children (rather than upon parents), and that involved a large number of youngsters at various stages of development, at various levels of educational and economic attainment, and of various kinds of families. The findings at Chowchilla opened up many new avenues of research." Lenore Terr, *Too Scared to Cry* (1990), 24.

³⁵ Terr, 289, 293.

³⁶ *Claremore Progressive*, 30 June 1977.

valve that parents don't have" and that they seem to "cope better with everyday life."

One girl who did not want to be left alone at any time during the day, was "getting a little better every day," but her parents said they were still nervous. A father from Pryor said his ten-year-old daughter had not been "distraught" about the deaths. "'She's not one to show her feelings. She's a pretty free and easy-going young lady.' It bothered us a great deal more than it did the girl.'" ³⁷ Some of the Camp Scott survivors' experiences mirror this, and some don't. Although trauma was better understood among professionals who worked with child survivors, the efficacy of treatment lagged behind for decades.

Lenore Terr's work with child trauma victims parallels much of what Camp Scott survivors experienced, but because they were immediately scattered and never had a chance to discuss the event with others, their stories have remained disconnected, isolated, and internalized. Age and maturity level did not seem to matter, nor did the actual "seeing" of the crime impact the depth of the trauma and the ultimate ineffectiveness of the only known and trusted therapy of the time for survivors. What we now know as survivor guilt, along with the overwhelmingly strong expectation of another tragedy, were common among both girls and young women at camp that day.

In a questionnaire answered as a stream of memories and impressions, feelings and life-choices, SarahJane Hopkins' writing moves between past and present tense to such a degree that past events and current anxieties weave tightly together. "I still wonder if he/they were really after me and my tent-mates. We heard them outside our tent first... I cannot stand the sound of someone walking on dried leaves. I cannot stand the sound of voices in a canvas tent. I am avoiding taking my 7-year-old Cub Scout on

³⁷ Ibid.

camping trips. I dread the day he asks to go to summer camp without one of his parents.”³⁸ This chronological spiraling of memories becomes especially evident among subjects interviewed in person. Their recollections evoke strong emotions as well as dissonance. What caused some of them to seek years of therapy was not the case for others, but everyone interviewed admitted to or related symptoms typical of trauma victims over a long time period.³⁹

Even if the survivors did seek out therapeutic help, more than twenty years passed before those who had PTSD symptoms found effective treatment. Too little was known about how to heal trauma, what its effects were on the limbic system and on neural pathways—much less the learned behaviors associated with trauma. Terr found that if treatment is delayed, “suppression, displacement, overgeneralization...splitting, undoing, and self-anesthesia take over.” In fact, the trauma may come to look “better” as a result of these coping and defense mechanisms, but it “will continue to affect the child’s character, dreams, feelings about sex, trust and attitudes about the future.”⁴⁰

Both Carla Wilhite and Michelle Hoffman, a fifteen-year-old camper who was to be the camp director’s assistant that summer, sought out the private psychological help that the Girl Scout council offered after the murders. Neither found talk therapy particularly helpful because very little changed with regard to ongoing panic attacks, fears, obsessive thoughts, and depression. Carla recalled, “I don’t remember much of the

³⁸ SarahJane Hopkins Mouttet, questionnaire, 2.

³⁹ Being interviewed and included in this project, knowing who else among the survivors were willing to be interviewed, affirmed what Herman articulated: “Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms.” Herman, 214.

⁴⁰ Terr, 293.

therapeutic dialogue, but I know she did everything within her power to assuage my guilt. But it didn't assuage my guilt, or stop the fear, or the nightmares."⁴¹ The combination of these three intense emotional states changed Carla deeply—she said her “former life was altered beyond any kind of repair” and she could not find relief from her mental anguish whether sleeping or awake. Her realization that she had slept while “while something murderous was close enough to touch me” tangled fear and guilt together while she also tried to reconcile her bravery once she was aware of the crisis that morning: “On one hand, I was proud of myself for handling the emergency like a Girl Scout. On the other hand, I was ashamed of myself for enjoying the recognition of my actions that day.” Very soon after the incident she remembered feeling isolated and unable to be the person she remembered herself being. It was “hard to contain the fear and yet still try to continue to function as a student in college or function as a friend to... friends who weren't at Camp Scott who didn't experience what [I] experienced.”⁴²

While Michelle was anxious and fearful, the most intense symptoms did not emerge until much later, when she was in her early twenties and on her own in the world. Although she had stayed to help close up the camp on the day of the murders, she never saw the girls' bodies. But the burden she carried for more than thirty years was believing that the sleeping arrangements she had been asked to make for the tents meant that she “chose” those girls for that tent; in this, she felt responsible in a tangential way for their deaths. What actually happened that night was that the counselors had instead allowed the girls to choose their own tent-mates. She did not know this fact until she found and read the criminal court testimony in 2008. For all those years, Michelle thought she had

⁴¹ Carla Wilhite questionnaire, 3.

⁴² Carla Wilhite, questionnaire, 3; June 6, 2009 Interview, 7.

somehow indirectly “decided” who was murdered. The tremendous anxiety this created leaked out in different iterations. She first initiated therapy for a brief period in 1989, at age 27, and then found another counselor a few years later. She remembered, “The second therapist I worked with diagnosed me with depression, but not anxiety. We discussed the panic attacks on my first visit and she explained that they were the result of depression. At my second visit with her I stated that they were still happening and her response was, ‘we talked about those last time, let’s move on.’” Michelle began to have panic attacks while she was driving and soon did not trust herself to not turn into oncoming traffic. She described taking circuitous routes everywhere she needed to go so that she could always stay in the right lane, close to the curb, and refrained from all left-hand turns. Instead of finding relief in a therapist’s office, she just adapted to the persistence. She openly admitted that “the anxiety attacks worsened as the years went by, and I learned to work around them by not driving alone on the highway and by not living or being alone. I became really good at manipulating situations, and people, in order to feel and be safe. That’s the sad, ugly, truth.”⁴³

Most of interview subjects identified sets of signs and symptoms that perfectly describe post-traumatic stress disorder, but their diagnoses occurred more than twenty-five years after the trauma, when all of them were well into adulthood. Once they learned about it, these women recollected symptoms of PTSD, most of which began immediately after the murders. By the mid to late 1990s, PTSD was more readily applied to victims and witnesses of many kinds of violence. Particularly in the United States, a broader understanding emerged in the culture at large following the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing and the 1999 Columbine High School massacre. Among Camp Scott survivors,

⁴³ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 5.

if they pursued help into the 1990s, the diagnosis emerged solely in the context of individual therapy in the decade following these national tragedies. Support groups, memorial services, and other kinds of public grieving never happened for them.

During the course of interviews and re-acquaintance, Carla, Michelle and others learned that several among them had individually encountered and found great relief from a new technique developed by Francine Shapiro. EMDR, short for Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, is based on the premise that PTSD symptoms arise when traumatic events are inadequately processed and that they can be eradicated when the memory is fully processed. EMDR usually involves bilateral stimulation of the brain, such as eye movements, used as “breaks” when the client is telling the traumatic story. The therapist might move a pen back and forth and ask the client to follow it for a few seconds during breaks in the re-telling of the traumatic event. This has the effect of slowing the story down and buried memories from the moment are likely to emerge. Researchers discovered that eye movements decrease the vivid nature and negative emotions of these memories.⁴⁴

Whether it is unique to Girl Scout culture or to secondary trauma victims in general, several women who were *not* at the camp that day recalled the feeling of actually *wishing* that they were there—whether to help out, allay fears, or to feel that they had a valid reason for the painful emotions they experienced afterwards. One was at a summer internship, another was on a family vacation, and was one accompanying a foreign exchange student on a trip.⁴⁵ When asked why they felt this way, all of their answers

⁴⁴ Francine Shapiro, *Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing: basic principles, protocols, and procedures*. New York: Guilford Press, 1995.

⁴⁵ Jo Lynch, Joni Kinsey, Linda Epps questionnaires.

included some reference to the phrase from the Girl Scout Promise: “Be a Sister to Every Girl Scout.” They truly wanted to be a comfort for their friends. One young woman, Jo Lynch, was a life-long friend of counselor Susan Emery. She tried to reach her friend that day. “As soon as I caught my breath from the horror and disbelief, my first thought was that Susan was hurting really bad and I tried calling her home...I wasn't able to get any answer at all until the next day and when I did, it was a recording telling me I had to call another number.”⁴⁶ Jo persisted and found herself on the phone with someone at the police department. She was asked numerous questions about how well she knew Susan, did she know Susan’s boyfriend, and why was she calling the Emery house. Law enforcement “protection” prevented her from comforting and consoling her old friend that day. “After the police representative realized I didn't know anything useful, they gave me a phone number. I had to call that number, give them my name and phone number, and they would give that to the Emerys...I was told not to try to call their home directly and not try to visit Susan.”⁴⁷ The result of this isolation had a devastating effect on Jo’s ability to be a source of comfort to Susan. Being cut off from her friend and losing Camp Scott became intertwined, as Jo’s letter revealed. “When we finally managed to arrange to meet in person, we really didn't talk very much about the crime...I remember when I went home having the feeling that even though I could still see, touch, and hear Susan, my lifelong friend had gone somewhere beyond my understanding and that I'd lost a part of her and our friendship forever”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Jo Lynch, correspondence with author, 2010.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

Jo Lynch and two other interviewees recalled having to deal with the tragedy and the loss of the camp, with a corresponding loss of safety and connection to the place, but without any direct connection to the event itself. Were they survivors? No. Did they experience a significant loss? Yes. “Not only had my friend changed, but all my cherished childhood memories of Camp Scott, camping, singing, hiking, doing Girl Scout crafts and earning badges...all of those felt cut off, and somehow tarnished by the tragedy.”⁴⁹ Joni Kinsey, who had prepared to be a counselor that summer but did not go at the last minute due to a family move across the country, recalled the morning her parents showed her the *Washington Post*. “I was shocked beyond belief. My parents both said, ‘We’re so glad you’re not there.’ But I felt like I should have been—the camp counselors dealing with the horror of it all were my friends.”⁵⁰ Linda Epps, who had been a camper at Scott from 1968-1976, was on a family vacation when she heard the news. She was enrolled to be a CIT later that summer, and “heard the news on the radio.” She was “frantic—because the radio did not specify if the murders were campers or counselors.” She recalled that she made her parents stop at the first pay phone they could find so she could call her friends, “and I started calling all my friends—collect! I don’t think I stopped shaking from the shock of the news for several days afterwards. What kept crossing my mind was that it could have been me.”⁵¹

In recent years, American culture has created traditions and healing modalities to deal with traumatic events. The Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995, the Columbine High

⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁰ Joni Kinsey, questionnaire, 2.

⁵¹ Linda Epps, questionnaire, 1.

School Shootings in 1999, and the September 11th World Trade Center attacks are notorious tragedies that have garnered national and international attention, where survivors and onlookers were immediately able to grieve, commemorate, organize, and support each other. For the women and girls at Camp Scott, no such memorial existed, and a time to gather, grieve and talk about what happened never occurred.⁵² Memorial services and other publicly accepted, cathartic displays of grief for victims of tragedies since the 1990s have not gone unnoticed by Camp Scott survivors. Their historical awareness that the culture has changed since then has allowed for a bit of hindsight healing, some of which they freely admitted happened in the course of interviews for this project. Michelle Hoffman articulated a point felt by several survivors. “We, as a community of Scouts, never had the opportunity to grieve together. In fact, we hardly ever even talked about it after the summer camp session ended in 1977. I don’t know about my fellow Camp Scott scouts, but I know that I didn’t really grieve what happened to the girls, to us, to our camp, until 2004...27 years later.”⁵³

For many Camp Scott alumnae, the property itself was the fourth victim that day. The camp was closed that day and never reopened. What happens to the place where a tragedy occurred? However isolated and rare the murders were, the loss of the camp property itself has continued to effect a generation of women who will never be able to return to that special place. Joni Kinsey spoke for several women interviewed when she said, “I have long felt that it was as if someone I deeply loved died and I never got to say goodbye. But a place is not supposed to die; it is a different relationship than with a

⁵²MECGS, *Lamplighter*,

⁵³ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 6.

person—human deaths, while irreconcilable in many ways, are inevitable. That fact—of a place dying—of *that place* which was so full of joy and innocence—is still hard for me to accept.”⁵⁴ Joni Kinsey became an art history professor with a renowned expertise on Western landscape painter Thomas Moran. The paintings preserve the beauty and grandeur of special landscapes in the American West and, as long as they are safe in a museum, the memory of those landscapes will remain intact. A genealogy of trauma, as Ruth Leys aptly described it, must also include the physical spaces—and in this instance, it was a place in nature where no one had ever imagined such a violent desecration could occur. The power of the memory changed the way Magic Empire Girl Scouts looked at nature.

Gendered Resentments

The Boy Scout’s Camp Garland was near Camp Scott property, and from the moment the murders were revealed to their camp officials, it became clear that they were not going to do anything to change their policies. Girl Scouts from that time remember this fact with great indignation. “I was really resentful that the Boy Scouts and their camp seemed to go right on as if nothing had happened, but for me, my little sisters, and all our friends, camping would mean HUGE [sic] security measures, and the freedom to wander about in nature at Camp Scott or anywhere else would be severely constrained and always have an element of fear that shouldn't be there.”⁵⁵ MaryJo Turner was the waterfront director at Camp Scott for five summers prior to 1977 and described them as the best summers of her life. She taught swimming, sailing and canoeing. When she

⁵⁴ Joni Kinsey, Questionnaire, 2.

⁵⁵ Jo Lynch, correspondence with author, June 2009.

raised her own children years later, the security disparities between Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts brought up old resentments, despite her personal knowledge of why differences existed. She did not believe that the new rules would necessarily keep someone from harming Girl Scouts if so determined, and resented the extra training and security for girls “when the boys rules were so much less restrictive.”⁵⁶

Although there are statistically more women than men in so-called helping professions, the kinds of work many Camp Scott survivors engaged in appears concentrated among people in the most dire need of help and protection: abused children, people with disabilities, the chronically ill, and other victims of violent crime. Susan Emery became a social worker who treats neglected and abused children. She admitted that her professional work is an outlet and a means to deal with trauma in a concrete and effective manner—she is a person in charge of making a bad situation better for children. Her inability to discuss the day of the Girl Scout murders has not lessened her own therapeutic impact on making the world a better place. In an era of exposés and exaggerated trauma, her silence maintains a certain dignity, but one that can only be understood because of other victims’ willingness to speak.

SarahJane Hopkins Mouttet also became a social worker specializing in child and adult rape survivors. She provided direct services as well as set up programs in four counties to improve investigation and evidence collection. Later, she served as the director of a child advocacy center in Tulsa that provided a coordinated, multidisciplinary investigation of crimes against children in a safe environment. She understands the connection between her work and her trauma. “I had first-hand experience as a child who

⁵⁶ Mary Turner Spangler, questionnaire, 1-3.

was improperly interviewed in an unsafe situation. It made me fight harder to see that the children I worked with were not re-traumatized by the investigation process.”⁵⁷

Michelle Hoffman wanted to be a forest ranger for the National Park Service, until she learned about the solitude required on the job in the wilderness—“that terrified me and I couldn’t even fathom it”—so she realized this would be an impossible occupation for her.⁵⁸ She earned a degree in journalism but found a job after college running a home for women with disabilities, and eventually became a professional advocate for people with disabilities. She later became a case manager and advocate for Medicaid recipients living with HIV/AIDS. In every job, she realized, “my work has always been about making things right for people...to prevent further pain or infliction...and to force societal change.”⁵⁹ As to how she feels today, Michelle added, “Now, at the age of 47, [being a forest ranger] sounds appealing to me and I’m certain I could complete the work peacefully. Much different than 20 years ago.”

Although Carla Wilhite applied to be a camp counselor the very next summer at a Girl Scout camp in Colorado, she was not emotionally ready to work there until the summer of 1979, following Hart’s trial. She earned a Bachelor’s degree in Fine Art and then, going in a completely different direction, pursued a career as a police officer and criminal investigator in Farmington, New Mexico during the 1980s. At the time, she wanted to be a police officer as a way to have some mastery over her fears, and she was doubly determined to treat all people she encountered with respect. The interrogations after Camp Scott still upset her, and she wanted to be a better officer—one who did not

⁵⁷ SarahJane Hopkins Mouttet, questionnaire, 3-4.

⁵⁸ Michelle Hoffman, questionnaire, 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 5.

make presumptions and accusations. Rather than mastering her fears, she over-exposed herself, adding new job-related traumas to her already troubled self. She distinctly remembers the case that ended her police work. “I investigated the murder of two young Navajo men; they were murdered all over this house, and I went home that night and I was just traumatized—a traumatized person just being continually re-traumatized.”⁶⁰ She went back to college and trained to be an occupational therapist. Now a professor of occupational therapy in Albuquerque, New Mexico, she helps and directs research projects that allow injured ranchers and farmers to stay on the job.

Dr. Judith Herman’s trauma and recovery research findings ring true with Camp Scott survivors and their path to healing. After dedicated psychological and emotional work, “the survivor who has accomplished her recovery faces life with few illusions but often with gratitude. Her view of life may be tragic, but for that very reason she has learned to cherish laughter. She has a clear sense of what is important and what is not. Having encountered evil, she knows how to cling to what is good.”⁶¹ Carla Wilhite may have inherently possessed an articulate, self-reflective personality, regardless of the trauma of the Camp Scott murders, but its impact on her life and her living settled at the center of her soul; her understanding of the tragedy is both deep and broad. Coming to peaceful terms with the its impact on her life—the guilt, the fear, the pain—has taken decades to reconcile. “In a lot of ways, every stitch and step of my life has been about

⁶⁰ Carla Wilhite, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, June 6, 2009, transcript, 8.

⁶¹ Herman, 213.

those three children...I want to make the world a better place and do what I can to just live a good life.”⁶²

⁶² Carla Wilhite, interview by Michelle Hoffman, June 2008, transcript, 5.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

Survivors embody memory, their bodies the texts of memory, their voices its textures. They stand at the juncture of memory and history, tugging by their very presence at the boundaries of each.

- Marita Sturken¹

The life stories and recollections of 1977 Camp Scott survivors, both written and voiced, certainly tug at the long history of that tragic summer night. And when compiled, they create a longer, more nuanced rendering of how one tragedy can ripple across decades in the lives of survivors. Writing this story has not been a jaunt in the archives, but it has been a journey of discovery both intellectual and revelatory into the minds of my subjects. Memory is not tidy. It is human, and therefore replete with fallibility and foibles, both trivial and devastating. Trauma survivors know that complete closure often remains elusive in their lives, despite continuous personal growth and episodic relief, but by my hope is that by documenting their previously unshared memories I have created a text that embodies their experiences honestly and with dignity.

The criminal case also remains open—still waiting for someone to close it, like a weather-worn, gaping window yawning from the eaves of an old abandoned house—and its unresolved status has left ghosts in many forms. The local media churns out perpetual anniversary pieces that repeat the tragedy ad nauseam, interview the aging parent-survivors, and rehash the unsolved murders with grainy footage and weary stills of a canvas platform tent. True crime websites abound with photos, narratives, and

¹ Sturken, Marita, *Tangled Memories*, 254.

speculation from hundreds of comment threads, opinions, and personal connections to the crime, or the area—however distant— all trailing down the screen’s endless page.² At what point will crime buffs and novice investigators stop swapping rumors and rehashing old leads?

Back in 1989 when DNA testing was a cutting edge, novel way to try to convict criminals—they called it “DNA fingerprinting”—and long after it became more widespread, samples of Camp Scott’s crime scene evidence were examined on several occasions in an effort to solve the case. To date, all such analyses have failed to precisely match Gene Leroy Hart or anyone else to the crime.³ Leads still come in to the OSBI.

In what is perhaps the most outlandish recent example, self-described filmmaker John Russell Penn announced in June 2011 that he was going to make a movie about the Girl Scout murders entitled *Candles The Movie* (sic) in which he would reveal as a climax in the plot the *actual murderer*, as if his alleged evidence would also logically make for good entertainment. He kept the identity of the “real killer” a secret for a time. His movie ambitions made headlines in Oklahoma, and hundreds of citizens attended his casting auditions in Tulsa. Young girls lined up to be cast as Girl Scout campers with their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers standing by, everyone excited, nervous, and

² The top four websites covering the crime and the camp are Justin Tyler Moore, “Abandoned Oklahoma: Camp Scott,” *AbandonedOK*, October 27, 2012, <http://www.abandonedok.com/camp-scott>; Needthetruth, “Oklahoma 1977 Girl Scout Murders, General Discussion” *Girl Scout Murders*, July 31, 2007, <http://girlscoutmurders.yuku.com>; Taun, “The Girl Scout Camp Murders,” *Unexplained Mysteries*, Sept 17, 2012, <http://www.unexplained-mysteries.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=234093>; Kevin Weaver, “The Still Unsolved 1977 Oklahoma Girl Scout Murders,” *Girl Scout Murders, 2010*, <http://www.girlscoutmurders.com>.

³ *Tulsa World*, 26 July 1989; *Tulsa Tribune*, 26 July 1989, 24 October 1989; *Daily Oklahoman*, 8 June 1996; *Pryor Daily Times*, 11 April 2005, 11 September 2007; KOTV-Tulsa, *NewsOn6.com*, 24 June 2008, <http://www.newson6.com/story/8545813/dna-testing-inconclusive-in-girl-scout-murder-case>.

intrigued—a poignant and sickening example of rape culture perpetuating and feeding itself.⁴

Penn's own criminal past caught up with him a few days into the media frenzy when a local reporter confronted him about his time served for embezzlement, check fraud, and mailbox robberies, a federal offense.⁵ He seemed unperturbed and dismissive of his past, and so did Mrs. Sherri Farmer, mother of Lori, who said she had become accustomed to the likelihood that anyone who knew the truth about her daughter's murder would somehow be connected to prison life.⁶ The OSBI did not find his announcement entertaining, and neither did the Oklahoma Film and Music Board. Both organizations urged him to contact law enforcement with any solid leads about the crime.

With the unexpected, natural passing of a death row inmate, Karl Meyers, Penn lost his man.⁷ During his early publicity, he said a current death row inmate had confessed to him while they were both drunk in a county jail in 1978.⁸ The film has not been made and appears to have stalled indefinitely.

⁴ Reshma Kirpalani "1977 Girl Scout Murders: Ex-Con Claims His Film Will Solve Case," *abcnews.com*, July 8, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/1977-girl-scout-murders-con-claims-film-solve/story?id=14022194#.TsiJU7Ixa8s>; Emily Baucum, "Tulsans Audition For Role In Upcoming Girl Scout Murder Movie, June 26, 2011," *Oklahoma's Own NewsOn6.com*, <http://www.newson6.com/story/14979166/tulsa-director-claims-upcoming-movie-will-solve-1977-girl-scout-murders?clienttype=printable>.

⁵ Tara Vreeland, "Filmmaker Behind Movie About Oklahoma's Girl Scout Murders Has Criminal Past," June 28, 2011, *Oklahoma's Own NewsOn6*, <http://www.newson6.com/story/14993957/girl-scout-murder>.

⁶ *Tulsa World*, 10 July 2011.

⁷ *Tulsa World*, 1 January 2013.

⁸ *Tulsa World*, 25 June 2011.

Certainly John Russell Penn can be dismissed as exactly the kind of person—the money-hungry, media sensationalist—that former Magic Empire Council Executive Director Bonnie Brewster wanted to keep away from the Girl Scouts as long as she lives. But given the media attention and the hundreds who came out for auditions, he clearly tapped the public’s appetite for both gruesome entertainment and a wish to have the weary murder case finally solved.

For the women survivors at Camp Scott, solving the crime after thirty-odd years could never diminish the impact the murders had on their lives following June 13. What did help was time passing; episodic or long-term therapy; and repeatedly connecting their trauma experience to local, celebrity, or notable incidents that followed: the Atlanta Child Murders, publicized accounts of missing children (perhaps beginning with Etan Patz), then Columbine, the Oklahoma City Bombing, 9/11, Virginia Tech, Aurora, and now most recently Sandy Hook. As therapy and social work professionals began to understand the impact of trauma on mental health and applied their trauma and recovery knowledge to victims of ever-increasing acts of mass violence, 1977 Girl Scout murder survivors saw how they too had suffered, that there was a name for it, and maybe even some relief.

Daily life in the late 1900s and early 2000s has accustomed Americans to repeated violent incidents of all kinds, and as a result, one could argue most of us now live with a kind of prememory of mass violence, like the prememory of rape discussed in my introduction.⁹ And many in the general public would likely diagnose themselves with

⁹ Marianne Hirsch, “Marked By Memory,” in *Extremities*, 74. And from Brison, *Aftermath*, 87: “Girls in our society are raised with so many cautionary tales about rape that even if we are not assaulted in childhood, we enter womanhood freighted with postmemories of sexual violence.” These postmemories haunt the present but also “reach into the future in the form of fear, a kind of prememory of what, at times, seems inevitable: one’s own future experience of being raped.”

a kind of collective media compassion fatigue. We can't stop watching even though we do truly tire of these senseless tragedies. They are heartbreaking and prolific. It is too much to handle psychologically and spiritually; and yet by watching and reading and following, we numb ourselves to the repetition, to the iterations of violence and death and trauma, over and over again. A pioneer in trauma studies, Dr. Judith Herman asserts that "denial, repression and dissociation operate on a social level as well as an individual level," and only when we begin to look back at the past, will there be any possibility of reclaiming a present and a future less tainted by trauma.

As with rape culture for women and girls, we are becoming socialized to a kind of murder continuum of violence in our daily lives. The prevalence of mass violent incidents in the past twenty years does not make the Girl Scout murders in 1977 any less horrific, but it is possible that such a story might be numbing to a contemporary audience, one acculturated and saturated by almost daily tragedies, both far and near. The purpose of this project is to show the long-term impact of one such event on survivors over a stretch of their lives. Start with the 150 Camp Scott survivors, and add their families and friends, their future offspring, their spouses and partners, and one begins to see the accumulated potential consequence each violent incident might have on the inner, emotional community of neighbors, friends, citizens—the forgotten and unspoken but still damaging impact these traumas have on the mental health of lives, cities, our nation.

In 1996, when I first began thinking of the Camp Scott incident as a master's thesis topic, I had an understandably protective and nostalgic attitude about what

happened to the Girl Scout council and to Camp Scott. At the time, I was enchanted by and freshly committed to women's history. I wanted to find these fearless women, and knew I could lovingly tell their story of strength, dedication, and courage on behalf of young girls. After all, these heroic adult Girl Scouts had maintained outdoor programming for us against terrific odds. I suspected I would find devoted feminists among them, and like the private suffragist in Girl Scout founder Juliette Gordon Low, I thought they would divulge to me their secret stories of women's empowerment and sharp, independent thinking during the Second Wave.¹⁰

During the interviews I conducted during 1996-97, I learned that they were indeed strong women, but they were also afraid, angry, sad, and damaged. They were not avowed feminists; one even suggested to me politely that Girl Scouting was "above" the aims of feminism in that era, though she didn't want to sound "snotty."¹¹ Despite her comment, I still thought I would be able to connect the Girl Scouts' history to the history of Second Wave feminism in the parallel moments of this tragedy's aftermath. It made historical sense that they would be, and I just knew I could tease it out. But they weren't. They were simply mothers and aunts, volunteers and administrators, housewives and career women who all just *loved* Girl Scouting. Their camp and its traditions were precious to them. Not only had they suffered the loss of three little girls on their property, their outdoor home became a crime investigation headquarters; a killer was on the loose, and within three months, six months before the suspect was even captured, the

¹⁰ Cordery, 175. Low drew a cartoon of herself in her diary holding a suffrage placard, pouring salt on the tail of a "refractory birdlike legislator, to hasten along the franchise," but she did not come out publicly as a suffragist or women's rights advocate so as to keep up her image as a Southern lady while offering the world to her Girl Scouts.

¹¹ Ginny Young, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, transcript, 93.

council itself was named in a negligence lawsuit. The Girl Scouts had a huge crisis on their hands. Whether they were 1970s feminists hardly mattered, then or later. The fallout from this tragedy demanded survival and protection on both an individual and organizational level.

These stories are compelling, and their own words are poignant and deep. At some point in 2009 after interviewing Carla Wilhite for the chapter on the arc of trauma, I decided to let the survivors narrate the meaning of the aftermath, both immediate and long-term. Connections and intersections emerged. I drew circles of women whose relationships overlapped, like a Venn diagram of associations and friendships, that when combined, created a ripple effect, much like a pond makes when a stone is skipped over it. I worked to make sense of the longer, hidden stories of survivors. Of these many voices, one stands out in each chapter to represent the historical moment and lesson embedded within.

Julia Ratliff, wise seer and fifth grade teacher, was horrified by the tragedy in 1977, and immediately penned an editorial about the camp that was both nostalgic and prescient, ending with the eerily accurate prediction that “camp will become a prison as well as a playground...armed guards and dogs to keep out the vipers of childhood.”¹² Late August of the same year, when she discovered that three fifth-grade girls in her Lee Elementary classroom had been at Scott that previous June day, she pulled them aside, said comforting things, and kept them under her wing. The class read *The Little Prince*

¹² *Tulsa World*, 21 June 1977.

and some of them memorized, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”¹³

So much remains invisible when researching Gene Leroy Hart, the most unsettling character in this history. Even though acquitted by a jury, the possibility of his guilt—the probability of it for many—still haunts the hearts and minds of investigators, parents, and Girl Scout survivors. Some have just accepted that Hart killed the girls because of the evidence and his past rapes. For many others, especially local residents who knew Hart or his family, he was an easy scapegoat, affirmed by the lengthy manhunt and a trial that represented the worst of a racially biased criminal justice system. The sacred mystery around Cherokee medicine and the role of power in the spirit world of medicine men is something I will always revere; I was raised to respect every world religion. None of us can ever fully understand the depth of a practitioner’s spiritual power, and my respect for the Keetoowah Nighthawk Society and the Cherokee nation remains deep. Some believed good medicine was used for ill purposes and that Hart’s sudden death was the price he paid for that misuse of medicine. Others believe he was not only a scapegoat, but that he was further victimized by a likely murder and cover-up in prison.

Sweet Michelle Hoffman, fifteen years old in 1977 and full of amiable respect and polite curiosity, represents in this story the bridge, the link, and the hopeful golden thread between the older Girl Scouts whom she admired, Camp Scott where she grew up, and the new girls, the new camp, and the time after the tragedy where she desperately wanted healing. She ached to keep camp a special place in the hearts of future campers, even as

¹³ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 70.

she longed for the landscape and traditions of the lost Camp Scott. Her work over many summers at the new Camp Tallchief embodies the very best of Girl Scout resilience and adaptability in the face of change, both individually and collectively.

Affable and strategic Dan Rogers, counsel for the Magic Empire Council, ushered the Girl Scout staff and board through eight years of protracted negotiations with two of the victims' families, and when those failed, defended them at trial in 1985. Up against a law school superstar in his own class, Rogers' performance won out. "We needed some tears on our side, Amy," he told me one fall day in 2005. "Can you imagine someone like me, a grown man, crying as I delivered my final arguments to the jury in defense of the Girl Scouts?"¹⁴ Who on the jury was ready to implicate Girl Scouts in this crime? Rogers protected their past actions because he knew his hand was on the pulse of what the jury was willing to consider, and that was "not guilty." He acknowledged that yes, the world was changing, but the Girl Scouts could have never stopped a killer bent on doing harm. The jury agreed.

Finally, the brave Carla Wilhite—a most tenacious survivor—who encountered the inexplicable on an early morning at her beloved camp: three dead girls cast off in the woods. Her heroism that day was never acknowledged. Instead, she was considered a suspect and then ached her way through a painful coming out; she wrestled for years through an unnamed and unacknowledged recovery that dogged her wellbeing into mid-life. A police officer, an artist, and now a professor of occupational therapy, Carla embodies the definition of survivor, embodies what it means to thrive in spite of trauma. Her eloquence was a priceless gift to this project. Her belief in my ability to come to it

¹⁴ Dan Rogers, interview by Amy C. Sullivan, transcript, 5.

honestly is that dearest sort of Girl Scout legacy—sisterhood combined with a common goal to “try whenever you can to make the world a better place.”¹⁵

Returning to the question of finding feminists among Girl Scouts in this project, the answer to my search now seems unnecessary, but for a different reason. Since its founding in 1912, Girl Scouting effectively adapted its programming to girls’ changing interests during a century of remarkable social and cultural changes for women. With its beginnings in what is called the First Wave of feminism, the girls’ organization created and forged its own path, one that held true to Juliette Gordon Low’s initial inspiration, and kept its focus on girls’ interests, deliberately choosing to not engage with political or social feminist, or anti-feminist, rhetoric. Their neutrality served them well because that way they could appeal to more girls. That said, the intellectual history of feminist thinking and acting in the world left crumbs on a trail that is now wide and full, thanks to historians of women. Tracing Juliette Gordon Low’s education, for example, one can see that it in fact harkens back to a feminist impulse that is even earlier than her First Wave counterparts. Most of all, Low related to girls on their terms and let them follow their own interests within a safe and flexible framework.¹⁶

Adults were definitely in charge and made critical adult decisions on the day of the murders and after, but memories of the day settled into the girls’ development, and as

¹⁵ GSUSA, *Junior GS Handbook* (1975), 10.

¹⁶ Susan Laird, “Make New Friends But Keep The Old: The Girl Scout Idea of Educating Girls and Women,” (2009), 7. Laird, a feminist philosopher of education, connected Juliette Gordon Low’s determination to offer girls as rigorous and wonderful a program boys had in Boy Scouts with Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). With regard to outdoor programming, a cornerstone of Girl Scout education, she draws a lineage from “Wollstonecraft’s claim that girls’ rational capacities can develop through their freedom to run wild out-of-doors” and that “Low’s Girl Scouts pursued the same coeducational aims that Wollstonecraft theorized.”

they grew to womanhood, they took lessons from it in the form of fears, actions, and future career paths. Camper SarahJane Hopkins and counselor Susan Emery chose social work careers helping sexually abused children; camper Michelle Hoffman became a Girl Scout camp director for a few summers; counselor Carla Wilhite trained at a police academy and worked as an officer for eight years, trying mightily to be strong, to be attentive, and to quell her persistent fears. The Magic Empire Council's leadership that day and for years after was all on behalf of children—for their protection, care, and safety. Beyond security, though, what lay at the heart of their actions, no matter how extreme they may have seemed then, was perhaps the most fundamental, long-standing value of Girl Scouting: that a girl must have access to, appreciation for, and the freedom to roam around in a natural setting. No matter how wicked the larger world had become.

CHAPTER VIII

EPILOGUE: MEMORY

Amy Sullivan: Junior Girl Scout, Troop #277
Magic Empire Council of Girl Scouts
Tulsa, Oklahoma

I.

We ate supper but the concilors[sic] were real strict. We started to sing, but after about 3 songs it started to rain. Well, here I am writing in my diary while it is raining...Kim's telling a story now. It's still raining. These girls are making noise for about two hours now. I can't get to sleep so I am writing. It's about the only thing to do when you can't go to sleep.¹

Kim and I became best friends when we were in the same fourth grade class and Girl Scout troop at Lee Elementary in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Incredibly—to us, anyway—we were both left-handed, shared the same April Fool's Day birthday, loved drawing mice, and collected miniatures. One day we discovered that, amazingly, we both had three-letter first names and eight-letter last names. What were the chances? These blood-sister commonalities cemented our friendship with a nine-year-old sense of the predestined, never to be forsworn.

Kim's house was where I had my first sleepover. As the oldest of three girls, I had no reference point for brothers, but Kim was in the middle of two boys. Her big brother Mark was especially strange and mysterious to me, with his tight bell-bottoms, feathered hair, and stinky-sweet chewing tobacco. Her parents, Kay and Dan, sold Amway products, something that also intrigued and confused me. Most of all, Kim

¹Amy Sullivan, personal diary, December 25, 1976-September 18, 1977.

¹Amy Sullivan, personal diary, December 25, 1976-September 18, 1977.

²Carol Lee Flinders, *At The Root of This Longing*, 164.

enchanted me with her black hair and her graceful, curvy body. Gangly and blonde, I remember wondering exactly how long I'd have to wait for such a body.

Early in 1977, we planned to go to Girl Scout summer camp, so we sold as many cookies as possible because of a new "Cookie Credit" that would defray the cost of camp. As summer approached, we signed up for the very first session and made some required camp accessories together—a sit-upon and a dip-bag, both in 1970s sherbet-floral oranges and plaid greens.

June 12th had finally arrived. We sat together on the big charter bus and decided that if we were given a choice, we definitely wanted to sleep in the same tent. Everyone was so excited, and girls sang silly camp songs all the way to Locust Grove. *"Just a boy and a girl in a little canoe, with the moon shinin' all around..."* When we arrived at camp and disembarked into groups, our wish to be tent mates came true. As we made our way around the horseshoe configuration of platform tents in our unit, named Quapaw, we were allowed to choose a girl or two we knew to bunk with. Kim and I found ourselves in a tent with Kelly, a girl from our troop, and another girl named Kim, whom we did not know. We four settled in to our new camp home, excited and nervous.

That night, at what everyone called the Great Hall, we had dinner at long tables and learned many rules about camp dining room etiquette. I was very nervous. The food tasted strangely bland. I don't recall my counselors' names, but they sat with us and explained what we were supposed to do—how to pass the food, when to refill the pitchers, and to eat *everything* on our plates. After dinner, a few counselors led us in songs as we huddled under a covered patio connected to Great Hall. I later learned that this was a very special place at Camp Scott, lovingly called The Singing Porch.

Oklahoma is known for dramatic weather changes, and this June night did not disappoint. The onset of an extremely heavy thunder and lightning storm kept us singing on the porch for a time. When the storm let up enough for us to get on with the evening, we headed back, the trees still dripping, and raced back to our units and into our tents. We spent the rest of the evening talking, messing around with our new camp stuff (flashlights!) and writing. When I finally turned my flashlight off, the darkness was so deep I could not see my hand in front of my face. In that moment, the darkest dark I had ever known in my ten years enveloped me. I couldn't tell if my eyes were open or shut; that darkness became my personal measure of any darkness—from that night forward, and ever after. I fell asleep to waves of giggling and laughing, yelling and screaming late into the night. I figured that some of the girls must have been having a hard time going to sleep because they were too excited. As I drifted off, I heard counselors chiding them to be quiet.

The next morning when we heard the camp bell, we knew from the previous night's instruction that we were to get dressed and ready for breakfast. Our unit walked to the Great Hall along a paved road this time, not the previous night's wooded trail, and it took longer to get there. As we were walking in a line at the edge of the road, three ambulances drove very slowly past us. Remarkably, I thought nothing of it, and no one else commented on it either.

After breakfast, our counselors told us that we were going on a creek hike to swim and picnic. Before we left, though, they said we had to pack our belongings and put them in a pile in our unit. I remember that there was a huge chalk circle drawn on the ground where we were to put our camp gear. Besides the disorienting task that we already had to

pack up our belongings, the pile of gear with the circle around it disturbed me.

Nevertheless, I was new to camp and moved along with everyone else, and like a good Girl Scout, did exactly as directed.

The creek hike was an adventure at first—we tromped along a path and came upon a beautiful swimming hole with a rocky shore and a striking rock overhang on the other side of the creek. I was not fond of swimming, and since any kind of creek, lake, and pond swimming made me even more nervous, I hung near the shore. I noticed that a few counselors were sitting together close to the tree line behind me. If a swimming or meandering girl strayed a little towards the edge of where we first landed, one of these counselors would holler at her to stay close by. They definitely seemed different that morning—quieter, distracted, and not so carefree. It gave me a strange feeling. At one point, an unidentified adult came down to where we were, called a girl's name, and took her back down the trail. Where was she going? I don't remember how much time we spent at the creek, but when we returned, the big busses were back.

What? We had to go home! Why? What happened? No one said. Some of the older girls on the bus were really mad. They wanted to know the reason. I heard someone say something about a water shortage. I guessed that made sense—we all needed water—but why didn't the grown-ups know that before now? I was my usual self, quiet and observant. Kim and I again shared a seat for the ride back home. Some girls made lanyards and others looked at magazines. No one sang this time.

Finally, we arrived in Tulsa at the parking lot across from the Girl Scout Service Center, the bus pulled into the same place, but the scene was incredibly different from the day before. I perked up my head, immediately alert. The parking lot teemed with dozens

of parents, reporters, television cameras, photographers, cars and news vans. What was the big deal? What was going on? We descended from the bus into a sea of grown-ups who looked stressed and anxious to find their daughters.

I wondered the whole way home what I would do when we got to Tulsa because my parents and little sisters were in Dallas. My dad was at a teachers' conference and my mom and sisters had gone with him to visit with her parents, my Nana and Grandpa, who lived there. Kim and I decided to talk to her mom to see if I could stay with her until they returned in day or two. I hung close to Kim during all the confusion. We found her mom. She said my grandma was looking for me. Grandma? Why would she be here? Still, I did not know what was happening. Sometime shortly after finding Kim's mom, my grandma appeared in the crowd. She looked distraught. We got my gear and went directly to her giant olive green Chevy Impala. A few minutes later at a stoplight, I remember looking at her very closely. I asked her what happened. "Oh, honey." She was crying. "Three girls were killed at your camp last night." "Killed?" The tears on her cheeks stayed there while she accelerated through the green light. I could not understand how that could be. Killed. At camp? While I *slept*?

When we arrived at her house, Grandma made me Spaghetti-Os. I loved them—a treat at her house, always—yet I wasn't hungry. I just stirred them around in the little white bowl. Then we called my mom and dad. They seemed upset and happy at the same time. After we hung up, Grandma called an airline company and arranged for me to fly—by myself—to Dallas! I remember their reasoning: it was the quickest way I could get to them. I had never flown, much less alone.

Not long after, Grandma and I were in the Tulsa airport. We walked past one of the newspaper dispensers. In huge letters across the top of the paper the headline read: THREE GIRLS SLAIN. Seeing that made me very mad. How could it already be in the news? I was just there. I didn't even understand what had happened yet, and there it was, a headline in the newspaper dispenser at the airport. Things happened so fast. I couldn't keep up, and I didn't understand. I knew even then that this was so much bigger than anything I could comprehend, like the size of the universe—and terribly, disturbingly big like that.

I sat alone in my own row. The stewardess gave me a Seven-Up, but before I had even finished drinking it, we were landing in Dallas-Fort Worth. My family was at the gate; Mom was crying. My sisters would not stop staring at me, even after we got in our van. I asked Mom to make them stop. She explained that they had been scared and were happy to see me. That was the first moment I remember feeling strangely exposed. Why were *they* scared? It seemed that everyone else was feeling something or seeing something that I wasn't. I felt numb, unsettled, and hollow.

Later that evening at my Nana's apartment, I asked if I could call Kim to see if she was okay. "Of course, Amy dear!" she lilted in her Boston brogue. Kim and I talked for just a moment. I was starting to feel upset by then, afraid, but not sure of what exactly, and really wanted to know if she felt the same way. She sounded cool and distant. "Are you okay?" I asked her. "Are you scared?" "No. I am fine," she said. It didn't seem like her. When we hung up, I felt a discomforting distance between us—it was the first time I had ever felt this space, this gap that somehow separated me from someone I loved. How could we have both been there when three girls our age were

murdered and she was fine and I was frightened? What did that mean? And what was rape, exactly? I could not make any sense of the information I had or, for that matter, the event itself. Later that night, in my grandparents' giant bed, I fell into my mother's arms and I sobbed and sobbed—crying for the first time during a long, unsettling day.

My journal entries three weeks later revealed a child trying to integrate something very troubling into the otherwise little events of a typical ten-year-old life. In my fanciest, most loopy cursive I wrote:

July 6, 1977

Maggie is four now. I don't really know what fear is and because of all the happenings like the three girls (G.S.'s) murdered, and a girl kidnapped. Linda's hamster died last night. And all of these have made me begin to feel what fear is like. Good-Bye!

July 7, 1977

What is life?

Life can be a series of things, like life and death, sadness and happiness. But when we feel sadness we think nothing good could ever happen. So cheer up. Enjoy every day as it comes to you.

Kim is spending the night. We just did some sparklers.

By the winter and spring of 1978, anxiety and fear dominated my life. I only slept when all of my stuffed animals had been arranged around my body, neck to toes, and only after my parents had come in to kiss me—Mom had to be first, always, and then Dad. The order was very important and I hated it when they messed it up. My door had to be open about a foot, exactly, with the stove light on in the kitchen. Despite these precise rituals, I knew that eventually the killer was going to find me. Indeed, he would often “appear” in my room behind the space of the door just before I slept. Once the actual suspect had been caught and I knew he was in prison, this imposter morphed into other scary men

who were acting on his behalf. Which scary man made no difference, because whoever he was or they were, the evil work of killing Girl Scouts, girls, my sisters, and my mother never ceased playing out in my mind. Every time my mom or sisters were out alone and did not come back at what I thought was the appointed time, I would sit on the porch and wait, and often I would cry. In the case of my youngest sister, Maggie, I would go looking for her if she didn't come home from school by the time I thought she should be home. My thinking at the time was that if at any time I was feeling safe, then others I loved were probably in danger, and therefore they would be targeted for assault instead of me. It made perfect sense in my newly imperfect world.

My parents accommodated my anxiety for as long as they could, and when it did not subside, they looked to help from a psychologist friend of theirs. He interviewed and “tested” me. I remember being asked to draw a house, and I carefully created an elaborate drawing of a hill with an arched wooden door in it—a kind of hobbit house or something a little clothed woodland animal from a Beatrix Potter book would happily inhabit. When I was then referred to a psychiatrist, and told by my parents that I had to start visiting this odd-sounding name for a doctor, I remember thinking that something must have been very *wrong* with the kind of house I drew. Did that drawing somehow reveal that something in me needed to be fixed? No more hobbit houses in my repertoire, ever.

Sometime later I met Dr. Betsy Wallach. She had a platinum blonde bob, glasses, and sat behind a desk when she talked with me. I remember feeling very, very small in the chair across from her. She may have been kind, but she soon became my emotional enemy. I learned much later from an interview subject that in the 1970s she, in fact, was at the forefront of helping women and girls who had experienced domestic and stranger

violence among Tulsa therapists. At the time, however, I felt her only interest was in deliberately making me cry *every single time* I saw her. I dreaded these visits more than having cavities filled. One day on the ride after school to see her, I asked my dad how long I had to keep going. “When you feel better, honey. When you don’t have any more fears.” Miraculously, all of my fears were gone within a couple visits! I just squeezed it all inside and said, “I’m better. Really!” I convinced my parents that I was “better” because I hated going, hated feeling exposed, and figured out that I could simply hide my fears. I succeeded at this strategy for quite some time.

I thought I might find some true relief when Gene Leroy Hart was finally captured in April 1978. I watched the news as obsessively as only someone who is eleven and had only four channels to choose from could. I read the paper every day. I know my parents struggled with this—I could see my mom watching me when I was reading an article related to the murders, which for the nine months since, was nearly every day. My first act as an informed citizen came when I wrote a letter to a beloved local news anchor, Clayton Vaughn, regarding what should happen to Gene Leroy Hart now that he had been captured. He read letters on air every night, and I waited for days to see if he’d read mine. I did not have to wait long. He read it with such seriousness—and I saw that he didn’t just think of me as a little girl. I was a Girl Scout! I was at Camp Scott that very night. And in my letter, I wholeheartedly advocated for Hart to get the death penalty. This was the first, last, and only time that I advocated for the death penalty, but at that moment, I just wanted my fears to stop.

II.

Historically, we must remember, the choice placed before women has almost never been between enclosure and freedom but rather between enclosure and *exposure*, and the only dependably safe enclosures available to us have been those offered by patriarchy.²

I was raised Catholic in the 1970s glory of Vatican II by parents who had each trained for a religious vocation before they met each other in college. The Church I grew up in was replete with guitars, groovy burlap and felt banners, living room Masses, and the dining room table baptism of my youngest sister. All three of our First Communion celebrations included nuns and priests who were close family friends. It was in this context that Roman Catholic catechism both helped and hindered my understanding of the murders. The forgiving God whom I had come to know as a child seemed worthless in this case—how could God forgive a child-rapist/murderer? Despite confession, absolution, and grace—all things that made God different from humankind—I couldn't find it in my heart to forgive such a beast. At ten, I understood inhumane cruelty more deeply than I understood the tenets of my religion. Existential confusion ensued. Why did those three girls have to die—and not three others? Were they so special that God wanted them? Why would God take them from their parents so brutally? God could be no part of this crime. So if God wasn't there, then God did not really “protect us from all evil,” regardless of how many times we prayed those words. I found loops of solace and hypocrisy in my church's teachings, and they orbited around me like the rings of Saturn.

Although I kept a diary religiously from age nine on, and still have them all, I was surprised to discover that after 1977, I wrote nothing of Camp Scott or of my associated

² Carol Lee Flinders, *At The Root of This Longing*, 164.

fears until the summer of 1984, just before I was to leave for college. Impending death had now loomed as a familiar shadow in my life for seven years.

June 17, 1984

June 13 marked seven years since the Camp Scott murders. I felt it very much this year—probably the most since it happened. I was terrified that I would have nightmares that night. I didn't...

In some ways, those brutal murders made me see how short and insignificant our lives can be when it comes down to the Scheme of Things. By insignificant, I don't mean unworthy of existence; but doesn't it seem strange that that would happen because of the brutal, savage behavior of one man? Doesn't Fate intervene anywhere? Is there not "a purpose to everything under heaven?" Day by day, I am realizing my purpose, though I continue to be unaware of when that purpose will end, and when I will move from this life

By the time I was in high school, the fact that I had been at Camp Scott in 1977 was part of my life story. Expecting death at any moment by any twist of fate hung around me like our humid summer air, and, like Tulsa's hot summers, death became something I just learned to live with. Sharing my experience of an infamous story that everyone I met remembered became one part of how I created intimacy in new friendships. When I finally felt trusting or close to someone, I would share this fact about my childhood. People were always shocked that I was there that night, and yet I knew there were more than one hundred of us—why was this such a surprise? "You're so lucky you weren't killed!" they would all proclaim. This commonly accepted concept of luck came to haunt me as an unseen and also very unpredictable force in my life. For many years I pondered the adage about one's luck "running out." Certainly mine would run out . . . wouldn't it? Well, yes, everyone dies...and around and around I would go.

Many years passed before I recognized that my sexual awakening had been greatly inhibited by the fact that I had learned about rape before I knew about the fun and joyful part of human sexuality. A few disparate therapists in a few different cities during my college years helped me to realize this connection. “Camp Scott” became an easy out—a way I could avoid unwanted sexual encounters, even if I was romantically enchanted. In many awkward situations, this “out” became quite handy, but in others, quite painful. Sometimes I really did want sexual connection, and yet I was so incredibly frightened at the core of my being, I could not relax or engage. I slowly realized that part of me had been closed off before I ever really knew what exactly I was hiding from. If sex is so great—so special—why did it scare me to death? At some point in my late teens or early twenties, my mother told me that when I was “psychologically tested” by the psychologists in 1978, the results showed a very close similarity to a girl who had been raped twice. How had this experience entered me so completely? Why was I so sensitive, and others not so much? This conversation haunted me for years.

III.

In conducting personal narrative research and in presenting its results, it is necessary to be transparent about both how the narratives were constructed or collected and how they were interpreted.³

In 1995, I was married, the mother of a precocious two-year-old daughter, and a full-time graduate student in History. As I neared the end of the required coursework, I was casting about for thesis topics. For months, nothing tangible came of my own Progressive

³ Maynes, et al, 124.

Era women's history research ideas or my professors' and classmates' lackluster suggestions. I went to bed one night quite frustrated with the whole situation. I decided that if I did not have a topic in mind by the morning, I would quit the program. I completely expected to do that the first thing the next day.

I woke up in the middle of the night—perhaps by the full moon shining in our bedroom window—and my first thought was of Camp Scott. What happened after we left that day? How was it that we had continued camping that summer? And the backpacking trips in the Ozark Mountains that I went on in 1980 and 1981—how did it happen that men had to come along, and why did they stay awake in shifts all night? Who were the women in charge who made sure we kept camping? Who did these amazing things for the Girl Scouts in the wake of the murders? I had no idea. I got up and began writing down these and other questions. At that time, I was hesitant about writing about the actual murders and the night itself, but decided I could instead write about the extraordinary leadership of the women of the Magic Empire Council. Surely as a budding women's historian, I could find a hook in this topic.

Instead of withdrawing from graduate school that day, I stopped in and proposed it to my advisor. After asking some tough questions, he was visibly moved and intrigued by my idea. I argued that it was relevant, and even beneficial that I had been a camper then—I had connections to women who had been there and been silenced by the impact this story would have on Girl Scouting. Surely someone would talk to me about how they valiantly saved camping for current and future Girl Scouts. I felt sure that the event was “old enough” to be history and important for women's history in Oklahoma. He tacitly agreed that I should move forward with idea. I researched oral history guidelines, gained

approval from the university's Institutional Review Board , and began the work of finding Magic Empire women to interview.

In 1996, the Executive Director of the Magic Empire Council was the very same woman who had been there in 1977—and she remembered me. Bonnie Brewster was willing to talk and offered to contact other women on my behalf to see if they would agree to be interviewed. One of them was my very own and much adored Cadette troop leader, Ginny Young, whom I did not know had been on staff at the council the day of the murders until Bonnie told me so. I was delighted to reconnect with her. I also contacted several other women who agreed to talk with me in a group interview setting.

That rainy September morning in 1996 stands out as one of the most powerful moments of my life, because I realized then that my thesis project was so much bigger than what it really was—much more than an oral history of a tragedy, and much more than a few women reliving it together almost twenty years later. The eight women who gathered in my Dad's empty classroom on a Saturday morning at Cascia Hall Preparatory School had *never* discussed the day of the murders, or anything related to it, with each other. They had not been allowed to because of the impending lawsuit against the council from 1977-1985, and after that, they either saw no reason to bring it up or had just been trained to keep silent. I explained my project, thanked them for coming, and then they cracked open. As I asked simple questions and left much of the direction of the conversation to them, each one spoke up and filled in murky memories and answered questions for the others that had lingered for years. They cried and laughed. After this, I interviewed several other women individually and began the work of writing.

I managed to write my thesis with very little input from women my age who had been young girls at camp that night—Bonnie Brewster continued to protect Girl Scouts, all now in our thirties or older—as fiercely as she had protected us after the murders. Being a good Girl Scout, and suddenly feeling younger than my real age in her company, challenging her authority never crossed my mind. Some part of me was still a ten-year-old girl, too, because when I finally had to write the part of my thesis that required explaining and describing the crime, I seemed to have temporarily lost my keyboarding skills. The entire thesis was complete, except for those necessary first few pages.

One day while our little ones were playing together outside, I mentioned my “typing issue” to a neighborhood friend who was also in graduate school, working on her MSW. Her eyes lit up and she told me about a guest lecturer, a counselor, who had just explained a new therapy called EMDR. The therapist had been trained to use it with Oklahoma City Bombing survivors in 1995. When I called to inquire, she seemed certain that my problem would likely subside with just one three-hour session. It sounded too good to be true. The best analogy for the experience goes like this: Imagine that I walked in her office that morning with a box brimming with junk—wires, ribbons, knick-knacks, trash. The only topic we discussed was the first few hours on the day of the murders. My job was to recollect the day, but stop when she asked, for a few moments, to allow my eyes to follow her pen moving back and forth, almost like a mini-hypnosis. New memories came to mind in this forced break in my familiar telling; the memories and the day slowed down and became more storied, organized, and with more lucid details. To continue my analogy: the box tidied-up, the lid shut properly, and I put it up on a shelf in my mind, labeled and organized. What a relief.

I went home and furiously typed out the story of the murders. The rest of my thesis, the part that celebrated the women leadership who preserved camping for girls, was after all, the heart of matter; it embodied both an affirmation of their courage and the power of moving on after such an unspeakable act. I defended my master's thesis in May 1997, six months pregnant with my second daughter. The following year when our family moved to rural Wisconsin, I put my academic work aside for seven years.

During those years, my oldest daughter joined a Brownie Girl Scout troop at her rural school. During the spring of 2002, when she was nine, she asked to go to camp that coming summer because many of her friends were going. At the time, I was working for a Girl Scout council myself and had occasion early that spring to visit the camp property during a staff meeting we held there. As I walked around the grounds and meandered off with a colleague to look at the individual tent units—all with the very same green canvas platform tents I knew from Camp Scott—I could not imagine *ever* sleeping if I let my daughter come here. I researched other area Girl Scout camps and found one where the girls slept in either yurts or rustic little cabins. That felt a little better. Nonetheless, I had to see my doctor about my growing anxiety and had a sleeping pill at the ready for her first night away. I felt ashamed that I had to use a drug to sleep, wondering how I'd feel in the morning if I learned something happened to her at night while I was sleeping so soundly. Such is the world of PTSD and anxiety. Before I went to bed that first night, I wrote Madeleine a letter. I have never given it to her; the night felt auspicious and I just needed to document the moment:

June 30, 2002

Dear Madeleine,

There are some things that TIME alone can heal and others that require active, deliberate experiences for the scar to fade. Today was one of the latter moments. Some day when you are much older you will know why taking you to camp today at Whispering Hills was such a big event for me. I cannot pass on to you anytime soon how horrific resident camp was on my first try—in fact, it was my last—and much of my psychic energy and struggles have stemmed from that trauma and the healing of it.

Today however, I was your mom—so happy and excited to be giving you this adventure—and I was a little jealous, too. It looked like great fun. I know that even as I am writing, watching the sun go down, checking on Lucia, that you are there having a wonderful time. You are such a beautiful person, such a bright and wise soul. I am blessed to be your mother and grateful for the opportunity to offer the world to you.

It still surprises me sometimes, the cruelty in the world and the shameful things people inflict on one another—being as old as I am, you'd think I would have learned. But even as something innocent was robbed of me on my first trip to camp, some kind of innocent persistence remained intact. I carry it with me to this day—believing that the world can be a better place, a more humane place...I don't yet know what your life's struggles will be, but I believe and know that your strength and courage and love will carry you through even the darkest times. May you always be surrounded by people who love and cherish you as we do—

I love you. Momma

As it happened, Madeleine did not have such a great time at camp—she reported lots of horsefly bites and a bunkmate who woke her every night to walk to the latrine. She lost interest in her troop and did not go to camp again, preferring urban adventures, like trips to New York in the summer to see her Aunt Maggie. For me, it remained a milestone in my healing and another solid step removed from the ghosts of Camp Scott.

IV.

The memoir and all forms of personal testimony can...lay claim to potential territories of community...writing that bears witness to the extreme experiences of solitary individuals can sometimes begin to repair the tears in the collective social fabric.⁴

One morning in 2007, I received an email from a woman named Michelle Hoffman who asked if I was the same Amy Sullivan who wrote a thesis about Camp Scott. I did not know until that moment that for ten years after my graduation, a tattered copy of my master's thesis had been passed around Tulsa Girl Scout circles. She introduced herself as a lifelong Girl Scout who was also at Camp Scott in 1977. Michelle asked if we could talk by phone because she was planning to make a film about the women survivors of Camp Scott. She had remained friends with many of them and had contact information for others. I was happy to talk but explained that I had given up on the Camp Scott project for my dissertation and was pursuing instead a social history of PTSD. She hoped I would reconsider. Later that day, we spoke for two hours. The fact that she was known and trusted by many women who had been at camp that night, and her own research and depth of understanding about trauma, convinced me to reconsider my shift away from the Camp Scott project.

Michelle's film has not yet transpired, but many interviews have. In June 2009, very close to the 32nd anniversary of the murders, Michelle gathered a group of willing Camp Scott survivors at the home of Anna Lawless, the CIT counselor in 1977 and Girl Scout music aficionado. A dozen of us came together from Tulsa, Iowa City, Minneapolis, and Casper, Wyoming for a sing-a-long and a memorabilia and photo share.

⁴ Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw, *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony & Community* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois, 2002), 3.

We sang for hours. I was the youngest among them and the only one who never had a good, true Camp Scott experience. At that point it didn't matter—they pulled me into the circle. Their joy was contagious, and besides, I remembered many of the songs.

The depth and scope of this project has matured beyond the loving, sentimental, and admiring tone of my 1997 thesis. The scholar in me is much relieved about that. But I still love and admire every woman I have had the honor to connect with over our shared tragedy—our “awful knowledge.” To insert the stories of these very real women into an historical context that had become a flat, sad, one-line tragedy among dozens since, gives voice to their history and legitimacy as survivors. Through their telling, I have stitched together stories that offer a patchwork of closure, context, and depth around an event that truly tore at the “collective social fabric” of our time.

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EDUCATION

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M.A., U.S. History, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 1997

B.A., Magna Cum Laude, History, University of Oklahoma, 1991

I.B. (International Baccalaureate), United World College of the American West,
Montezuma, New Mexico, 1986

HONORS

The Loft Literary Center Mentor Series, Award Winner, Non-Fiction, 2012-13

YWCA of the Coulee Region Tribute to Outstanding Women, Awardee, 2010

University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents Diversity Award Nominee, 2010-11

University Fellow, University of Illinois at Chicago Graduate School, 2004-2009

Phi Beta Kappa, Alpha of Oklahoma, 1991

Golden Key National Honor Society, 1991

TEACHING

Instructor, The Self-Sufficiency Program, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, WI
Mind Hunger: A College Preparatory Course for Low-Income Single Parents
September 2002-2011

Lecturer, Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies Department, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, La Crosse, WI

HIS/WGS 370: History of Childhood in the U.S. Spring 2011

WS-100: Gender, Race & Class in America, Jan 2003-May 2004, Sept 2006-May 2008, Summers 2007 & 2008 (for UWL Academic Success Institute), Fall 2010

English Instructor, Viterbo University, La Crosse, WI
English Composition & Literature, September 2002 - August 2004

Teaching Assistant, History Department, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
History 104: World/Environmental Focus, Fall 2005
History 103: U.S. since 1865, Spring 2006

Teaching Assistant, Women's Studies Dept., University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK
Introduction to Women's Studies, Spring 1992, Fall 1995 and 1996

EXPERIENCE

Facilitator, Century College, Transition to Work/Succeeding In Life Offender Re-Entry Course, Faribault, MN & Red Wing, MN Correctional Facilities, March 2013 – July 2013

Interim Honors Writing Instructor, Bais Yakkov Girls' High School, St. Louis Park, MN, October 2012 – January 2013

Director, The Self-Sufficiency Program, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, 2002-2011

District Field Executive, Diversity Specialist Recruiter, Girl Scouts of Riverland Council, La Crosse, Wisconsin, April 2001 to July 2002

Co-Founder & Director, Ida: A Center for Girls' Art & Humanities, Westby, WI, April 2000 to July 2001

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Coordinating Council for Women in History
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