

Parents of Missing Youths Hope, Fear — and Wait

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Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO, Dec. 30 — The waiting and the wondering are a painful blend of hope and fear for thousands of parents all across the country.

As Cook County Sheriff's investigators press on, almost methodically now, with the search that since Dec. 22 has yielded 27 bodies at the home of John Wayne Gacy, the daily reports at the medical examiner's office have been monotonously the same:

"Unknown age, sex, address, unknown causes, found at 8213 W. Sumner Avenue, unincorporated section of Norwood Park Township."

Today, the authorities made their first identification of a victim. They said that a skeleton found under the garage was that of John Butkovich, 18 years old, of west suburban Lombard. He was last seen on July 31, 1975, when he said he was going to Mr. Gacy's house to pick up a paycheck.

Told of 32 Killings

None of the other severely decomposed bodies has been identified yet. But each was somebody's child.

And any one of the thousands of young people who have been drifting across the face of America could eventually be identified as one of those in shallow graves under the modest brick-fronted house.

Investigators have said that Mr. Gacy told them he killed as many as 32 young men in the last four years, most of them by strangulation, after having sexual relations with them. A chubby 36-year-old remodeling contractor, Mr. Gacy is being held without bond in the medical wing of the Cook County Jail on charges that he murdered a missing 15-year-old Des Plaines boy. In the late 1960's, Mr. Gacy served 18 months in an Iowa State prison for sodomizing a teen-age boy.

Investigators have speculated that at least some of the bodies being dug from the home's crawl space are those of youthful transients, a few of the lonely legions who follow the sun to California, Arizona, Texas and Florida, or are drawn to the urban excitement of such high-rise cities as New York and Chicago.

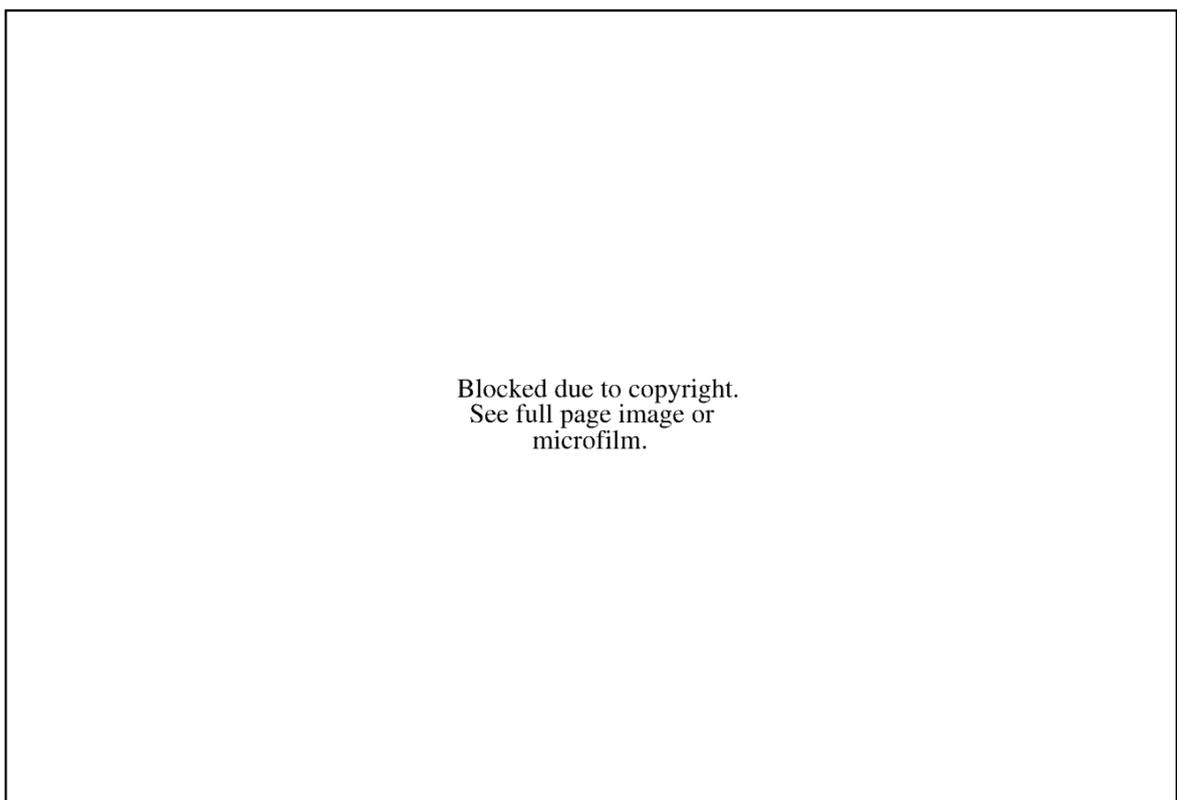
'Not Getting the Volume'

Sgt. Howard Anderson of the Cook County Sheriff's Department said that investigators had only eight or nine missing persons from this area who were considered possible victims in the case, leading them to believe that a number were from outside the region.

"We're getting calls, and we're getting stuff in the mail now," he said, "but we're just not getting the volume you'd expect. In the future, I would expect hundreds. Maybe it's because of what happened. If it was a bus accident, I guess they'd call, but since it's a homosexual thing, well..."

Last year alone, 175,557 persons under the age of 18 were reported missing, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's uniform crime report, which is compiled from statistics provided by 9,582 police departments. In the same period, the Chicago police received 19,000 reports of missing youths. Neither figure has varied significantly in recent years.

There are a lot of young people — some runaways, some wanderers — who maintain tenuous contacts with home. They are not so visible now, almost everyone agrees, as in the late 60's and early 70's, when their long hair and their clothes set them apart as hippies, street people and Vietnam War protesters. But they are there, scarcely



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Aerial view of home of John Wayne Gacy, center, as the curious gathered on either side during police search last week



Gregory Godzik
Disappeared Dec. 11, 1976

noticed by the police or by anybody else; scarcely missed when they disappear, except by worried families.

And, as in the 1971 conviction of Juan V. Corona, a farm labor contractor, in the slaying and burial of 25 itinerant fruit pickers in California, it takes a lot of people dead in one place at one time to make society wonder how so many absences could go unnoticed for so long.

The Chicago police have come under some public criticism because they turned up nothing unusual in 1975 and 1976 when parents of two 17-year-old youths who had worked for Mr. Gacy reported their sons missing.

But Mike Gold, spokesman for the National Runaway Switchboard, a Chicago-based organization that maintains a 24-hour, toll-free line for youngsters who need advice or assistance, said: "As I recall, the police have stated that they have to give the younger kids priority, the 12-year-olds

and younger, and that's the logical way of doing it."

Noting that his organization handles about 50,000 calls a year, most of them anonymously at the youngsters' request, Mr. Gold added: "It's a very, very difficult situation for the police department. If a kid is going to run away, he's not going to be found very easily by the police. It's too easy for the kids to submerge. The good news is that most runaways return home within three or four weeks, and a great many return home within a couple of days."

David M. Mozee, a spokesman for the Chicago Police Department, agreed.

"It's a monumental problem," he said. "We investigate every one we can. The younger the child, the more intensive the investigation. We can't do anything to a 17-year-old runaway. All we can do, if we see the kid, is tell the parents we've seen him."

As for the two missing youths who once worked for Mr. Gacy, Mr. Mozee said that he was not familiar with the details of the investigation into the disappearance of Gregory Godzik, who was last seen two years ago, but that he had seen reports on the case of John Butkovich.

"We talked to a lot of his friends, and we talked to Gacy," Mr. Mozee said of the Butkovich case. "But there were no leads. We questioned Gacy, we followed Gacy, but we found nothing wrong. We knew of the conviction in Iowa, but that doesn't make him a mass killer."

Mr. Mozee described the recent arrest of Mr. Gacy and the discovery of the bodies at the contractor's home as "a fluke, because a Des Plaines lieutenant had a 15-year-old boy."

Lieut. Joseph Kozenczak, chief of detectives in suburban Des Plaines, conceded that the fact that he had a son the same age and in the same high school with Robert Piest, the 15-year-old who disappeared on Dec. 11, made him pursue that case with more diligence than usual.

The Piest boy was reported missing



John Butkovich

Skeleton was among victims

after he left his job at a pharmacy, where Mr. Gacy had been doing some remodeling work, after telling his mother that he had to talk with a contractor about a promised summer job.

Charged With Boy's Murder

After following Mr. Gacy for several days and searching his home — the police said they found evidence that the Piest youth had been there — the Des Plaines police charged the contractor with the boy's murder. Mr. Gacy is reported to have told investigators that he threw the Piest boy's body into the Des Plaines River and disposed of four or five other bodies the same way.

After Mr. Gacy told the police a rambling tale about the bodies buried on his property, investigators said, a search of Mr. Gacy's home was begun.

Officials said that so far they had received 15 sets of dental charts from parents who thought their missing sons might have been among the victims.

The officials asked concerned parents around the country to send any information that might help in determining the names of those uncovered.

While the dread of knowing what is now only a possibility might affect parents of missing persons everywhere, it weighed especially heavily on the families of John Butkovich and Gregory Godzik. Investigators reported finding wallets containing identification of both youths in Mr. Gacy's home.

There was a bleakness close to despair in the homes of both families this Christmas season.

Before his son's body was identified, Marko Butkovich said that after years of hearing little about the progress of the Chicago police investigation into the disappearance of his son, a youth officer told him: "If he is dead, we'll find him, but if he's not, then there's nothing we can do."

At the Godzik home on the Northwest Side, Eugenia Godzik recalled the last time she had seen her son on Dec. 11, 1976.

"We were going to church, and he sat down with a jar of cookies and milk," she said. "He was real excited because he was going out with a young lady he'd had his eye on for a long time. When he wasn't in his room the next morning, we called her and she said he let her off around 12:30. So we contacted all his friends. And they didn't know where he was."

She said that her son had liked his new employer, for whom he had worked only five or six weeks. "I don't think anybody thought anything about Gacy" in connection with her son's disappearance, she said.

As the search in Norwood Park Township goes on, Gregory Godzik is still missing. In a closet at his home, there are unopened presents waiting — presents from three Christmases past.

Officer Dismissed Over Photo

CHICAGO, Dec. 30 (UPI) — Cook County Sheriff Richard J. Elrod said today that he dismissed the corrections officer responsible for releasing a photograph of John Wayne Gacy strapped to his hospital bed.

Sheriff Elrod said he would seek charges against the officer and against The Chicago Tribune, which published the photo on the front page of yesterday's editions.

The sheriff said Donald Butler, a county corrections department sergeant, took the photo from corrections department offices. Mr. Elrod said the photo was for official purposes and was not intended for release to the public. Investigators are looking for the person Mr. Butler said "took" the photo from him and then sold it to The Tribune.