

The Story Of The Barbie and Ken Killers: Paul Bernado and Karla Homolka

It's not often that we hear the tale of a married serial killing couple, but it does happen. Serial killing is often portrayed as a lonely existence - a drifter picking up hitchhikers on a doomed, lonely road. But there have been occasions where two indulge their sick habits together, hiding behind the veneer of comfortable suburbia. Perhaps the most famous of these twisted couples in recent years has been Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka's case. Dubbed "The Ken and Barbie Killers" by the press for their good looks, the Canadian couple's spree of murders left the country stunned.

But the details of the case are somewhat muddled, in part due to Homolka's attempts to portray herself as a victim, which led to a much lighter sentence than the public felt justified.

A Nice Kid Undisturbed By Horrific Events

Paul Bernado grew up in the city of Toronto, the Scarborough area.

Paul was only nine when his father molested his sister, and his childhood is filled with similar horrors. Despite this, Paul was a happy child. They were a comfortably well-off, middle-class family. Things took a turn when his mother revealed to him, at 16, that he was the result of an affair. After that, he started regularly referring to her as "whore" and "slob". He started beating women he picked up in bars while at the University of Toronto, Scarborough.

Paul was a salesman known for his adeptness at persuasion. Like many businessmen in the 80s, he subscribed to a *Wall Street*-style corporate assassin strategy. He would study books and tapes - the kind sold on infomercials hosted by get-rich-quick motivational speakers. But he came to worship a much more perverse piece of pop culture: Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*. The satirical novel took the concept of making a killing in the market literally, but Ellis's wit was lost on Bernardo. He studied it like a Bible.

It was that same salesmanship that he applied to meeting women in bars. He and his friends practiced pick-up moves in bars.

A Violent Childhood Attracted Karla

Karla's upbringing wasn't nearly as pleasant or seemingly ordinary on the surface. Her father, a Czechoslovakian immigrant and traveling salesman was an alcoholic who would regularly beat her mother. Karla was an asthmatic, and witnessing the violence at home sent her to the hospital on many occasions.

But as early as her teen years, she showed a gentle side. Her love of animals led her to work in a pet shop. Her teachers liked her but noted that she could be pushy around her peers.

In fact, she was known to enjoy scaring her friends. As she got older, she traded her Nancy Drew books for readings on the Occult.

At 17, she met Paul Bernardo. They had sex the first night they were together and quickly learned they shared an interest in sadomasochistic sex.

The Scarborough Rapist

The same year they met, a series of rapes occurred in Scarborough, Ontario. All the victims were between 15 and 21, and they were subjected to beating and verbal abuse during the attacks.

Over five years, 19 women were raped or at least attempted. Though the police investigated, Bernardo was never named as an official suspect.

It's unclear whether Homolka knew she was engaged and later married to the Scarborough Rapist, as the police dubbed him, but it is widely believed she did and approved of his crimes.

A Terrifying Engagement Gift, Followed by A Nightmarish Wedding Present

It started after they were engaged in 1990. Within just months, Bernardo had grown bored sexually with his bride to be. She shared his sick fantasies and seemed willing to do anything to please him, but he had become much more interested in her 15-year-old sister Tammy.

That summer, Homolka decided to offer her sister to him. She crushed some valium she got from her work at the Martindale Animal Clinic and fed it to Tammy, who quickly passed out. Homolka watched as Paul raped her unconscious sister.

On December 23, 1990, Karla wanted to "give Tammy's virginity to Bernardo for Christmas." This is the first of many confusing statements from Homolka on the stand, as her sister had already been raped. Still, Bernardo was disappointed he wasn't Karla's first.

Karla used a rag soaked in halothane taken from her clinic to knock Tammy out while Bernardo raped her, the two of them videotaping their crime. But soon, Tammy began to vomit. The two frantically tried to cover up their crime while calling for help.

The coroner pronounced Tammy dead at the hospital. The coroner noted a strange chemical burn in the autopsy but ruled it an accidental death caused by alcohol poisoning.

The One That Got Away

Despite several successful outings, they weren't without their mistakes. As early as Paul's Scarborough rapist days, some victims were able to fight him off. On June 7, 1991, Homolka invited a 15-year-old girl she met at a pet shop two years earlier over for a "girl's night out." The girl was never publicly identified but claimed Homolka laced a drink with Halcion and was sexually assaulted without knowing it.

That August, she was raped under similar circumstances; Homolka had called 911 because she stopped breathing momentarily. When she resumed breathing, Homolka claimed that "everything was okay" and called the ambulance off.

A Body Was Found The Day They Married

On June 29, 1991, Karla and Paul were finally married. That same day, a couple canoeing in Lake Gibson found the body of Leslie Mahaffy, 14, who had disappeared over two weeks previous.

Bernardo abducted Mahaffy in Burlington, Ontario, where he blindfolded her and brought her home. Video played at the trial show Bernardo graphically abusing Mahaffy, saying things like, "The next two hours are going to determine what I do to you. Right now, you're scoring perfect."

Mahaffy later mentioned that the blindfold was slipping, meaning she may have been able to identify her attackers. Homolka injected her with enough halcyon to kill her.

Their M.O. Stayed Pretty Much The Same

On April 16, 1992, Bernardo and Homolka cruised around for victims during the afterschool hours in St. Catharine's. Though it was early, the streets were relatively empty, and they spotted 15-year-old Kristen French walking alone.

The videotapes played at the trial showed Homolka and Bernardo raping, beating, and sodomizing French, plying her with more alcohol to get her to comply.

It seems Homolka and Bernardo enjoyed their M.O. of raping and poisoning. They didn't alter it.

The following day, before heading to Easter Dinner at Homolka's family home, the pair murdered French. Her nude body was found fourteen days later.

Police Interest

Both Homolka and Bernardo were questioned as early as the Scarborough Rapist investigation. They also came under questions after Tammy's death and in matters regarding both Mahaffy and French. Over the years, coworkers and friends had reported Bernardo's penchant for violence to the police.

It wasn't until 1992 that Bernardo's DNA was tested, coming back a match for the Scarborough rapist. He was placed under constant surveillance.

On February 9, 1993, Homolka confessed to her aunt and uncle that her husband was the Scarborough Rapist and that both of them had murdered Mahaffy and French.

Paul Bernardo was arrested on February 17. Due to Karla's involvement in the crimes, immunity was off the table.

The Warrant Was Limited

Up until that point, she had played the victim, and the press had eaten it up. The only footage found in the first search showed just a snippet of Homolka performing oral sex on Jane Doe.

During Bernardo's trial, as the tapes were played, it became clear the extent that Homolka was involved.

The country was outraged. Because she'd already taken a plea deal, double jeopardy laws prevented a retrial. She was getting off easy.

Even more troubling are the numerous victims that remain unknown. According to Homolka's testimony, over 30 women had at least been raped, if not worse. Then there's the disappearance of Elizabeth Bain, who disappeared three weeks after the last attack by the Scarborough Rapist, leaving a bloody car to be found later.

At least one murder for which Robert Baltovich was imprisoned could be linked to the Scarborough Rapist. Unfortunately, we'll never know the true scope of their murderous coupling.

An Inspiration For Other Killers

Other killers appear to have been at least indirectly inspired. Luka Magnotta, of the Netflix documentary series 'Don't F**k With Cats,' tried to ingratiate himself to Homolka, claiming they were in a relationship.

Shortly after reporting their alleged relationship, in a bizarre attempt to increase his popularity as a male model, Magnotta filmed a video of himself brutally killing a Montreal Chinese student. He sent his body parts to members of the press and government officials.

Though there's no evidence suggesting Magnotta even knew Homolka, she has given birth to two children. As of last January, she lives in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield in southwestern Quebec without her kids or husband.