

SENTENCING TODAY FOR SERIAL KILLER - NOTHING BUT COLD-BLOODED CORAL WATTS A MYSTERY, EVEN TO MURDER EXPERTS

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We know a lot about **Coral Watts** .

Then again, we don't know much at all.

We know he killed more than a dozen women, all strangers, attacking them at random and slashing, stabbing or drowning them.

But we don't know why.

We know he is suspected of killing legions of other women in several states and Canada.

But we don't know when, where or how.

Coral Watts is revealing nothing about what lurks in the dark corners of his soul. He has never granted a media interview, and the few times he was examined by psychiatrists, he was guarded. He has been so inconspicuous since his killing spree in Texas in the early 1980s and subsequent arrest that most people do not know his name, despite the fact that police think he killed more often than infamous serial murderers Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy combined.

The story of **Coral Watts** is mostly one of many questions and few answers.

The answers there are reveal a man so utterly cruel that he once demanded a hamburger and fries from police after leading them to the shallow grave of one of his victims. He had other graves to show them, he said, but not until he got his meal.

Watts will be in court today to be sentenced to life in prison for fatally stabbing Ferndale resident Helen Dutcher 25 years ago. The conviction in effect stopped his 2006 parole from a Texas state prison.

Now that he has no chance to walk free, police hope he will tell them about other women they think he killed, including three Ann Arbor women in 1979-80 and a Kalamazoo woman in 1974.

But they know **Watts** may never offer up his secrets.

"I would like to talk to him again," said Paul Buntin, who is now Saline's police chief and who investigated the long-ago Ann Arbor killings. "Years ago, when I asked him why he does the things he does, he said he would take that to the grave, but maybe, facing life in prison, he'll want to talk."

One of the strangest

Experts have compiled research on what motivates serial killers, but **Watts** remains an anomaly.

For one, he is black, a rarity in the unholy fraternity of serial killers. He did not sexually assault his victims or mutilate them. And his methods of killing varied.

"He is worth studying," said Harley Stock, an FBI-trained forensic psychologist from Florida who has examined more than 800 killers and who interviewed **Watts** in a Texas prison.

"What struck me when I looked into his eyes was the coldness, the shrewdness," Stock said. "An utter lack of regard for the value of human life."

Most of those who have interviewed **Watts** or studied his actions agree he is likely a classic psychopath -- someone who lacks a conscience, fails to feel compassion or remorse and kills as easily as normal people buy socks.

But not all psychopaths are serial killers, though most serial killers are psychopaths.

So where does a **Coral Watts** come from?

Stock and others theorize it may be an unfortunate confluence of many things -- psychopathic traits, a chaotic and perhaps violent childhood and even the possibility that **Watts**' brain, particularly the frontal lobe that processes language and emotion, functions abnormally.

Whatever it is, it is a deadly mix.

Childhood questions

Carl **Eugene Watts** was born in 1953 in Texas to Richard **Watts**, an Army man, and his 18-year-old wife, Dorothy Mae Young. Within two years, the couple had divorced and Young moved her family to Inkster, and eventually got a job teaching art in the Detroit Public Schools.

Not much is known about **Coral Watts**' Michigan childhood. He apparently never knew his father. He has told people that his mother sometimes hit him in the face and his stepfather, a mechanic, drank heavily and was abusive.

Investigators also wonder whether a severe bout of meningitis as a child that left him nearly comatose and battling high fevers for weeks could have contributed to his criminal behavior. Stock dismisses that idea, but others are intrigued.

"We know that an injury to the brain, particularly the frontal lobe, including that from disease, can cause deviant behavior," said Dr. Frank Ochberg, a psychiatry professor at Michigan State University who has studied criminal behavior, including that in the Columbine school shooting in Colorado.

Watts ' troubles, though, may have begun before the meningitis.

Some experts think many psychopaths are born with traits such as impulsivity, aggression, deceitfulness, callousness and a lack of deep-seated emotion. Those traits often show up in childhood. By adolescence, they were raging in **Watts** .

Watts , who changed his first name to **Coral** to reflect how Carl was pronounced in the Southern drawl of his mother's family, was in serious trouble by age 15. He inexplicably beat a woman in the face and head after delivering a newspaper to her home. She fended him off. He then resumed his paper route.

Police arrested him the next day. With a shrug, he said he did it "because I felt like it."

He was sent to the Lafayette Clinic in Detroit for a psychiatric examination. The doctors offered a portentous diagnosis.

The handsome teenager was an "impulsive individual who has a passive-aggressive orientation toward life," a psychiatrist wrote in 1969. "He is struggling for control of strong homicidal impulses. This individual should be considered dangerous."

And he was.

In 1974, when he entered Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, he severely beat a woman, again a stranger, and was sent to prison for a year. Around the same time, police say, he killed WMU student Gloria Steele. He recently was charged in the case, which is expected to go to trial next year.

Addicted to killing

Psychologist Stock theorizes that although **Watts** did not sexually assault his victims, he got sexual pleasure from the way he killed them, and that makes him similar to other serial killers.

"You notice he doesn't use a gun," Stock said. "He likes the actual physical contact, the control that it gives him, the ability to do things that make them suffer."

Once **Watts** began killing, he could not stop. The thrill was like a drug, with **Watts** the addict.

"These people always kill again because that's what they do, it's who they are," said MSU's Ochberg. "They become predatory. They're good at killing, and they're highly motivated to do it."

Watts , Ochberg said, extended his killing spree for years because, like most psychopaths, he was intelligent.

"He doesn't get caught," Och-berg said. "You have to be bright when you toy with police."

Is **Watts** insane? It's the "mad or bad" question psychiatrists and lawyers and courts struggle with when confronted with seemingly incomprehensible criminals.

"Absolutely not," Stock said. The careful planning, the quick getaways, the ability to evade law enforcement time and again showed "this was a man who was very organized in his thinking. He knew exactly what he what he was doing."

Watts , Stock said, knows right from wrong but has no regard for it. "I think what makes him so terrifying is that you cannot predict **Coral Watts** ."

Heartless

Watts , killer by night, presented a passable front in daily life. He was married briefly, and fathered a daughter with another woman. He worked as a mechanic and in a warehouse. He hung out at bars and sometimes made superficial friends.

Dr. Robert Hare of the University of British Columbia, a forensic psychologist and author of "Without Conscience -- The Disturbing World of Psychopaths Among Us," said that fits the pattern of a psychopathic serial killer.

"They are intellectually intact, but they don't have the emotional underpinnings like the rest of us," he said. "So the decisions they make are not colored by their emotions."

A psychopath predisposed to violence has nothing to hold him back. "It doesn't mean anything to him, because he doesn't understand empathy or remorse, and you cannot instill it in him. It's like trying to explain color to a person who is colorblind."

The Texas Rangers, in a lengthy investigation of **Watts** , produced a report in 2003 that showed just how colorblind **Watts** is.

A fellow inmate told them **Watts** described in detail how best to get rid of a body.

"He said you put a nude body in a hog pen, and they'll eat everything but the bones they can't chew with their teeth. All that will be left is part of the skull and part of the shoulder blades, and you take those and put them in a vice and use a grinder to grind them all to dust. Then they'll only be small pieces left in the vice. You can hit the small pieces with the hammer and then you can get rid of the pieces and the dust."

The rangers don't know who may have ended up in a hog pen.

Anger behind bars

Although **Watts** is not talking, there have been glimpses about how he views the world.

Watts , it turns out, feels put upon.

In a January 2000 letter to Andy Kahan, the victims advocate for the city of Houston, **Watts** complained that personal letters he was writing from prison were being marketed on the Internet.

Kahan was working on legislation to prohibit the sale of what was becoming known as "murderabilia," the sale of personal items by well-known criminals.

In the letter, **Watts** offered his support for Kahan's campaign.

But then he turned angry.

"Mr. Kahan, I have learned from my dealing with people such as yourself, the state, that they can not be trusted. They mix truth with falsehood. They lie, decieve, mislead and back stab. Some of you are more cruel and vicious then the crimlals you hold in prison. And some of you belong in prison yourselves."

Watts complained of the "low down and dirty uncareing, conniving, conspiring, terrorizeing and controlling ways in which the state treat those under it's supervision."

Then, inexplicably, he signed off with this:

"Thank you for your help and concern.

" **Coral E. Watts** "

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Caption: Photo;Photo Nov. 16 photo at trial CARLOS OSORIO/Associated Press

Emily LaQua Margaret Fossi Anna Ledet Michelle Maday Susan Wolf Elena Semander Linda Tilley Gloria Steele Elizabeth Montgomery **CoralWatts** is surrounded by photographs of women he is suspected of killing. All were killed by contact; none were shot from a distance. No men are known to be among **Watts** ' victims. A photo and a police sketch of **CoralWatts** from December 1979. By then, police say, he was already a serial killer, having murdered women in Kalamazoo and in Ann Arbor.

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