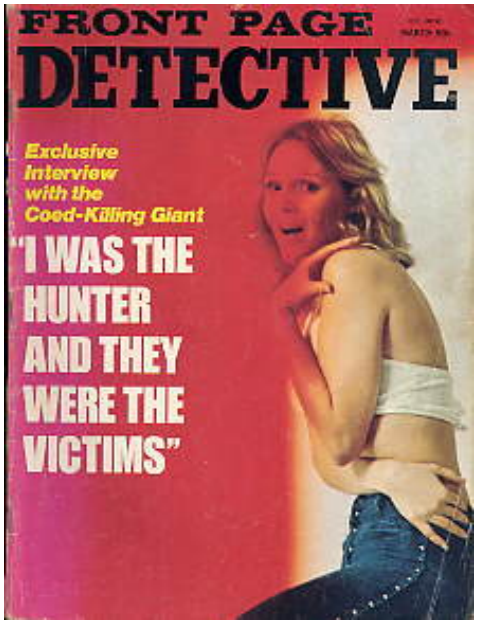
EDMUND KEMPER INTERVIEW



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By MARJ von BEROLDINGEN

Just a few hours after California's mass murderer Edmund Kemper, 24, was convicted on eight counts of first-degree murder, he kept a promise and granted me an exclusive interview. It was not my first person-to-person talk with the young killer.

As a reporter assigned to cover the grisly murder investigation (*I'll Show You Where I Buried the Pieces of Their Bodies*, August INSIDE, 1973) and the trial, I had, by chance, chatted with him a few weeks before his trial, as he was waiting at the Santa Cruz County courthouse for a conference with his lawyer.

I wrote a story about our meeting and my impressions of him and he liked it, thus came his promise of an interview once the trial was ended. Kemper had warned me the court hearings on the gory sex-killings of six coeds and the subsequent murders of his mother and her best friend probably would turn my stomach. They did.

As a sex-starved young man in what should have been a peak of his virility, he was sexually and socially so uncertain of himself that he began to prey on hitchhiking coeds, not as a rapist, but as a murderer and necrophiliac.

"At first I picked up girls just to talk to them, just to try to get acquainted with people my own age and try to strike up a friendship," he had told investigators. Then he began to have sex fantasies about the girls he picked up hitchhiking, but feared being caught and convicted as a rapist So, he

said: "I decided to mix the two and have a situation of rape and murder and no witnesses and no prosecution."

Kemper's first two victims were 18-year-old Fresno State college coeds, Mary Ann Pesce and Anita Luchessa whom he stabbed to death May 7, 1972, after he picked them up in Berkeley.

"I had full intentions of killing them. I would loved to have raped them, but not having any experience at all..." he trailed off.

He disclosed that, despite the fact he killed Miss Pesce, she had awakened a feeling of tenderness in him that none of his other victims did. "I was really quite struck by her personality and her looks and there was just almost a reverence there," he said.

Kemper decapitated the girls' corpses, burying Miss Pesce's body in a redwood grove along a mountain highway and casting that of Miss Luchessa out in the brush on a hillside. He kept their heads for a time and then hurled them down a steep slope of a ravine.

The girls were listed as "missing persons" for months until Miss Pesce's head was found by hikers and, subsequently, identified through dental charts. Kemper later led investigators to the grave where he had buried her.

"Sometimes, afterward, I visited there ... to be near her ... because I loved her and wanted her," he said on the witness stand.

Miss Luchessa's head and body never were found.

A month after Miss Pesce's head was discovered, Kemper chose another victim. Beautiful Aiko Koo, 15, a talented Oriental dancer, was hitchhiking from her home in Berkeley to a dance class in San Francisco. She never arrived. Kemper literally snuffed out her life in the darkness of an isolated spot in the mountains above the city of Santa Cruz.

Her mouth was taped shut and he pinched her nostrils together until she suffocated. Then he raped her inert body and put it in the trunk of his car. A few miles away, he stopped at a country bar "for a few beers."

Before going into the bar, he opened the trunk to make sure she was dead. He told investigators:

"I suppose as I was standing there looking, I was doing one of those triumphant things, too, admiring my work and admiring her beauty, and I might say admiring my catch like a fisherman."

Kemper also spoke of a sense of exultation in his killings:

"I just wanted the exaltation over the party. In other words, winning over death. They were dead and I was alive. That was the victory in my case."

He said of the act of decapitation, "I remember it was very exciting … there was actually a sexual thrill … It was kind of an exalted triumphant type thing, like taking the head of a deer or an elk or something would be to a hunter.

"I was the hunter and they were the victims."

On the witness stand, though, Kemper testified that "death never entered as a factor" in the coed killings. He said:

"Alive, they were distant, not sharing with me. I was trying to establish a relationship and there was no relationship there...

"When they were being killed, there wasn't anything going on in my mind except that they were going to be mine ... That was the only way they could be mine." (Kemper testified that as a child of eight he had killed his pet cat, which had transferred its affections to his two sisters, "to make it mine.")

His desire to possess the coeds led Kemper even further than murder, he revealed in court. In his fantasies he literally made two of the girls "a part of me" by eating "parts of them."

Of all his coed victims he said: "They were like spirit wives... I still had their spirits. I still have them," he declared in the courtroom.

Kemper did not kill again until after he bought a .22-caliber pistol in January of this year.

"I went bananas after I got that .22," he told me.

The day he bought it he fatally shot coed Cynthia Schall, a 19-year-old Santa Cruz girl, in the trunk of his car. He carried her body into his mother's apartment near Santa Cruz, kept it in his bedroom closet overnight and dissected it in the bathtub the next day while his mother was at work.

He buried the girl's head in the back yard "with her face turned toward my bedroom window and, sometimes at night, I talked to her, saying love things, the way you do to a girlfriend or wife."

Less than a month later, Kemper picked up two girls, Rosalind Thorpe, 23, and Alice Liu, 21, on the campus of the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC). He shot them both to death in the car before driving off campus and later cut off their heads in the trunk of his car while it was parked in the street in front of his mother's apartment.

He told investigators the killings came on an impulse born out of anger with his mother.

"My mother and I had had a real tiff. I was pissed. I told her I was going to a movie and I jumped up and went straight to the campus because it was still early.

"I said, the first girl that's halfway decent that I pick up, I'm gonna blow her brains out," he revealed.

Kemper's final killings were those of his mother, Mrs. Clarnell Strandberg, 52, and her best friend, Mrs. Sara Hallett, 59, in his mother's apartment on Easter weekend. Then he began a cross-country flight, in a rented car loaded with guns and ammunition, that ended in a decision to surrender, "so I wouldn't kill again."

On April 24, 1973, he was arrested in a public telephone booth in Pueblo, Colo., after he had called policemen he knew in Santa Cruz to say he was the coed killer and told them where to find the bodies of his mother and Mrs. Hallett.

The afternoon I went to see Kemper in the Santa Cruz County jail where he was being kept pending sentencing the next morning, I expected to talk to him for an hour or so, in the presence of a jailer. Instead, I spent over five hours alone with him, locked up in a tiny glass-walled room within sight but not sound of the jailer's desk. Though he wore manacles on his ankles, his hands were free.

Disarming as he is at times, more than once during the long afternoon I was reminded that I was sitting face to face with a six-foot, nine-inch 255-pound giant who had murdered and mutilated six coeds, beaten his sleeping mother to death with a hammer and strangled his mother's best friend in a matter of seconds. The frequent traffic of jailers and inmates past the glass wall was reassuring comfort.

My visit with Kemper was an unforgettable experience, inducing a collage of feelings. As he talked on and on, he was many things.

- A lonely young man, grateful for companionship on the eve of what was certainly to be his last day outside prison.
- An angry and bitter sibling recalling what he felt was rejection and a lack of love from a divorced father who "cared more for his second family than he did us."
- A son who alternately hated and "loved" a mother he described as a "manhater" who had three husbands and "took her violent hatred of my father out on me."
- A sometimes wry and boastful raconteur, chronicling the events of his life and a person quick to see the humorous side of things and laugh, even if the joke is on him.
- An anguished and remorseful killer when speaking of the coeds whose bodies he had sexually assaulted after death and of the "pain" he had caused their families. "The day those fathers [of the Pesce and Luchessa girls] testified in court was very hard for me ... I felt terrible. I wanted to talk to them about their daughters, comfort them ... But what could I say?"

Kemper also was a person who momentarily precipitated in me a flush of terror and then allayed my misgivings by faultlessly assuming the role of the gracious host. He talked about the jury's verdict that morning. He had pleaded not guilty and not guilty by reason of insanity to each of the killings.

Court-appointed psychiatrists, called to testify by the prosecution, described Kemper as suffering from a "personality disorder," but said he was not criminally insane by California's legal standards. One doctor called Kemper a "sadistic sex maniac."

The jury found Kemper was guilty and sane.

He didn't disagree with the jury's verdict.

"I really wasn't surprised when it came out that way," he said. "There was just no way they could find me insane ... Society just isn't ready for that yet. Ten or 20 years from now they would have, but they're not going to take a chance."

But he expressed regret that the "sane" verdict would mean he would go to prison, instead of possibly returning to Atascadero state hospital.

Kemper spent five years at Atascadero after he murdered his grandparents in 1964 at the age of 15. He recalled with pride the job he'd held there as head of the psychological testing lab at the age of 19 and working directly under the hospital's chief psychologist. He said:

"I felt I definitely could have done a lot of good there, helping people return to the streets ... I could have fit in there quicker than anybody else...

"After all," he explained, "I grew up there. That used to be like my home.

"Basically, I was born there, you know. I have a lot of fond memories of the place ... And I don't know anybody else who has," he added with a rueful laugh.

It was there that he became a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. During his trial, he wore his membership pin in his lapel, apparently with pride.

Because of his intelligence and ability, he apparently was a valuable aide in psychological testing and research. "I helped to develop some new tests and some new scales on MMPI... You've probably heard of it ... the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory," he said with a chuckle. "I helped to develop a new scale on that, the 'Overt Hostility Scale'... How's that for a..." He groped for a word.

"Ironic?" I suggested.

"Ironic note," he agreed. "There we go, it was an ironic note that I helped to develop that scale and then look what happened to me when I got back out on the streets."

Though Kemper couldn't give me a positive answer to why he did what he did, he partly blamed society, the courts and his parents as well, saying:

"I didn't have the supervision I should have had once I got out... I was supposed to see my parole officer every other week and a social worker the other week.

"I never did. I think if I had, I would have made it.

"Two weeks after I was on the streets, I got scared because I hadn't seen anyone.

"Finally, I called the district parole office and asked if I was doing something wrong... was I supposed to go to my parole officer, or would he come to see me, I asked."

Kemper said the man on the phone asked him, "What's the matter, you got a problem?" When Kemper told him, "no," the man replied, "Well, we're awfully busy with people who have; we'll get to you."

Kemper blamed the court for counteracting the plan of Atascadero doctors to release him in stages geared to get him accustomed to the world outside again. He said they planned to send him to a "halfway house" environment where he would still have counseling, have a chance to get acquainted with girls at social functions and become aware of persons in his own age group.

"When I got out on the street it was like being on a strange planet. People my age were not talking the same language. I had been living with people older than I was for so long that I was an old fogey."

Instead, Kemper was sent to a California Youth Authority institution by court order, only to be released abruptly five months later, paroled to the custody of a mother who was "an alcoholic and constantly bitched and screamed at me."

Kemper looked down at his hands and said, "She loved me in her way and despite all the violent screaming and yelling arguments we had, I loved her, too." "But," he continued, "she had to manage your life... and interfere in your personal affairs."

He said his mother was a "big, ugly, awkward woman who was six feet tall and she was always trying to get me to go out with girls who were just like her... friends of hers from the campus." (His mother was an administrative assistant at UCSC.)

"I may not be so much to look at myself," Kemper said with a laugh, "but I have always gone after pretty girls."

All of his hitchhiking coed victims were pretty and, with the exception of one girl, were small and delicate in stature.

Of his father, he said, "he didn't want me around, because I upset his second wife. Before I went to Atascadero, my presence gave her migraine headaches; when I came out she was going to have a heart attack if I came around."

It was because of that, Kemper said, that he was "shipped off" to his paternal grandparents to live in "complete isolation" on a California mountain top with "my senile grandfather" and "my grandmother who thought she had more balls than any man and was constantly emasculating me and my grandfather to prove it.

"I couldn't please her... It was like being in jail... I became a walking time bomb and I finally blew ... It was like that the second time, with my mother."

Kemper laughed as he recalled an incident with his grandmother when she left him home alone one day but took his grandfather's .45 automatic with her in her purse, because she was afraid he might "play" around with it in her absence. His grandparents were going to Fresno on a monthly shopping trip. He recalled:

"I saw her big black pocketbook bulging as she went out the door and I said to myself, 'Why that old bitch, she's taking the gun with her, because she doesn't trust me, even though I promised I wouldn't touch it.'"

He said he looked in his grandfather's bureau drawer and "sure enough the gun was gone from its usual place...

"I toyed with the idea of calling the chief of police in Fresno and telling him 'there's a little old lady walking around town with a forty-five in her purse and she's planning a holdup' and then give him my grandmother's description."

He laughed appreciatively at the idea and asked me: "How do you suppose she would have talked herself out of that?" There were moments, prior to her death, when he felt like punishing his mother, too. Kemper told investigators he had killed his mother to spare her the suffering and shame that knowledge of his crimes would bring. But, he said, as he sat in the little room with me:

"There were times when she was bitching and yelling at me that I felt like retaliating and walking over to the telephone in her presence and calling the police, to say, 'Hello, I'm the coed killer,' just to lay it on her."

Kemper's testimony in court revealed his desire to punish his mother did not end with the fatal hammer blow. He cut off his mother's head, "put it on a shelf and screamed at it for an hour ... threw darts at it," and ultimately, "smashed her face in," he recalled for the horrified court.

Once during the long afternoon, a deputy brought us in some coffee. Another one came to inquire if Kemper needed any medication. (Under doctor's orders he was allowed to have tranquillizers as required and sleeping pills at night.)

The jail nurse also came in while I was there and changed the bandage on his wrist where he had slashed an artery in one of his four suicide attempts after his arrest.

"Would you like to see my wound," he said, holding his arm out to me.

(The cutting instrument he had used to make the suicidal incision had been fashioned from the metal casing of a ball point pen I had given him. Jailers at the neighboring San Mateo county jail, where he was kept for security reasons after two suicide attempts in Santa Cruz, had failed to remove the pen from his folder of papers when Kemper returned from court.)

He had previously assured me, "It's not your fault." He tried to explain his suicide attempts, saying that he did not have a suicidal feeling when he was first "locked up." Then the "kindness and respect with which I was treated by the people [jail personnel] after a while started to get to me ...

"I started feeling like I didn't deserve all that nice treatment after what I had done ... and I guess that's why I started cutting myself up."

Kemper also talked about his previous statements that, if he were sent to prison he would kill someone so he could die in the gas chamber, and indicated he had had a change of heart.

"I guess you heard me say that I wanted to kill 'Herbie' Mullin, my fellow mass murderer," he said. (The Mullin story, *Chalk Up Another for Mr. Kill-Crazy*, appeared in the June, 1973, issue of INSIDE DETECTIVE.)

"Well, there was a time when I thought it would be a good solution for everyone.

"It would be good for society and save everyone a bundle of money. Instead of spending thousands and thousands of dollars to lock the two of us up for life to protect us from people and people from us...."

Kemper had told investigators and psychiatrists he thought he would kill again if he ever were released. He also admitted under cross examination by District Attorney Peter Chang that he had fantasized killing "thousands of people," including Chang himself. He said:

"I figured that if I killed him [Mullin] and then they sent me to the gas chamber, it would be a good solution to the problem.

"I know I'd never get a chance to though and I don't have any intention of killing him or anyone else...."

(Mullin was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder and eight counts of second-degree murder in the shooting deaths of ten persons he killed during a 21-day rampage early in 1973 in Santa Cruz County. Five of the victims were complete strangers to him. He said he killed three others in 1972.)

Kemper and Mullin were next-door neighbors in their security prisoner cellblock at the San Mateo County jail before Mullin was tried and convicted. Kemper made no secret of his disdain for Mullin from the first moment of their meeting in San Mateo.

"You're a no-class killer," he taunted him.

During Kemper's trial, under questioning from Chang, Kemper admitted he had thrown water through the cell bars onto Mullin to "shut him up when he was disturbing everybody by singing off-key in his high-pitched, squeaky voice."

Kemper added, though, "When he was a good boy, I gave him peanuts. He liked peanuts."

Kemper said of the alternate water treatment and the peanuts, "It was behavioral modification treatment... The jailers were very pleased with me."

“You know, though," Kemper told me, as he looked out of the window in the little room, "It really sticks in my craw that Mullin only got two 'firsts' and I got eight.

"He was just a cold-blooded killer, running over a three-week period killing everybody he saw for no good reason."

He paused for a moment, then broke into laughter, saying, "I guess that's kind of hilarious, my sitting here so self-righteously talking, like that, after what I've done."

When Kemper assured me that he had given up thoughts of trying to take his own life again, I asked him what he planned to do with the rest of his years in prison. He told me he knew he would be locked up in tight security for the first few years and that he thought he would try to do a lot of reading and studying. "I've always loved science and math," he said, "and I'd also like to study French and German.

”After that, I hope, I can find a way to help other people… Maybe they can study me and find out what makes people like me do the things they do."

(The next morning. Judge Harry F. Brauer sentenced Kemper to life in prison and told him he was going to recommend "in the strongest terms possible" that Kemper not be released for "the rest of your natural life.")

One relationship that obviously has touched Kemper is that with Bruce Colomy, Santa Cruz County sheriff's deputy. Colomy has been with Kemper more than any other officer, transporting him to and from San Mateo County Jail to Santa Cruz for court appearances and remaining with him at all times when he was out of his cell.

Kemper said of Colomy, only a few years older than himself, "He's more like a father to me than anyone I have ever known ... He's like the father I wish I had had."

(Deputy Colomy told me later that one of the last things Kemper did before he left the Santa Cruz courthouse for state prison was to remove his cherished Junior Chamber of Commerce membership pin from his coat lapel "and give it to me." The deputy said, "Ed looked at it for a long time and tears came to his eyes. Then he handed it to me and said, 'Here, I want you to have it.'")

For all of his seeming ability to relate to people in an animated and warm exchange, Kemper also has the ability to withdraw without warning into a kind of frightening reverie, reliving his acts of violence. I watched it happen.

He had paused in his outpouring of talk about himself and looked at me curiously.

"You haven't asked the questions I expected a reporter to ask," he said.

"What do you mean," I replied. "Give me some examples."

He drawled, "Oh, what is it like to have sex with a dead body? ... What does it feel like to sit on your living room couch and look over and see two decapitated girls' heads on the arm of the couch?" (He interjected an unsolicited answer: "The first time, it makes you sick to your stomach.")

He continued, "What do you think, now, when you see a pretty girl walking down the street?"

Again, an unsolicited answer: "One side of me says, 'Wow, what an attractive chick. I'd like to talk to her, date her.'

"The other side of me says, "I wonder how her head would look on a stick?'"

(The public defender appointed as Kemper's attorney told jurors in his closing argument: "There are two people locked up in the body of this young giant, one good and one evil... One is fighting to be here with us and the other is slipping off to his own little world of fantasy where he is happy."

"Oh, for God's sake, Ed," I said, just a trifle piqued by the feeling he was putting me on and hoping that was it, "the jury found you legally sane and I agree with that. But, at the same time, I can't help but believe that, as you yourself said, you must have been sick when you did the things you did.

Kemper, himself, earlier had told me he thought his actions were that of a "demented person."

"In my estimation," I continued, "it doesn't make any more sense to ask a delirious patient what he's thinking than it would to ask you what you were thinking when these things were going on."

Despite that, for the first time, he began to detail to me how he killed one of his victims. The illustration he chose made me even more uncomfortable. It was the killing of Mrs. Hallett, not a coed but a mature woman, like me.

Kemper straightened up in his chair and began a graphic description. "I came up behind her and crooked my arm around her neck, like this," he said, bending his powerful arm in front of himself at chin level.

"I squeezed and just lifted her off the floor. She just hung there and, for a moment, I didn't realize she was dead ... I had broken her neck and her head was just wobbling around with the bones of her neck disconnected in the skin sack of her neck."

He began to wobble his head around, never changing the position of his arms and gazing fixedly at me. His jail-pale face had become slightly flushed, his eyes glazed, his breath coming a little quickly and he stuttered almost imperceptibly as, he spoke.

"Holy Christ," I said to myself, "what am I doing here?"

I reached for a cigarette in my pocket and said the first thing that came into my mind to try and change the subject without showing I was upset. "Have you always been so strong, Ed," I asked in a nonchalant tone.

"No," he replied. "As a matter of fact..." he relaxed and then we were off and talking about other more comfortable topics.

The sky outside the windows of the little room had grown dark and I made efforts to leave, saying I had been "virtually incommunicado all day as far as my family was concerned and they would wonder why I had not arrived for dinner."

Kemper was reluctant for me to go. "Well, you can always tell them later, you have been over talking with Ed Kemper all afternoon," he laughed.

As it turned out, though, I stayed for dinner with Ed. The trusty had brought his dinner and it was getting cold. When I insisted that we should stop talking and that Kemper should eat, the jailer invited me to stay for dinner.

"Big Ed" urged me to accept and I did. He carried the trays into the little room himself and arranged them on the desk chairs. We chatted as we ate and he was the host. He ate hungrily and I noticed he had finished his rice with meat sauce. I had more than I could eat, so I offered to share. What seemed like a large portion to me must have been but a morsel to a large man like him.

He gratefully accepted the added food, but cautioned me as I scraped it from my tray on to his, "Save some for yourself."

I gave him my milk as well, saying, "I really hate milk, you can have it."

"Do you?" he said. "I love it."

When dinner was over, I said I must go and, when he got up and proceeded toward the door, I said, "Do you think you could knock on the window and get the jailer to spring me, Ed?"

He laughed and replied, "I'll try."

He stood in the doorway, his hair brushing the top of the door jamb, watching me leave, as if he were graciously bidding a guest goodbye from his home.

He said to a deputy, "Could I have some matches?" (I had been lighting his cigarettes all afternoon with my lighter.)

The sergeant on duty at the desk said to the deputy, "He can't have any matches, but light his cigarette for him." Kemper looked at me and grinned like a teenager. "Yesterday," he said, "I had matches, but isn't it funny when you're convicted, you immediately become combustible."

"Well, Ed," I retorted, "if you'd learn to stay out of trouble, you wouldn't find yourself in these predicaments."

"Right on," he said, with a final salute of his hand and a smile.