

## People Magazine: Secrets of a Serial Killer

2023

Vernon J. Geberth participated in *People Magazine's* coverage of the Richard Cottingham case. This recording was in their *ID Discovery People Magazine Investigates* series.



In addition to the show, *People Magazine* also had a two-page story in print. In the article, Vernon J. Geberth was quoted:

*"He's a psychopath and a sexual sadist who has absolutely no remorse" says Vernon Geberth, a retired NYPD Lieutenant Commander who investigated and profiled The Richard Cottingham case. "Some people don't believe in evil, but I do. And he is evil. He's a devil who came to earth."*







Decades after a deadly crime spree, grieving families finally get answers

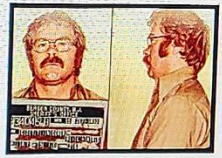
RICHARD COTTINGHAM IS LINKED TO THE MURDERS OF 16 WOMEN—BUT MAY HAVE KILLED DOZENS MORE. WILL HIS PRISON CONFESSIONS FINALLY GIVE VICTIMS' FAMILIES CLOSURE?  
By JOHNNY DODD and CHRISTINE PELISEK

# SECRETS OF A SERIAL KILLER

**A** light dusting of snow blanketed the parking lot of the Indegwood Terrace Apartments in Little Ferry, N.J., on Dec. 15, 1977, when newlywed Maryann Carr returned home from her job as an X-ray technician, poured a glass of wine and flipped through her mail. But when she missed dinner that evening with her mother-in-law, worried family members called police. A neighbor told authorities that around 7:45 p.m., a woman screamed something that sounded like "I will..."

**THE VICTIMS**  
Fourteen of at least 16 women and girls Cottingham killed from 1967 to 1980.

"I will." And the sound came from the direction of Carr's apartment. Early the next morning officers found Carr—still wearing her nursing uniform—three miles away. Her brutally beaten body was lying near a fence in a Quality Inn parking lot. She'd been strangled, likely by her necktie, according to an autopsy. It also appeared that her wrists had been bound and her ankles handcuffed, and adhesive residue found on her lips indicated that her mouth had been taped shut. "She was the all-American girl, happily married, beautiful,



**CRIMINAL MIND**  
Victim Maryann Carr was found at the Quality Inn in Hackensack Heights, N.J. (above), in 1977. Richard Cottingham (left, in a 1980 mugshot) was convicted of her murder in 1982.

loved her parents," says her cousin Nancy Kohlhoff, 56. "She didn't deserve this. This was the worst thing that ever happened to our family." The man convicted in 1982 of murdering Carr turned out to be a then-35-year-old serial killer named Richard Cottingham, given the monikers of the Times Square Killer, the Torso Killer and the New York Ripper. He was responsible for at least 16 murders in New York and New Jersey between 1967 and 1980. His MO included raping his victims before torturing and mutilating some by removing their heads, hands and



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**TRACKING A KILLER**  
Cottingham got 'bustle over the years,' says detective Alan Grieco (above right). Above left: the NYPD's Vernon Gebert. Right: Victims are removed from a New York City motel in 1978.

breasts. A married father of three, Cottingham was convicted of five murders and three assaults in three trials that ended in 1984. "He's a psychopath and a sexual sadist who has absolutely no remorse," says Vernon Gebert, a retired NYPD lieutenant commander who investigated Cottingham. "Some people don't believe in evil, but I do. And he is evil. He's a devil who came to earth."  
Now detectives think that Cottingham—who is serving multiple life sentences in New Jersey's South Woods State Prison and has boasted of having killed between 80 and 100 women—is responsible for other cold cases.

**'HE KILLED WHO HE WANTED—IT DIDN'T MATTER TO HIM'**  
—ANNE DONNELLY, D.A., NASSAU COUNTY, N.Y.

Beginning in 2010—after years of detectives visiting Cottingham in prison and plying him with fast food—he allegedly confessed to unsolved homicides stretching back to the 1960s. "This guy is a manipulative monster who loves control," says Alan Grieco, a retired chief of detectives with the Bergen County prosecutor's office in New Jersey. "The number of women he killed and assaulted has to be one of the highest of any serial killer."

**HUNTED BY MURDER**

"My family has spent all these years trying to bury the past," says Nancy Kohlhoff (right), cousin of Maryann Carr (left), whose abduction in 1977 led her to become the Lindbergh Terrace Apartments in Little Ferry, N.J., where Cottingham was arrested a year later on her doorstep.



Cottingham's killing spree ended with his May 1980 arrest at gunpoint at the Quality Inn in Hackensack Heights, N.J., where Maryann Carr and Valerie Ann Street, 19, had been found dead. Before police arrived, Cottingham was using a knife to torture an 18-year-old girl he had hired as a prostitute—her blood-curdling screams led staff to call 911. Soon investigators began to suspect that Cottingham, a computer programmer for an insurance company, might also be responsible for three other homicides in two Manhattan hotels over the previous five months. All three women had been set on fire.  
That hunch was confirmed when detectives searched his safe—full of pendants, necklaces



done," explains Gebert, who says that many of the items were linked to his known victims, but numerous others left investigators puzzled. "His trophy room was a treasure trove of all the cases that nobody knew about."

It would take another 12 years after Cottingham's 1984 guilty verdict before investigators could unravel the full extent of his killings. Grieco and his partner visited Cottingham in prison, but he spent years stonewalling. "One day he said, 'You guys did a really good job... but you didn't go far enough back.'" And the police knew they had to expand their investigation.

Grieco retired in 1997, and Robert Anzitutto, a detective with the Bergen County prosecutor's office, began looking into cold cases he believed could be connected to Cottingham. In the years that followed, Anzitutto used pizza and poker games to coax Cottingham, now 76, to talk. The effort reportedly paid off in 2010, when Cottingham slowly began admitting—often in exchange for immunity—to additional murders, including five unsolved homicides in 2022.  
One of those victims is Long Island dance teacher Diane Cusick. The 23-year-old was abducted at a mall in Valley Stream, N.Y., in February 1968, then raped and strangled to death. "I had given up hope of getting answers," says her daughter Darlene Altman, 59, who was 3 when her mom was killed and telephoned police on the anniversaries of the murder, desperate



**SECRETS IN THE SAFE**

After Cottingham's 1980 arrest, investigators found a safe (above) in the basement of his Lodi, N.J., home containing many personal belongings that he had taken from his victims. "It was a trophy room," says retired NYPD lieutenant commander Vernon Gebert.



**LIFELONG QUEST**  
"I spent many years not getting answers," says Darlene Altman (above), daughter of