Arthur Shawcross  
The Genesee River Killer

Dr. Mike Aamodt  
Radford University  
maamodt@radford.edu

Birth
• Born on June 6, 1945 at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Kittery, Maine
• 1 month premature  
  − weighed 5 pounds  
  − spent 20 days in the hospital  
• Mother Bessie was 18, father Arthur Roy was 21  
• Born with XYY  
• Was first of four children  
  − Sister Donna (-1)  
  − Sister Jean (-3)  
  − Brother Jimmy

Infancy
• Mother took Art to Watertown, NY until father completed military stint  
• Spoke first word at 9 months  
  − Norm is 12 months  
• Walked at 15 months  
  − Norm is 9-12 months  
• Weaned from a bottle at 16 months  
  − Norm is 9-18 months
• Age 4
  – Claims he was punished with belt and a broom handle
  – Father would use buckle and draw blood
  – No confirmation of this

• Age 5
  – Missed 33 days of kindergarten
  – Still talked “baby talk”
  – Described as “odd”
  – Frequent nightmare
  – Wet the bed
  – Mother didn’t pay as much attention to Artie as she did with the others
  – Artie craved attention

• Age 6
  – Began running away from home
  – School
    • Earned As and Bs in first grade
    • Teacher said “had lazy work habits”

• Age 7
  – Began having conversations with imaginary friends
  – Peers
    • made fun of him
    • called him “oddie”

• Age 8
  – Was a bully—mean to younger children
  – Had trouble making friends
  – Doctors said he was “attractive, neat, and well-dressed”
  – Kept running away
  – Felt his parents didn’t like him as well as his other siblings

Age 9
• Grades in 3rd grade slip
• Mother discovers husband has a wife and son in Australia
  – Family relations decline
  – Mother dominates husband
  – Things are never the same
• Hit in head with stone
  – hospitalized
  – received stitches
  – caused numbness for years
  – still has knot on head
• First sexual encounter
  – Claims Aunt had sex with him
  – no confirmation of this
Age 10

• School
  – Stayed in 4th grade for 2 years
  – Would cry and speak baby talk when bullied by other children
  – Constantly got into fights
  – Bullied younger children

• Home
  – Ran away
  – Nightmares
  – Still wetting the bed

• Crime
  – Began shoplifting and stealing

Age 11

– Masturbated often
– When caught by mother
  • threatened with butcher knife
  • Stuck broom handle into his rectum
  • mother denies all of this
  • psychologists are not sure

Age 13

– Family built a small house nears Brownsville, NY
  • 3 sets of relatives moved to the area
  • Called “Shawcross Corners”
– New bedroom means he only shares room with his younger brother

Age 14

• Claims he had constant oral sex with his sister and cousin (he denies this)
• Claims he had sex with a female neighbor
  – When caught by her brother, was forced to have oral sex with him
• Claims he was raped by a male stranger
• Began having sex with a variety of animals (sheep, chickens, dogs)
Age 15

- Failed 8th grade (2 years behind in school)
- Still had nightmares, wet the bed, and talked baby talk
- Began setting brush fires
- Became more violent
- Tortured animals
- Described as a loner and as being moody

Age 16

- School
  - Still in 8th grade
  - Had perfect attendance record but didn’t pay attention in class
  - Joined wrestling team, but became violent when he got mad
  - Got hit in the head with a discuss - spent four days in the hospital
  - Bullied other kids
Age 17

- School
  - In 9th grade
  - Grades fell
  - Dropped out of school
- Crime
  - Burgled homes
  - Stole
  - Peeped into houses

Age 18 & 19

- Arrested for breaking into a Sears store, received 18 months probation
- Sarah Chatterton
  - Met her while working at the Family Bargain Center (he was fired for poor customer service)
  - Married her—she was 20 (September, 1964)
  - Did not consummate the marriage for several weeks
  - His son Michael was born a year later (10/2/65)
- Work
  - Quit or fired from several jobs during the year
  - Favorite job was at a butcher shop

Age 20

- Shawcross Arrested
  - Hit a 13-year old who threw a snowball at his car
  - Received 6 months probation
  - Psychologists label him an “emotionally unstable personality”
- Drafted into the Army (4/7/66)
  - Initial discipline problems
  - Settles down
  - Falls off 40-foot ladder and hits head
- Sarah Divorces Shawcross
Age 22

- **Linda Neary**
  - Meets at a bar
  - Didn’t have sex until marriage
  - They get married (September, 1967)

- **Vietnam (October, 1967)**
  - Sent to Vietnam as a supply parts specialist

Age 23

- **September, 1968**
  - Left Vietnam
  - Took 21 days leave in Clayton, NY

- **October, 1968**
  - Was stationed in Fort Sill, OK
  - Became moody, saw an Army psychiatrist
  - Attempts suicide by overdosing

- **Spring, 1969**
  - Discharged from the military

Age 24

- **Linda Neary**
  - Got angry and beat her up, she was 4-months pregnant and she miscarried (June, 1969)
  - She divorced Shawcross (Fall, 1969)

- **Arson**
  - Was arrested for setting fire to Knowlton Brothers paper mill (April, 1969) and Crowly’s Cheese Company (September, 1969)
  - Sentenced to 5 years in Attica prison for arson (December, 1969)
Age 24 - 26

• Prison
  – Sentenced to 5 years in Attica (December, 1969)
  – Claims he was raped by three Black inmates; claims he got revenge
  – Was transferred to Auburn Prison (June, 1970)
  – Was paroled early for saving a prison official’s life during a riot (October 18, 1971) and returned to Watertown, NY

• Penny Sherbino
  – Started dating; they knew each other from high school (January, 1972)
  – Penny got pregnant (already had 2 children), but later miscarried
  – Got married (April 22, 1972)

Age 26

• Killed Jack Blake
  – April 7, 1972
  – 11-year old boy
  – Sexually assaulted the boy
  – Strangled him and battered him on the head
  – Shawcross claims
    • He cut out his heart and genitals and ate them
    • He returned to the grave site several times to have sex with the body

Age 27

• Killed Karen Ann Hill
  – September 2, 1972
  – 8-year old girl
  – Raped, strangled, and mutilated her
  – Arrested on October 3, 1972
Age 27

- Sentenced to 25 years in Green Haven Prison
  - Sentence was light in order to get confession and to clear Jack Blake case
- Never charged with death of Jack Blake

Age 28-41

The Prison Years

- 1974 Became violent in prison after receiving constant threats from other inmates
- 1975 Filed for divorce because Penny wouldn’t visit. Claimed he had sex with a female nurse’s aide
- 1977 Still not cooperating well with psychologists, not attending therapy, breaking rules
- 1978 Earned his GED and then a “B” in a college horticulture class. Received excellent comments from counselors and staff

Age 41

- April 28, 1987 – Paroled after 14 ½ years
  - Parole board was uncomfortable releasing him
  - Psychologist’s reports were not positive
- Robert Kent (parole officer)
  At the risk of sounding melodramatic, I consider this man to be possibly the most dangerous individual to be released to this community in many years.
Trying to Find a Home

• Placed in the Binghampton, NY area
• Moved to Delhi, NY
  – Moved into Rose Walley’s apartment
  – She has been Art’s prison pen pal
• Rose and Art moved to Fleischmanns, NY
• Rose and Art moved to Rochester, NY

Christmas, 1987 (age 42)

• Invited his family to come visit
  – They declined
  – Discovered mother had thrown away a present he had sent her
• Was having an affair with Clara Neal (age 56)

The Killings

• Dorothy Blackburn (March 15, 1988)
  – Agreed to mutual oral sex for $30
  – She bit his penis, drawing blood
  – He bit her vagina and then strangled her, causing her to lose consciousness
  – He threatened to kill her but she kept calling him names
  – He strangled her and eventually dumped the body into the river
  – Police discovered her body on March 24, 1988
April, 1988  Fired from Brognia Produce when they discover his criminal past

April, 1988  Has sex with a prostitute but does not kill her

May, 1988  Gets a job with G&G Food Service as a salad maker ($6.25 per hour)

June 28, 1989  Has sex with a prostitute but does not kill her

Anna Steffan (July 8, 1989)
- 28-year old prostitute
- Strangles her after she got frustrated by his lack of an erection after 40 minutes
- She threatened to tell police that she saw him with Dorothy Blackburn
- Dumps her body near the river
- Body is discovered on September 9

Dorothy Keller (July 29, 1989)
- 59-year old housekeeper for Shawcross and Rose
- She threatened to tell Rose about their 2-month long affair
- Shawcross bludgeons her to death
- Hid the body, went back to see it, threw her skull into the river
- Body is discovered on October 31
August, 1989

• Art and Rose Marie Walley finally get married after two years of living together
• Art invited a lot of people to the reception (he made lots of food)
• Only the boyfriend of Rose’s daughter and his mother attended

Patty Ives (September 29, 1989)
– 25-year old prostitute
– She tried to steal his wallet and had seen him with Anna Steffen
– Body found on November 6, 1989

June Stotts (October 23, 1989)
– 30-year old, mildly-retarded neighbor
– Strangled her after she was going to tell people they had sex
– Went back one week later, had sex, cut her open, and ate her vagina
– Body is discovered on November 23, 1989

Frances Brown (October, 1989)
– 22-year old prostitute
– Suffocates by pushing his penis deep into her throat
– Body found on November 13, 1989

Maria Welch (November 9, 1989)
– 22-year old prostitute
– Strangled her after she lied to him about having her period

Jo Ann Van Nostrand (November 22, 1989)
– Prostitute who survives Shawcross
– Has sex with her and ejaculates for the first time with a prostitute
– She pulls knife on him when she thinks he is trying to strangle her
### Elizabeth Gibson (November 26, 1989)
- Prostitute
- Strangles her after she panicked and started to gauge his face
- Body found on November 27, 1989

### Darlene Trippi (December 4, 1989)
- 32-year old prostitute
- Strangled after she made fun of him for not getting an erection

### Felicia Stevens (December 26, 1989)
- 29-year old African-American prostitute
- Strangled after she stuck her head in his car and threatened to yell rape if he didn’t pay her

### June Cicero (December 18, 1989)
- 34-year old prostitute
- Strangled after she made fun of him for not getting an erection and threatened to tell police who she was
- He returned a few days later, cut her up, and ate her vagina
- Police discover the body but do not publicize. Instead they stake-out the body
- Police helicopter spots Shawcross parked above the body on January 2, 1990

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### Summary of Killing (1989)
- March 15 Dorothy Blackburn (27)
- July 8 Anna Steffen (28)
- July 29 Dorothy Keller (59)
- Sept 29 Patty Ives (25)
- Oct 23 June Stotts (30)
- Oct Frances Brown
- Nov 9 Maria Welch (22)
- Nov 26 Elizabeth Gibson
- Dec 4 Darlene Trippi (32)
- Dec 18 June Cicero (34)
- Dec 26 Felicia Stevens
Arrest and Trial

- January 3, 1990
  - Shawcross arrested

- November, 1990
  - Trial begins
  - Shawcross found guilty and sentenced to 250 years
  - Sent to Sullivan Correctional Facility

Update

- July 10, 1997
  - Married Clara Neal in visitor’s room. She was 66, he was 52
  - Clara: “It was nice and all. It took 10 years to make the grade but I finally did it.”

- September 13, 1999
  - Had art privileges suspended after trying to sell his art on eBay

- June 17, 2000
  - Released from solitary confinement and placed back into general population
Psychological Summary

- Genetics
  - XYY
  - Parents had no history of violence
- Birth Difficulties
  - Born 2 months premature
  - Weighed 5 pounds
  - Spent 20 days in the hospital
- Birth Order
  - First of four
    - Brother Jimmy
    - Sister Jeannie

Physiological

- Brain Abnormalities
  - EEG showed brain abnormality: “paroxysmal irritative patterns in bifrontotemporal areas—more in the right side”
  - CAT scan showed a slight asymmetry
  - MRI showed
    - a small subarachnoid cyst
    - a healed frontal lobe fracture
    - A slightly atrophied and foreshortened temporal lobe

Physiological

- Head Injuries
  - Age 9
    - Hit in head with stone
    - Received a concussion, stitches
    - Still has knot
  - Age 10
    - Hit head while at the lake
    - Hospitalized, but doctors could find nothing wrong
  - Age 16
    - Hit on the head with a discuss
    - Concussion—unconscious for many hours
    - Spent four days in the hospital with a hairline fracture
  - Age 18
    - Hit on head with a sledge hammer
    - Received a concussion and was unconscious for many hours
  - Age 22
    - Fell 40 feet from a ladder and hit head while in the army
    - Concussion and was unconscious for many hours
Physiological

• Chemical Abnormalities
  – Pyroluria
    • Elevated level of Kryptopyrrole (200) – 20 is high
    • Serious Vitamin B6 and zinc deficiencies
    • Pyrolurics have terrible behavior problems, can’t control anger when provoked, have mood swings, tend to be night people, usually skip breakfast
  – Exposed to lead while in Vietnam
    • Slept in lead-lined ammunition crates
    • Hospitalized, but doctors could find nothing wrong

• Physical Abnormalities
  – None

• Physical Attractiveness
  – Neither attractive nor unattractive

Physical and Psychological Abuse

• Shawcross says yes
• Family denies
• Psychologists are not sure

Triad

• Animal Torture
  • Skinned fish and enjoyed watching them suffer
  • Tortured cats, birds, squirrels, and chipmunks

• Fire Setting
  • Started brush and trash fires in his mid-teens
  • Burned down a barn and paper mill when he was 24

• Bed Wetting
  • Wet his bed through his mid teens

Psychological Info

• IQ
  – 4th grade between 86 and 92
  – Age 48
    • Full scale = 95
    • Verbal = 88
    • Performance = 107

• Diagnoses
  – 20 Emotionally unstable personality
  – 27 Defective moral and social development
  – 32 Evidence of schizoid personality
  – 34 Abnormal character with psychosexual difficulties
  – 38 Is in good contact with reality and in good control of his mental facilities
  – 40 A lack of any emotional disturbance
  – 41 Orgasmic and ejaculatory problems
  – 42 Post-traumatic stress disorder