



Sylvia Likens — her mutilated body sickened even hardened policemen.

by **GEORGE DILLON**

DETEKTIVE Sgt. William E. Kaiser of the Indianapolis, Indiana, homicide division stared down at the mutilated body of the 17-year-old girl and shuddered.

It was one of the worst cases of sadistic murder he had ever seen — something right out of a medieval torture chamber — or one of Hitler's concentration camps.

She was lying naked except for a rumpled scrap of pink blanket on a dirty old mattress thrown on the floor of an upstairs bedroom in a ramshackle old house at 3850 E. New York Street.

There was no other furniture in the room, nothing but a collection of trash on the floor and Kaiser noticed a religious booklet titled, "God's Simple Plan for Salvation."

He didn't think this was it. The girl's body bore more than a hun-

dred bruises, cuts, abrasions and burns. Most of the burns obviously had been made by glowing cigarettes being pressed against her flesh, but others seemed to be scald marks.

A brand in the shape of a numeral 3 had been burned into her flesh, and etched across her stomach with burning steel were the words:

"I am a prostitute and proud of it."

The agony which the girl had been made to suffer was to be seen in her pain-twisted face and badly



Marie Baniszewski testified that her mother tortured the victim.

Full Details of...
THE TEEN-AGE TORTURE MURDER
that Shocked Indianapolis...

The pretty 17-year-old girl suffered fiendish abuse before she died!



Mrs. Gertrude Baniszewski, guilty of leading the torture murderers.



Richard Hobbs, 15, admitted branding the murdered girl.

chewed lips. The time was October 26, 1965, and the girl's name, officers learned, was Sylvia Marie Likens.

She had been left by her parents in the care of 37-year-old Mrs. Gertrude Wright, who occupied the house on New York Street with her own seven children.

Further investigation revealed that six of the seven children bore the name of Baniszewski and that this was Mrs. Wright's legal name. She was the former wife of John Baniszewski, who until recently had been a Beech Grove police officer.

Yet, she took the name of Wright from the father of her 18-month-old child, Dennis Wright, with whom she had been living without benefit

of clergy until he had been called into the service.

She was bony-faced but looked as though she was once attractive. She was too thin now, however, with a sour, bitter look about her.

When Sgt. Kaiser asked her what had happened to Sylvia, Mrs. Wright replied that the girl had come staggering home about 5:30 that evening with a note in her hand, saying that she had been beaten and tortured by a gang of boys.

Mrs. Baniszewski's older children, Paula, 18, Stephanie, 15, and John, 13, all swore that this was true.

Kaiser listened politely but his mind was growing ever more skeptical. He noticed that all the burns and wounds on the girl's body had not been made at the same time.

Some of the scars were obviously
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BRUTAL MURDER

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inflicted at least a week earlier than the others, perhaps longer.

Finally he thought, what girl who had been mistreated as this one had, would stop to write a note?

The detective questioned each of the Baniszewski children separately, a number of neighbors, as well as Sylvia's younger sister, Jennie, who was crippled with polio.

An entirely different story began to unfold, and it was a story so monstrous, so inhumanly cruel, it staggered the mind.

Sylvia's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lester C. Likens, ran a food concession in a carnival which was touring the country.

Wanting their two youngest girls to continue with their education while they traveled, the Likens had arranged to leave them with Mrs. Baniszewski, paying her \$35 per week for the children's board and room.

They had assumed that because Mrs. Baniszewski had a large family of her own, she would be good to, and for, growing children.

Vicious Woman

Gertie Baniszewski, it turned out, could easily have won in a walk the all-time prize for the meanest woman in the world.

Under her not-so-loving care, Sylvia Likens was beaten repeatedly over a period of three weeks, starved, burned with cigarettes and matches, dipped in scalding water while bound and gagged, slashed, hit, kicked, branded with hot metal, made to sleep on a pile of rags in the basement with two mangy dogs.

Sgt. Kaiser grew angrier as the investigation progressed.

Surely, he thought, there must be some decent, courageous people living nearby who could have prevented such cruelty. Yet, several neighbors admitted that they had heard Sylvia's screams of anguish, and none had bothered to call the police.

Kaiser was appalled at this public apathy toward such a shocking crime.

He was able to find some two dozen children in the neighborhood who had known that Sylvia was being systematically tortured, and several admitted that they had joined in the torture.

One, a big, powerfully built boy of 15, named Richard Hobbs, admitted that it was he who had etched, "I am a prostitute and proud of it," on Sylvia's stomach with a red hot needle.

Kaiser studied him curiously. He was a brutish-looking lout, with a wide fleshy nose, small pig eyes obscured by horn-rimmed glasses, and long lank hair worn down across his forehead.

"Why?" Kaiser demanded. "Why did you do it?"

Hobbs shrugged. "Gertie told me to," he said.

He lived around the corner from

the Baniszewskis, with only one house between, and was a boyfriend of Paula Baniszewski. He was a student at Howe High School and said he had gone over to the Baniszewski home on October 23, "just for a visit."

"Gertie called Sylvia up out of the basement," he said, "and told her she had branded her daughters and now she was going to brand her."

"What did she mean by that?" Kaiser asked.

"She said Sylvia had passed it around school that Paula and Stephanie were prostitutes."

"So what did she do?"

Hobbs grinned. "She got a big sewing needle and told Sylvia to take off her clothes. She took matches and paper and heated the needle, then started burning words on Sylvia's stomach, having me and Paula hold her."

"Gertie got as far as the letter 'm'—then got sick at her stomach and told me to finish it, writing the words she wanted on a piece of paper. So I finished the job."

Gertie had stared at the words branded on the girl's stomach, smiling venomously. "Now what are you going to do?" she said to Sylvia. "You won't ever be able to get married or take off your clothes in front of anyone."

Sylvia was sobbing with pain and despair, but Gertie heartlessly threw her down the basement stairs.

Additional routine detective work soon proved that Paula had written the note saying Sylvia had been attacked by a gang of boys.

When questioned, Paula confessed it, also admitting that she had mistreated Sylvia in several unmentionable ways.

Paula was a sexy-looking dish, with a cheapy pretty face, suggestive curves—and no heart.

Every one of the Baniszewski children, except the eighteen month old baby, admitted to having joined in the torture of the unfortunate girl, and several neighborhood teenagers. All said that Gertie had encouraged them in their actions.

Suspects Arrested

Grimly, Sgt. Kaiser rounded up all those who had taken part in the death of Sylvia Likens who were old enough to stand trial.

Arrested were Mrs. Gertrude Baniszewski, her three older children, Paula, Stephanie, and John, and two neighborhood boyfriends of her daughters, Richard Hobbs and Coy Hubbard.

Hubbard was handsome in a cold, arrogant way, but he was as brutal and unfeeling as any of the others. He had liked to use Sylvia as a tackling dummy and practice place-kicking with her head.

Sylvia has been described by a former neighbor of the Likens family as a "very nice girl."

Even before the Arsenal Technical

High School incident where Sylvia was accused of saying the older Baniszewski girls were prostitutes, she was treated more like a slave in the household than a paying guest.

After the incident, Sylvia was kept home from school and the beatings and torture began.

Jennie, Sylvia's younger sister, said the tortured girl had fought her tormentors as long as she had the strength, but starvation and despair had at last weakened her until she lay in a half stupor most of the time, a helpless prey to anyone who wanted to abuse her.

Jennie, crippled, and with no one to turn to, had feared to try to defend her sister lest she receive the same punishment.

Dr. Charles Ellis, who performed the autopsy, said Sylvia had suffered serious head injuries and death had resulted from internal hemorrhage of the brain.

When brought to court on charges of first degree murder, all six defendants pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity. All were given extensive psychiatric examinations, found competent to aid in their defense, and ordered to stand trial.

Shocking Trial Begins

After the usual delays, they were brought to trial April 18, 1966, before Judge Saul I. Rabb in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The prosecution was headed by Deputy District Attorney Leroy K. New, and William C. Erbecken undertook the defense of Gertrude Baniszewski. George P. Rice, James G. Nedeff and Forest Bowman aided in the defense of the juveniles.

Evidence was introduced that Stephanie had moved Sylvia from the basement to the upstairs bedroom just before her death and had tried to save her by mouth to mouth resuscitation.

She agreed to testify against the other defendants and was granted a separate trial.

For three weeks the evidence piled up against the torture killers and in his closing summary Prosecuting Attorney New said in part:

"Never in the history of man's inhumanity to man has there been anything like this . . . I don't know of any animal that would do this to another animal. The torture death of this young girl was deliberate, calculated, cold-blooded murder."

The jury, it turned out, agreed with him. They found Mrs. Gertrude Baniszewski guilty of first degree murder, Paula guilty of second, and John Baniszewski, Coy Hubbard and Richard Hobbs guilty of manslaughter.

Judge Rabb sentenced Mrs. Baniszewski and Paula to life imprisonment in Indiana Women's Prison, and the three boys to serve from 2 to 21 years in Indiana Reformatory.

Gertie and Paula will have one grain of comfort, however. They can still live on the same street. The Indiana Women's Prison is, ironically, located on E. New York Street, not too far from the scene of the murder.

THE END