

Murders committed, conviction,
And execution of Charles Starkweather

By:

Kati Jo Backer

An Oral History Interview With:
JoAnn Gayle Boyd

Palmyra, NE
May 2010

Kati J. Backer: During the time of the murders by Charles Starkweather in Nebraska, how old were you?

JoAnn G. Boyd: I must have been twenty-four.

KB: Where did you live?

JB: Here in Lincoln, at about 53rd and Holdredge.

KB: What was going on in your life?

JB: Had a new baby, three months old (My uncle, Daniel Boyd).

KB: Were you working or staying at home with the baby?

JB: Basically staying at home with the baby, a couple shifts here and there, but not regularly.

KB: Grandpa was working? (Thomas L. Boyd)

JB: Yes.

KB: How did you feel when you saw the first news headlines about the murders?

JB: Well, I was concerned when I heard about the first Filling Station attendant, but I wasn't overly concerned, because I thought someone had tried to rob him. But then I became more concerned as time past, and they had a suspect and they didn't know where he was, I was worried.

KB: Did the murders change anything about your life?

JB: No, after it was over I really didn't think about it.

KB: Did you change your routine or way of life at all during the murders? How? (i.e. make sure house was locked at night, etc.)

JB: Yeah, I didn't go out alone, I didn't go out much anyway with the baby. But I was constantly on the alert.

KB: Were you at home alone a lot?

JB: All day while Grandpa was at work.

KB: How did you follow the story?

JB: Newspaper and radio.

KB: How did you feel when Starkweather was finally caught?

JB: Relieved, very relieved and sorry for the families of the people killed, they were innocent, and the two teenagers were from the Bennet area.

KB: During the time of the murders, how was Lincoln different from today?

JB: Well, Lincoln didn't have homicides, very rarely, and usually it was family or some reason for it. And people locked their doors and continued to lock them after this incident.

(Interviewee tells me that in a recent conversation with my cousin, Julie, 28, had never heard of Starkweather before, Interviewee finds this odd since it was a nationwide headline during that time, and remains to be a well-known event.)

KB: How was the public advised to protect themselves?

JB: As I recall there were some events that were cancelled during that time, and people were warned to keep their doors locked, and not be out, to stay at home.

KB: How did you feel for the families of the victims?

JB: Very sorry for them, they were all senseless murders. They were all in the wrong place at the wrong time. Especially the kids, since they were from the Bennet area.

KB: How did you feel towards Starkweather himself?

JB: Well I knew he was nuts, I was just hoping he would be caught and put away. I was very sorry for his family; apparently they were a nice family. And the farmer that was killed was a family friend.

KB: How did you feel towards Caril Fugate?

JB: I felt that she had a lot to do with it too; I think she was under Charlie's thumb. I don't know if she herself actually killed someone, but it wouldn't surprise me.

KB: Any last comments about the murders, conviction, or execution of Starkweather?

JB: Well, you should know your Great-grandfather (Harold Thompson) was on jury duty at the time, but was excused from the jury because he knew the judge. But he went through the whole trial and saw Charlie. The strange thing is, this happened in '57 and he (Charlie) was executed in '59, and these days that doesn't happen that fast. I was fully for the death penalty, and my dad said, there was no doubt that kid was nuts. People were terrified, they took their kids to school, and you just didn't see kids walking to school during that time. Gun shops were also doing quite while at the time, people were trying to protect themselves.

Interviewee also tells me about the home she and my grandfather lived in during the times of the murders. She says it was a small, square house, split into four rooms with a crawl space below the house. In the middle of the house was a large vent on the

floor that the furnace blew air up into, you could see down the vent into the crawl space and as she imagined it, probably see up into the house also. Every time she heard a noise from in the crawl space, she remembers thinking, "its Charlie down there".