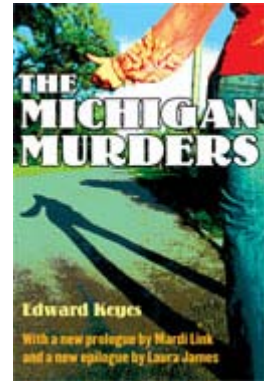


The Michigan Murders
Edward Keyes
<http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=2103636>
The University of Michigan Press, 2010

Q&A with Edward J. Keyes, son of Edward Keyes, author of *The Michigan Murders*



Southeastern Michigan was rocked in the late 1960s by the terrifying serial murders of young women, whose bodies were dumped in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. In each case, few clues were left at the scene, and six separate police agencies were unable to end the horror. Then, almost by accident, a break came. The suspect: John Norman Collins, a young, quiet, all-American boy.

Collins was one of the first serial killers exposed in the region, and his arrest had many in the area locking their doors for the first time. Edward Keyes' harrowing *The Michigan Murders* covers every step of the case. It fell out of print for more than a decade before being revived for this special edition.

Edward Keyes, now deceased, spent several years in the early 1970s investigating the Michigan murders. He also authored the works *Double Dare* and *Cocanut Grove*. *The Michigan Murders* won the Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Fact Crime in 1977.

Here we speak with his son, Edward J. Keyes, about the murders and the book *The Michigan Murders*.

The University of Michigan Press: Why do you think these murders so completely captivated local interest?

Edward J. Keyes: At the time of the crimes, it was the 1960s, and the status quo was changing vis a vis the way young people were perceived by the older generations, how the establishment – especially civil rights and equal opportunity – was evolving, and the manner in which American society was straining in the midst of what we now see as defining moments in the radical changes that were ahead.

People were more trusting of one another and of strangers.

After the first several murders, the shock factor turned to anger – why were the authorities not able to corral and capture this monster-killer? When were the people of these towns going to feel safe again? Who was responsible for these atrocities upon our own children and young adults? Isn't anyone going to help us in this time of great need?

The combination of small town communities and families embedded with several universities – Univ. of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University, et al – gave rise to a suspicion by some that perhaps the crimes were being committed by someone who came to the Michigan area through one or several of the universities. The reaction for many in that era and those areas thus became one of misdirected mistrust of academia – and of young people in general, particularly the new “long haired hippie freaks”, which seemed to many to logically dovetail with the social unrest on campuses throughout the country, especially as it related to anti-war sentiment – which for some was a rebellion against the very fabric of the beliefs that to believers ruled our nation.

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UMP: What do you find most interesting about the way the case played out?

EJK: There were several interesting aspects to this case as it played out. One was that the killer ultimately was discovered to be one of the community of citizens living in those towns alongside the police, the victims' families, and the distressed locals. It was incredible that law enforcement could not catch this horrible criminal. Many believed of course that the perpetrator must have come from outside the area, but there were little clues to go on and no pattern to the killings that led the police anywhere significant. The fact that the killer eventually became discovered and was related to a policeman was utter shock and dismay.

UMP: What do you think these crimes and the court case did to change the way people perceived the area?

EJK: The crimes and subsequent court trials and extensive legal case gave notoriety to the Michigan area which, up to that time, was relatively unknown by most of the rest of the nation and beyond. The horrific nature of the deeds that the accused did to the victims were widely reported in newspapers and in the media nationwide, and to a lesser degree worldwide. The sleepy towns of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and the environs were thrust into the national spotlight, and attention was focused on the law enforcement communities, the academic circles, the families, and the sense of trust and safety that were being slowly eroded. Perception of this area evolved into uncertainty, suspicion, wariness – even as the killer was brought to justice; the prevailing attitudes of carefree living and easy-come-easy-go were forever altered.

UMP: What role did this book play in your father's life? Did you ever hear about it growing up?

EJK: My father was a deliberate and fastidious researcher and interviewer. He played a significant role in the hands-on writing and editing for the award-winning novel *The French Connection* – which went on to score big attention and accolades as a major motion picture. His writing was alternately inspired and wrenching, in that Dad's mood would often reflect what he had done that day on the book. His writing office was a little room at the top of the stairs on the second floor of our three story home where all seven of his and Mom's kids were raised in New Rochelle, NY, in lower Westchester County.

Dad had a schedule of writing that included being up early enough to see the kids go off to school in the mornings, then after his daily read of the NY Times newspaper – doing the crossword puzzle each day, in ink, with nearly no "do-overs" – he'd proceed to his office with the door closed and write. If we were around anytime during the day, we'd hear Dad the author pounding on the manual typewriter upstairs till late afternoon, when he'd emerge. Our take of him was always respectful, and sometimes a bit reverent. Mostly he was in a good mood and was fair yet stern with his brood. If there was a writer's block he encountered, we knew better than to get in his way until he had time to work it out. Each evening the family of Mom and Dad at either ends of the dining room table, and the seven kids all met for dinner, the three boys sitting on one side and the three girls on the other, with the baby boy in his highchair near Mom. The memories of our times together as a family are vivid and positive. We learned our table manners and respect for one another from the examples shown us by our parents.

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An interesting sidebar about the way my father worked on his book was that, first of all, my sister Dara was asked to help type the chapters of *The Michigan Murders* as he was compiling them, for a few months during the compilation of his hand-written interviews, notes, and discoveries. She recalls how interesting the chapters were as she was typing them, so much so that she was completing the work far too slowly for Dad's schedule because she was enjoying the reading of the story too much. She was fired, she recalls with some nostalgic amusement.

Also, my mother was the one who read the chapters for Dad as they were completed, often at night before they went to sleep. To her dismay, however, there were cliff-hangers at the ends of some of the chapters, and the following chapter was not ready or available to be read for several more days. Mom recalled years later how she would get frustrated because she would have to wait so long to catch back up on the story when she was so engrossed in the characters and the storylines!

UMP: What do you hope to accomplish by allowing it to be released again now?

EJK: Our family highly respected our father's work, and we want to share the results of his efforts with the world. This reprinting of *The Michigan Murders* is a testament to the quality of his research and the impressive manner that he as a story teller crafted the language to make the tale one rich with humanness, surprise, fact and vision. His other books, *Double Dare* and *Cocoanut Grove* were crafted in much the same way, using his days at the home office after extensive deliberations with principals and families of victims, law enforcement, local people, and his ever-grateful editors. I am proud to be of him.

For more about *The Michigan Murders* by Edward Keyes, visit The University of Michigan Press at: www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=2103636.

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