

Robert John Erler
"The Catch Me Killer"



Information summarized and researched by

Laura Hehemann

Robert Cowell

Katherine Cippel

Savannah Childer

Department of Psychology
 Radford University
 Radford, VA 24142-6946

Date	Age	Life Event
unknown		Born in Adams, Massachusetts
		Moved to Alabama city in Arizona
		Grew up in Phoenix Arizona
		Was the oldest son of 8 children
		As a child his father pushed him to be tough and put pressure on him to live out his life.
1963		As an amateur boxer Erler went up against a well known fighter named Florentino Fernandez. During that bout, Erler suffered a severe concussion. Later that night he went berserk in Hollywood's Diplomat Hotel. It took 11 police officers to calm him down and from then on he would wake up with blood soaking his pillow from his ears. This is thought to be the reason Erler suffered from severe migraines.
1965		Joined the Army and was a Green Beret
1965		Attended Special Forces Medical School at Fort Sam Houston.
	23	Worked for the North American Boat Corporation
		Married Go-Go dancer Pattie Gould who was pregnant at the time.
		Rented a house in Phonix and they moved in with the new baby.
1967-1968		Became a cop for the Dania Police Department. 1968 he graduated from Broward County Police Academy. Also went and worked for the Hollywood Police Department.
08-12-68	25	Attempted murder of Dorothy Clark and her 12 yr old daughter Marilyn.
		Married and had one son. Lived with wife and child until they left him.
		While on the job, Erler suffered a severe brain concussion from a high speed chase
08-12-68		Attempted murder of a mother and killed the 12 yr. old daughter. Shot them both in the head with a .22 caliber pistol. Shot the mother five times in the head and also shot

		the 12 yr. old daughter in the head five times. Killing took place inside his mobile home.
09-10-68		Erler drove to sisters house in Phoenix to stay for a few days. Upon his arrival he was arrested for the attempted murder of Dorothy Clark and the murder of her 12 year old daughter.
09-24-68		Dorothy Clark, mother of child shooting victim was unable to positively identify Erler in a line up.
11-05-68		New Republican judge assigned to the trial of Erler
01-27-69		Trial began for Erler
		Erler sentenced to 99.5 years in prison
1973		Erler escapes from jail
March 1974		Erler captured. He had dyed his hair black and went under the assumed name Bruce Strickland
03-26-74		Dorothy Clark admitted to lying on the stand about the events that occurred the night that she and her daughter were shot.
1974		Bob Erler accepts Christ as his Savior and admits to the murder of Marilyn Clark.
		Transferred to Fort Grant in Arizona, which is a minimum security prison.
		Transferred back to Florence because he was a runaway risk for the minimum security prison.

General Information

Sex	Male
Race	Caucasian
Number of victims	2 attempted victims, mother and daughter
Country where killing occurred	United States
States where killing occurred	Florida
Type of killer	Disorganized
Height	5'10

Childhood Information

Date of birth	
Location	Adams, Massachusetts
Birth order	Oldest
Number of siblings	7 younger siblings
XY? Y?	Did not specify
Raised by	Both parents
Birth category	Oldest
Parent's marital status	Married
Family event	Death of parent- father
Age of family event	No specific date given as to the death of his father
Problems in school?	No information
Teased while in school?	No information
Physically attractive?	Yes
Physical defect?	No
Speech defect?	No
Head injury?	Yes, During a police chase. The car slid 56 feet before hitting a stop sign and projecting Erler through the window. He had a severe brain concussion. This left him with severe migraines that brought on nausea and dizziness as well as blacking out
Physically abused?	No information
Psychologically abused?	No information
Sexually abused?	No information
Father's occupation	Served in military
Age of first sexual experience	No information
Age when first had intercourse	No information
Mother's occupation	Stay at home mother

Father abused drugs/alcohol	Not specified
Mother abused drugs/alcohol	Not specified
Cognitive Ability	
Highest grade in school	12
Highest degree	High-school diploma
Grades in school	No information
IQ	Not specified
Work History	
Served in the military?	Yes
Branch	Army - Green Beret
Type of discharge	Left on emergency leave. Didn't come back
Saw combat duty	No information
Killed enemy during service?	No information
Applied for job as a cop?	Yes, Accepted
Worked in law enforcement?	Police Officer
Fired from jobs?	No, quit police
Types of jobs worked	North American Boat Corporation, Police officer
Employment status during series	Police officer
Relationships	
Sexual preference	Heterosexual
Marital status	Separated at time of killings due to domestic dispute where Erler hit his wife for punishing their son. Remarried now
Number of children	1 son
Lives with his children	No
Living with	Alone at the time of the killings. Live with wife now
Triad	
Animal torture	No information
Fire setting	No information
Bed wetting	No information
Killer Psychological Information	
Abused drugs?	He abused pot, pills and coke during his time in prison
Abused alcohol?	He attended Alcoholics Anonymous in prison, but was assumed not to have abused alcohol.
Been to a psychologist?	He was interviewed by a psychologist while he was in jail awaiting trial.
Time in forensic hospital?	No
Diagnosis	The diagnosis (while Erler was in jail) from the psychologist said that Erler had a sociopathic personality, which suggests an angry and hostile personality.
Killer Criminal History	
Committed previous crimes?	No information
Spend time in jail?	No information
Spend time in prison?	No
Killed prior to series? Age?	No
Serial Killing	
Number of victims	1
Victim type	young woman, mother of young woman
Killer age at start of series	25
Gender of victims	Young woman and her middle aged mother
Race of victims	Caucasian
Age of victims	12, the mother's age was not specified
Method of killing	Shooting with .22 caliber pistol
Type of serial killer	Organized lust, disorganized thrill
How close did killer live?	Drove to crime

Killing occurred in home of victim?	No
Killing occurred in home of killer?	Yes
Weapon	Killer brought with him
Behavior During Crimes	
Rape?	No
Tortured victims?	No
Stalked victims?	No
Overkill?	Yes, shooting victims more than once
Quick & efficient?	Yes, he shot the victims several times with .22 pistol
Used blindfold?	No
Bound the victims?	No
After Death Behavior	
Sex with the body?	No
Mutilated body?	No
Ate part of the body?	No
Drank victim's blood?	No
Posed the body?	No
Took totem – body part	No
Took totem – personal item	No
Robbed victim or location	
Disposal of Body	
Left at scene, no attempt to hide	No
Left at scene, hidden	No
Left at scene, buried	No
Moved, no attempt to hide	Yes, moved the victim to side of the road in an industrial park about 5 miles from the home where the shooting occurred and then dropped off the mother at the Fort Lauderdale Airport and left her in the car. She was later discovered alive by an airport security guard.
Moved, buried	No
Cut-up and disposed of	No
Moved, too home	No
Sentencing	
Date killer arrested	September 1968, no specific date given
Date convicted	No specific date given, but the assumption would be 1968
Sentence	99 years and 6 months for second degree murder
Killer executed?	No
Did killer plead NGRI?	No
Was the NGRI plea successful?	It was ruled by psychiatrist that examined Erler that he would not qualify for the NGRI plea.
Name and state of prison	Florida State Prison
Killer committed suicide?	No, yes, attempted
Killer killed in prison?	No
Date of death	

References

Erler, B., & Souter, J.C. (1981). *They Called Me the Catch Me Killer..* Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.

Frasier, D.K. (1996). *Murder Cases of the 20th Century*. North Carolina: McFarland and Company.

Varon, J. A. (1994). *The Catch Me Killer. The True Story of Florida's Most Sensational Murder*. New York Lifetime Books.