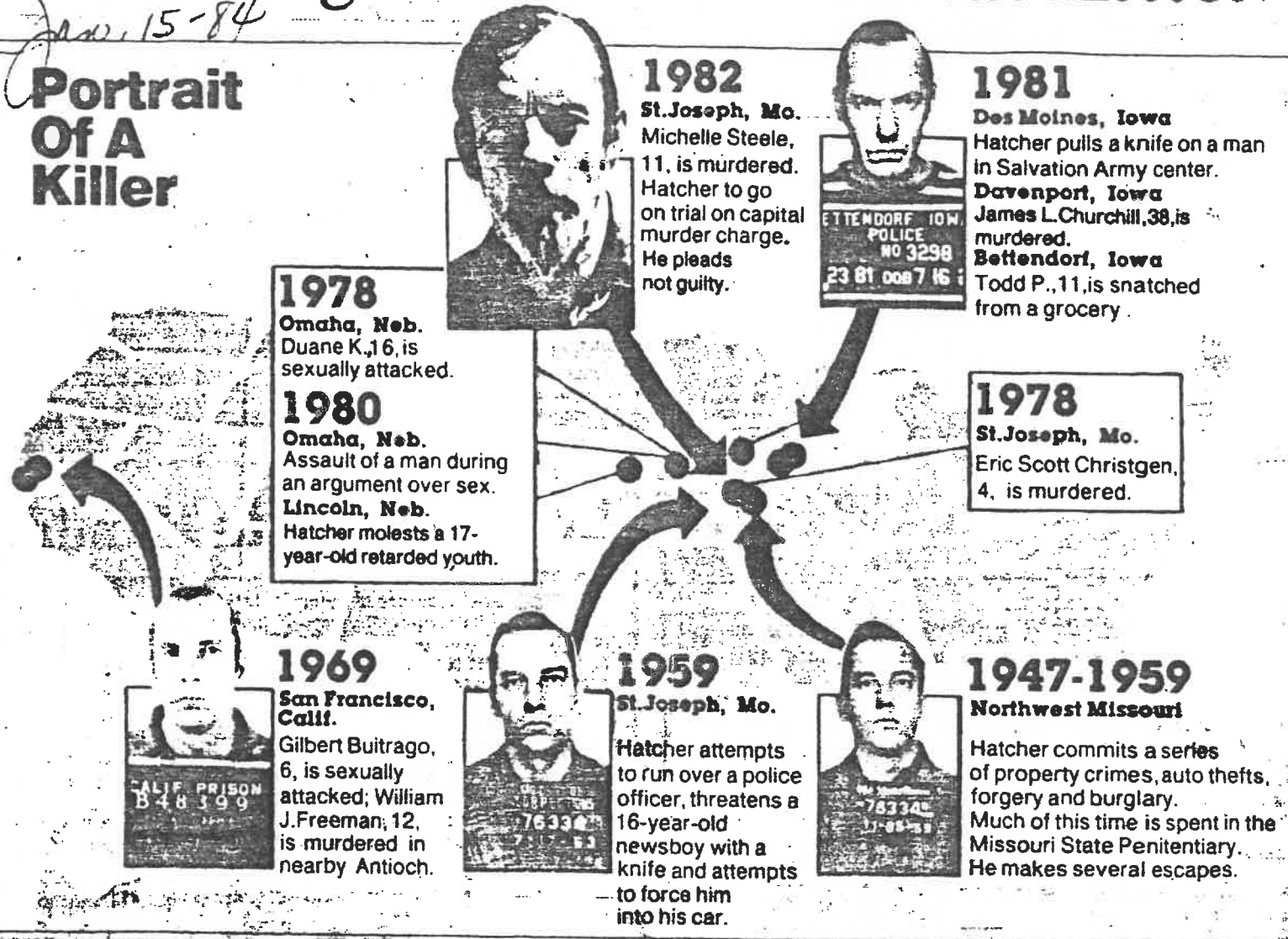


Newest Nightmare: The Serial Killer

Portrait Of A Killer



— A young man in Omaha who will never forget Hatcher's face and the nightmares that went with it.

— A 13-year-old boy in Bettendorf, Iowa, who had to sleep near his parents for weeks after Hatcher snatched him from a shopping center.

There are other kinds of victims as well:

— Melvin Lee Reynolds, who served nearly five years in prison for a murder Hatcher committed.

— Wanda O'Meara. Reynolds

From page one

home by those who thought her son guilty.

— Harry Fox, 64, a janitor who died of a heart attack as police officers questioned him about one of the murders.

Justice has been elusive on the trail of Charles Hatcher. As the innocent suffered, a guilty man was constantly set free. Police in city after city failed to identify Hatcher as a wanted man, and psychiatrists misjudged him

How the police, prosecutors, psychiatrists and judges dealt with Hatcher's crimes raises disturbing questions of national implications:

How does a community deal with sex offenders? Can they be cured? Can parents protect their children from them? When the doors of the institutions were opened and Hatcher was set free, did anyone ask: "Is he getting worse instead of better? Is he

The Post-Dispatch has retraced the tragic route of Charles Hatcher, a Missourian whom authorities in San Francisco call "a one-man crime wave."

• Dozens of interviews and inspection of hundreds of court and prison records showed that:

► Despite all of law enforcement's

sophisticated identification techniques and an FBI bank of 22 million criminals' fingerprints, police in Wilmar, Minn., Lincoln and Omaha, Neb., and Des Moines and Bettendorf, Iowa, could not connect Hatcher with his criminal past. Hatcher repeatedly slipped through their fingers even though he was in custody, often for sex-related crimes, in each of those cities. Police could not pierce his aliases to identify him as a fugitive from California.

"I suppose if he stayed in the criminal system here, ultimately we would have tried to do some background on him and tried to confirm who he was," said Sam Cooper, deputy prosecuting attorney in Omaha for Douglas County.

"He was in and out of our clutches so quick. I think everybody thought, 'He's crazy, and he's not coming back to court,' and that was the end of it. I don't know how you stop a guy like that."

In one case, police determined that Hatcher was wanted somewhere else. But in that case, the "somewhere else" didn't want him back. San Francisco police identified Hatcher as a fugitive from a prison in Kansas. But when authorities in Kansas were notified that he was in custody in California, Kansas authorities replied that they didn't want to be troubled with having him extradited. They said they would enforce the escape warrant only if he returned to Kansas.

► Hatcher cunningly turned the mental health system into his own sanctuary to avoid criminal prosecution, then used it as the path of least resistance back to freedom. Dozens of psychiatric exams and years in prisons and mental hospitals had taught him how to convince police that he was insane to gain entry to the mental health system. He then turned it into a revolving door — by gaining freedom by fooling doctors into believing he was "cured."

The psychiatrists who decided to free him are not accountable to the public. The law that protects the privacy of a patient also protects doctors from questions on why they returned him to society.

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"In that program, they talked about not going with strangers," the boy's father said in an interview. "That was the summer before he went away. I don't know what else could have been done. He had been taught to like everybody but not to go off with anybody. He was very outgoing."

► Tracking a serial killer presents unusual problems.

"We in law enforcement don't really have a mechanism right now to find out if a local homicide is involved with another homicide that occurred 50 miles away or 100 miles away," said Capt. Robert Robertson of the Michigan Highway Patrol. This type of

criminal recently bolted into the public consciousness after the made-for-TV movie "Adam" appeared on NBC Oct. 10. It depicted the kidnapping and death of 6-year-old Adam Walsh in Hollywood, Fla.

Ottis Elwood Toole, 36, a drifter, has told of killing the Walsh boy and more than 50 others, most of them young men. (He later denied killing the Walsh boy.) There are parallels between Hatcher and men like Toole — men constantly on the move, whose current address is the next flophouse or charity rehabilitation center.

How big is the problem? Merlyn D. Moore of Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, says it's big enough to justify establishment of a national center to correlate information on child murders and serial killings. "Homicide is the fourth leading cause of death for children between 5 and 14," Moore said. "They are being murdered at six times the rate of the general population."

MONDAY: Gilbert Bultrago and William Freeman

Psychiatrists dealt with his case in isolation, not realizing that he had been considered a danger to society many years earlier.

Hatcher cunningly turned the mental health system into his own private sanctuary to avoid criminal prosecution, then used it as a path of least resistance back to freedom.

Nomadic Slayer 'Wasn't Born That Way'

By Terry Ganey

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

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MOUND CITY, Mo. — "He was not born that way," is the way Debbie Burich describes Charles Hatcher. She is the Buchanan County victim-witness advocate and knows the Hatcher case.

"There must be things that happened to him along the way that made him angry," she said. "I'm not justifying what he's done, because I have children, too. But there are things that happen that can make a person end up hating the system."

Hatcher is in the Buchanan County jail in St. Joseph on a charge of capital murder in the death of an 11-year-old girl. He has confessed to

killing a 4-year-old boy in St. Joseph and provided police with information on two other murders. In all, Hatcher has said he has committed 16 murders nationwide.

How were the elements mixed in Charles Hatcher to create the hatred, anger and bitterness necessary to lead a nomadic life of sexual violence that included the murder of children?

The answers may be somewhere in the area of Mound City, in the northwestern corner of Missouri, in the duck-hunting country along the Nodaway and Missouri rivers. That's where Hatcher was born and where his family lived in a dozen places by the time he was 16.

Or the answers may be along the

country road where Hatcher, at age 6, saw his older brother die.

Or the answers may be with the Missouri prison system, where Hatcher spent 17 of his first 37 years, serving time for seven offenses that ranged from property crimes to assault with intent to kill.

Hatcher was born in Mound City, 34 miles north of St. Joseph, in the year the Great Depression began. He came into the world at 4 p.m., July 16, 1929, the fourth and last son of Jess J. and Lula Hatcher. His father was 42 at the time; his mother 24.

Jess Hatcher was a farm laborer who provided for his family by shucking corn at 50 cents a day and by fishing, hunting and trapping. The family lived in rented houses in

Graham, Fillmore, Maitland and New Point, settlements that dot the rolling countryside just north of St. Joseph.

"Selling pelts was one way Jess Hatcher fed his family," said J.C. Patterson, who now farms the ground where Hatcher grew up. He recalled one of his earliest memories of the Hatcher boys lining up on a snowbank the carcasses of fox and coyotes their father had killed for their pelts.

Oldtimers in Holt and Andrew counties recall that Jess and his younger brother, Grover, often carried shotguns and were reckoned as a rough-and-tumble pair. Grover sometimes was seen walking stiff-legged; some people

See BACKGROUND, Page 13

Violent Trail Of Charles Hatcher

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"There were times Jess didn't show up for work because he was too drunk. The last time I saw Jess Hatcher, it was over in Fillmore. He was so wall-eyed drunk, I don't think he even recognized me."

pins in a bowling alley and doing farm and kitchen labor — and got into his first brush with the law at 17, when he stole a car. He was placed on probation, but it was revoked in October 1947, when he stole another car in Holt County. At 18, he was sentenced to two years in the penitentiary. Hatcher later told psychiatrists that he had had homosexual experiences, particularly while in prison.

While some might believe that Hatcher was coddled by the system later in life, it dealt with him harshly in those early years. When he was 20, he got a three-year sentence for forging a check, a crime many jurisdictions today handle with probation. In the two decades between 1947 and 1967, Hatcher spent 17 years in the Missouri prison system for car theft, forgery, escape, burglary and assault.

He also said that when he was 19, he had intercourse with an 11-year-old girl, whom he described as promiscuous. Hatcher called her "a whore" and said she "didn't really turn me on." In 1959, he had a live-in relationship with a woman in St. Joseph, but it was discontinued after six months.

Hatcher, then 29, was charged with felonious assault and auto theft. He

stole a car, nearly ran over a police officer and threatened a newsboy with a butcher knife. Records show he tried to force the newsboy into his car at knifepoint at 3 a.m. The boy, 16, wrestled free. It earned Hatcher a five-year term in the penitentiary.

Hatcher later told doctors that when he drank, his strong sexual desires "can go either way." He said he had no sexual interest at all in children but felt sexual drives toward adolescent males and females. "Depending on how I'm feeling," Hatcher said, he might prefer a 12-year-old boy to an 18-year-old woman.

Doctors later speculated on whether Hatcher had an organic brain disease or suffered from a brain injury. He was once in a car accident in which the car rolled over three times. Hatcher was knocked unconscious, but he said as far as he knew, he had no skull injury.

"Once he was shot in the head with birdshot in a hunting accident," said one psychiatric report. "A companion shot over his head, and he was struck by some of the shot. The injury was not serious enough to require medical attention, but he could still feel two of the shots, one behind his right ear and the other over his right upper jaw."

Missouri prison records are

generally silent about Charles Hatcher, except in one respect. There is a place on a form identifying the person who should be notified in the event of an emergency. In his early years in prison, Hatcher listed Lula Lee, his mother, who had remarried. But she died in the mid-1950s; after that, Hatcher listed "no one."

By the time he was 40, Hatcher had escaped from more prisons and jails than many criminals had seen. In 1952 he walked away from a Missouri prison farm; in 1955, he escaped from the Ray County Jail; in 1964, he tried to break out of the Buchanan County Jail; in the same year, he escaped from the Allen County jail in Iola, Kan., where he was being held on theft charges.

In 1967, he was sentenced to five years in prison in Kansas for car theft but did not finish the term. While at the Kansas State Prison at Lansing, he worked in the prison hospital's surgical ward, drinking whatever medicine he could for their alcohol content. He stole drugs, which he administered to himself in his upper arms.

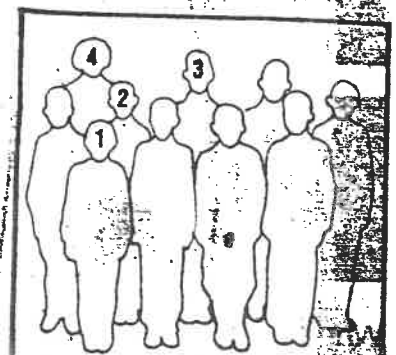
"It was while he was taking these stimulant drugs that he began to hear people plotting to kill him," said a psychiatrist in California who later examined him. "One night he saw a corpse stretched out in the next room, and all night Indians performed a ceremonial dance over the body."

On Aug. 4, 1969, Hatcher signed an agreement under which he would abide by certain conditions to attend a Kansas honor camp. But 17 days later, he escaped and headed for California.

Within eight days, a 12-year-old boy in Antioch, Calif., was dead and a 6-year-old boy had been sexually attacked in San Francisco.



Charles Hatcher's school picture, taken in 1938 in the Pine Hill School, Maitland, Mo. Hatcher (1) was in the third or fourth grade at the time. His older brothers, Floyd (2) and Jesse (3), also attended the school. The teacher, Ruth Allen (4), said the Hatcher boys were quiet and gave her no problems.



Molester's Victim: 'I Went . . . To Get Some Ice Cream'

Jan 16-1984
By Terry Ganey

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff
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SAN FRANCISCO — Late in the afternoon of Aug. 29, 1969, Gilbert Bultrago and Denise Lieb, both 6 years old, were playing in front of the Bultrago home in San Francisco's Mission District.

The boy's mother, Valentia, checked on them about 5 p.m. When she looked outside a short time later, Gilbert was gone.

Denise told Mrs. Bultrago that a man had approached them at a little park up the street and offered her candy if she would go with him. She didn't go, but Gilbert did. The mother called police.

Officers were searching for the boy when Roger Galatoire, an auto body repairman, called police about 7 p.m. to report an attack taking place on a small boy high atop Bernal Heights Hill about two miles from the Bultrago

home. Galatoire was walking his dog when he saw a man beating a naked, bleeding boy.

"The boy stood up, and upon standing, the man grabbed the boy by the neck and forced him to the ground with a thud . . . with an actual thud," Galatoire told police. "He grabbed the boy by the neck and threw him violently to the ground. My thought

was that he was going to kill the boy, so the boy could not identify him."

Police arrived in time to catch the attacker. They found the boy had bruises on his cheek and forehead, swelling of the neck and gross anal bleeding.

"The blood was not centered in one place," the police reported. "The boy was smeared with blood. There was

blood on his legs and in the buttock area."

The child was shy and refused to talk, police said. The only thing he said was, "I went with a man to get some ice cream."

The man police arrested had a bottle of wine and a 5-foot length of wire. He identified himself as Albert Price. But while police prepared to

book him — a process that eventually enabled them to identify him as Charles Hatcher, a fugitive from a Kansas prison — the man took a double-edged razor blade from his pocket and cut his left wrist. Police took the man to a hospital and later returned him to the San Francisco City Prison.

For Hatcher, a Missourian with a lengthy prison record, the events began an odyssey through California's courts, prisons and mental health systems. The courts suspected Hatcher was insane and sent him four times to Atascadero State Hospital for 90-day psychiatric evaluations. Each time, the hospital sent him back, saying he was competent to stand trial for the attack on the boy.

Kelly M. Waterfield, who spent nine years as a juvenile officer in San Francisco, said it was one of five cases

See HATCHER, Page 8

Child's Murder May Be Solved — 14 Years Later

By Terry Ganey

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff
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ANTIOCH, Calif. — William J. Freeman, 12, was winding up a great summer vacation in 1969. He had made the Little League all-star team and had gone to camp, where he had won awards in archery and swimming.

On the afternoon of Aug. 28, 1969, four days before his seventh-grade classes were to begin, he and a friend played tennis, a sport William had just taken up. On their way home, the two boys were called by a man sitting behind the wheel of a green car parked on an Antioch street near the high school.

The Freeman boy stopped to talk to

the man, and his buddy bicycled on. But when William didn't catch up, the companion went back to the spot where he left him. The boy's bike and tennis racquet were on the ground, but he was gone.

A day later, a Missouri man, Charles Hatcher, was arrested in San Francisco for beating and sexually

See WILLIAM, Page 8

"That's the only thing they can do, send me back here."

there as long as he wasn't in the state of Kansas," Waterfield said. "I was shocked. If it had been us, we would have gone after him. They said they didn't want him unless he was in Kansas."

Between August 1969, when he was charged, and April 1973, when he was convicted, Charles Hatcher was examined by dozens of California psychiatrists who were paid \$50 to \$75 each to tell judges what was going on in his head.

Before an examination at San Francisco General Hospital on June 1, 1971, Hatcher escaped. He got as far as Sacramento, Calif., before he was

arrested. He tried to escape twice more while at Atascadero.

When Hatcher was arrested in Sacramento, he used the name of Richard Grady. He was committed to Atascadero again under that name in July 1971. Hospital officials there recognized him as Albert Price, whom they had sent back to San Francisco only a few months before.

"Why did they send you back here?" asked Dr. James B. Hollingsworth.

Hatcher replied, "That's the only thing they can do, send me back here."

In November 1971, the hospital staff reported that Hatcher "has been feigning mental illness in order to avoid prosecution, and may possibly be expected to continue to do this in the future." It was a warning that went unnoticed years later in Nebraska and Iowa.

While at Atascadero, Hatcher told doctors that he saw someone move a large incinerator opposite his room, build a big fire in it and continually put people into it.

"He thought they were just outside his room, waiting to take him next," wrote Dr. Edward S. Dean in 1972.

Atascadero officials in May 1972, thought that Hatcher was dangerous enough to be sent to the California Medical Facility, a prison hospital at Vacaville. Three months later, officials there determined he was "a serious risk with a pattern of manipulating his way into the hospital from prison to facilitate escape."

That conclusion appeared to end Hatcher's hospital merry-go-round. On Aug. 23, 1972, Vacaville officials transferred him to San Quentin. Two

days later, he wrote his public defender to say he wanted to stand trial on the charges.

"Is all this legal?" Hatcher asked.

"My transfer to the medical facility was, but is it legal for them to send me to San Quentin? They don't have a medical facility here that would come under treatment for a 1368 (Mentally Disordered Sex Offender), as I was sent to Atascadero for treatment under a 1368 status.

"I agree that I don't need further treatment, and I am ready and willing to stand trial. Can you get me back to court with a writ of Habeas Corpus?"

His attorney got him back into court, and on April 25, 1973, Hatcher was convicted, nearly four years after the attack on Gilbert Bultrago. He was sentenced to an "indeterminate term" that could range anywhere from one year to life in prison.

(Last year, San Francisco police tried to track down the Bultrago boy to check on his progress. They were unsuccessful. The only information the police found was in their own computer files. In 1975, when Gilbert would have been about 12, a boy with the same name and birthday had been arrested for shoplifting and was released after getting a lecture.)

Two months after Hatcher was sent to the California Department of Corrections, he cut his wrists and neck with a razor blade. That was enough to get him into the medical facility at Vacaville again. While there, he took high school classes and did outstanding work. He was considered cooperative and conducted himself well.

In June 1976, a report for the California Parole Board quoted a therapist as saying that Hatcher appeared to be more outgoing and to

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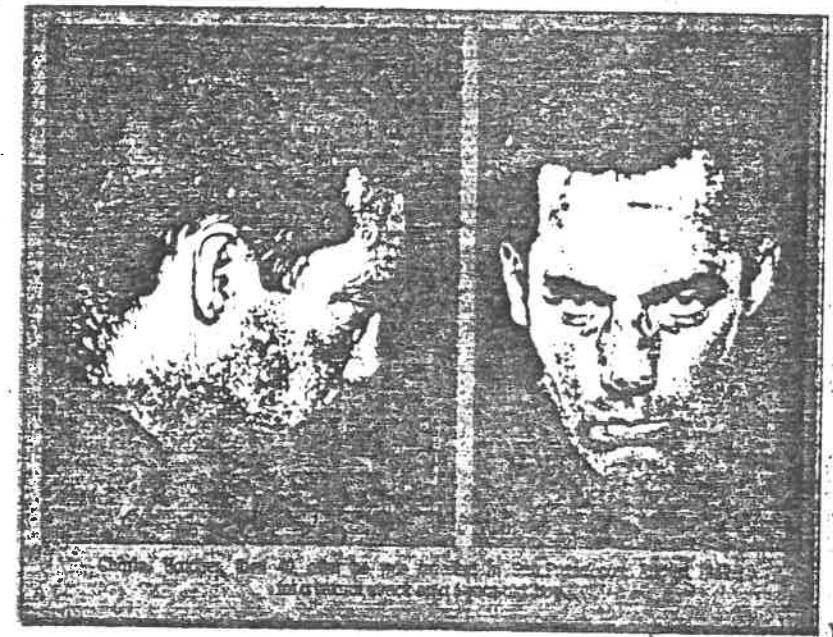
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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH



Post-Dispatch graphic by Tony Lazorko

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attacking a 6-year-old boy. At the time, Hatcher was 40 years old and had escaped the week before from a Kansas prison, where he had been serving a term for auto theft.

Although Antioch is only 25 miles east of San Francisco, Hatcher was not questioned or suspected in the Freeman boy's disappearance.

In fact, Hatcher had been taken to a hospital immediately after his arrest because he had slashed his left wrist at the San Francisco police headquarters while officers were trying to book him. A day later, when they came to question Hatcher about the attack, they found him in what they described as "a catatonic state."

Fourteen years passed before authorities began connecting Hatcher with what happened to William Freeman.

Two days after William's disappearance, two children walking along Las Trampas Creek, discovered the body of the sandy-haired, freckled-face boy. He was at the edge of the creek, his hair just touching the water. The boy had been asphyxiated — probably strangled. It was 15 miles from his home.

Josie Freeman, William's mother, felt guilty after the boy's death.

"Just before he disappeared, I scolded him for wasting Kool-Aid," she said at the time. "But then I found out he was giving it to the man working on the street in front of our house."

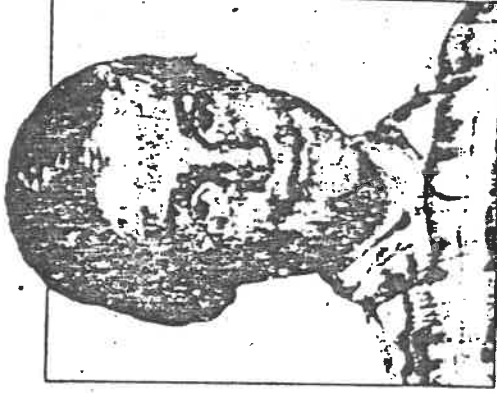
The Contra Costa County sheriff's office was stumped. The only lead the department had was the small green sedan, described by William's companion. Two weeks after the murder, the department was issuing public appeals for any information about William's disappearance.

A month later, officers questioned a man who had been arrested in a knife attack on a 15-year-old hitchhiker who had refused the man's homosexual advances. The man, an Antioch railway clerk, was driving a green car, and the homosexual advance had taken place while the car was parked near where William's body was found.

No charges were ever filed against the man, who died a few years later in an auto accident. But sheriff's investigators said later that they always thought that the man was "good for" William's death, although they could not prove it.

Hatcher, meanwhile, was winding his way through the California courts, prisons and mental health systems for the sexual attack in San Francisco.

At the Atascadero State Hospital, he told psychiatrists that he could not remember much about the time just before the attack. The last thing he said he remembered was that he was in Sacramento, Calif., for about a



William Freeman
Murder victim

week after escaping from a prison camp in Kansas. Antioch is on California Route 5, between Sacramento and San Francisco. Hatcher said he was drinking heavily.

"He thinks he was sleeping in a park in Sacramento in August of 1969, and drinking wine and sometimes beer very heavily," wrote Dr. Edward S. Dean, who examined Hatcher in November 1972. "He vaguely remembers working a day or two as a farm laborer to earn some money. He also recalls taking one blue LSD tablet while in Sacramento at this time. He was unable to remember coming to San Francisco. He said he had no interest in children or men but, confined to mature females."

But in December 1972, Hatcher told Dr. Roland Levy that he regarded himself as bisexual and that he had difficulty controlling strong sexual desires that "can go either way."

"He said he had no sexual interest at all in children, but he has felt sexual drives toward males and females of adolescent years," Dr. Levy wrote. "He also states that on occasions depending on how I'm feeling he might prefer a 13-year-old boy to an 18-year-old or older female. He said that even when he was drunk he would not have sexual impulses towards young children."

A week after talking with Dr. Levy, Hatcher was examined by Dr. David N. Cook, and was asked about the attack on the 6-year-old boy.

"It could have been drugs or alcohol, but I couldn't say that's what caused it," Hatcher said. "I just can't say." Hatcher was trying to gain entry into a California treatment program for sex offenders.

"His feeling is that he does need treatment, but he does not know what kind might be indicated or what he would like to accomplish," Dr. Cook wrote. "All he knows is that there is

something seriously wrong which accounts for his not being able to function outside of prison."

The doctors concluded that Hatcher probably knew what he was doing at the time he committed the attack in San Francisco. Dr. Levy said Hatcher had an antisocial personality and was capable of committing "dangerous sexual offenses." Dr. Levy said Hatcher was not amenable to treatment in the California program for sex offenders.

Hatcher entered the California prison system and was paroled on May 20, 1977. He violated the terms of his parole five days later and fled the state. The Freeman murder remained unsolved.

In the spring of 1983, while in the Buchanan County Jail on a charge of killing an 11-year-old girl from St. Joseph, Charles Hatcher began remembering. He told FBI agent Joseph Holtslag that he had killed 16 people, children and adults, over the years. Many of the people would never be missed, Hatcher said, and he has yet to give specifics on those crimes. But he remembered the death of a boy in Antioch.

Contra Costa sheriff's deputies say Hatcher provided details about the scrapes and abrasions on the body, as if it had been dragged some distance. He also knew how the body was positioned, details they say would only be known by someone there at the time.

The deputies visited Mrs. Freeman to say that the case of her son's disappearance was active again.

"We believe we have a chargeable case," said Detective Sgt. Steve Cole of the Contra Costa Sheriff's Department. "We're waiting on the outcome of the St. Joe case."

Mrs. Freeman said in an interview that she hoped that justice finally would be reached in her son's death.

"Some people call it revenge. I call it avenge," Mrs. Freeman said. "The guilty ones should be punished. After doing what he did and going scot-free is pitiful. Children are punished when they do wrong."

Slayer' Confessed Intense Questioning

By Terry Ganey

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff
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ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — It was a cloudless afternoon on May 26, 1978, as 4-year-old Eric Scott Christgen played on a slide on the downtown shopping mall in St. Joseph. Karen Carter, secretary to Eric's father, had accompanied the boy and had gone into a store to buy an American flag for Edwin B. Christgen.

She allowed the blond-haired, blue-eyed boy to play outside while she went into the store for about five minutes. When she came out, he had vanished. When she didn't find him in nearby stores, she called the police.

Eric's body was found near dusk the next day on a Missouri River bank. He had been sexually molested and asphyxiated.

Authorities established a task force, the Northwest Missouri Major Investigating Squad, to solve the crime. But there were few clues. Two witnesses told police they had seen an older man, possibly 50 to 55, accompanying a boy who appeared to be about 6 or 7.

Six days after Eric was abducted, someone called the squad to say that a young man, Melvin Reynolds, had been walking on the mall the day of the crime. Reynolds — tall, thin and 25 at the time — did not fit the other witnesses' description. But he was known by the St. Joseph police and was brought in for questioning.

When Reynolds was first interrogated on June 2, he denied being on the mall. A day later, he was given a polygraph examination by Terry Boyer, a police department employee.

"Melvin told me that he did not kill Eric but that he would say he did if I wanted him to," Boyer said later. "Several times during the interrogation, he said he did not do it, but he would say he did it if I wanted him to."

The police continued to round up suspects. Before their task force was disbanded, they conducted 450 interviews.

On June 5, they brought in Harry A. Fox, 64, a janitor in the Corby Building, near the spot where Eric

See HATCHER, Page 8



Hatcher

From page one

was abducted. Fox didn't fit the description either. He weighed more than 200 pounds. State Rep. Mark Youngdahl, a lawyer whose office is in the Corby Building, described Fox as "a fat slob who was a hell of a nice guy."

While being interrogated, Fox went into convulsions and was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead at 10:19 p.m. An autopsy showed he had died of a heart attack.

"They kept on questioning him and questioning him until they brought on a heart attack," said William Rosenthal, a lawyer who knew Fox. "They accused him in the Christgen boy's death. It was not the first time they questioned him. My personal opinion was that he could have had nothing to do with it. He was nowhere close to the description."

St. Joseph Police Chief James R. Hayes refused to discuss the circumstances surrounding Fox's death. He said the Christgen murder case was closed, and he had been ordered by city officials not to discuss any aspect of it.

The day after Fox died, the man who killed Eric Christgen checked out of a hotel in St. Joseph and headed for Omaha. Detectives had checked the hotel register for transients like him, but they looked only at daily registrants. The killer had signed a weekly guest register.

On June 16, the task force investigating the murder was disbanded. But officers continued to question Reynolds, a homosexual whom police had arrested before for shoplifting.

As a child, Melvin Reynolds suffered from rheumatic fever that left him thin, frail and with an IQ of 75. The product of a broken home, Reynolds had been expelled from elementary school, had run away from home at age 10 and once had set fire to his closet.

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After Reynolds confessed, police took him home. The next day, they picked him up there and charged him. A few months later, while Reynolds underwent psychiatric tests at the Missouri State Hospital at Fulton, he was interviewed by a reporter for the Columbia Tribune.

"I'm just hoping when I go to court, the son-of-a-bitch that did it — I just hope his conscience bothers him so bad he can't take it no more and he just confesses to it," Reynolds said.

On Oct. 9, 1979, Reynolds went on trial in St. Joseph before a jury of eight women and four men. Some of them knew of Reynolds or had heard that he was a homosexual.

Reynolds' mother, Wanda O'Meara, paid Lee M. Nation, a lawyer in Kansas City, \$10,000 to defend her son. Nation did not call any of the witnesses who had seen a man much older than Reynolds leading a boy from the mall by the hand. He said later that he had believed the jurors already knew from news reports that an older man had first been sought in the Christgen murder.

The confession was the key in the state's case, and Buchanan County Circuit Judge Frank D. Connett Jr. allowed it to be admitted over Nation's objections. Reynolds recanted the confession on the witness stand, saying he had given it because he was scared and tired of the questions.

"How long could any of you continue to deny something?" Nation asked the jury. "Isn't there a point when every human being asked the same questions over, and over, and over, and over, and over again and denies, denies, denies, denies; how long before that person says, 'You're going to keep asking me this forever.'"

Nation argued that the police, who had solved every murder in St. Joseph for the previous 30 years, had seized upon Reynolds because he was "a ready-made patsy."

But Michael A. Insko, Buchanan County prosecutor, praised the police for their thorough work.

"We are lucky in this county to have such fine investigators as we do," Insko said. "They checked to be sure. They double-checked to be doubly sure. And they finally checked to be absolutely sure in the case of Melvin Lee Reynolds. They spent so much time and so much effort in order to find the details and find the truth."

Reynolds was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment in the Missouri Penitentiary, where he was the target of homosexual attacks from fellow inmates. Mrs. O'Meara was forced to move from her home because of vandalism and harassment.

Four years later, in the summer of 1982, the police in St. Joseph had another child murder on their hands — the rape and strangulation of 11-year-old Michelle Steele. They had arrested and charged a man first identified as Richard Harris and later as Richard M. Clark.

The man's real name was Charles Hatcher, who had been born just north of St. Joseph in 1929. Authorities were aware that Hatcher had attacked a 16-year-old in St. Joseph in 1959, had a lengthy prison record and had attacked a child in 1969 in California.

In May 1983, Hatcher gave a note to a sheriff's deputy in the Buchanan County jail. "Please call the FBI," the note said.

For the next two months, FBI agent Joseph Holtsliag listened to Hatcher's rambling, ugly tale of his travels, including the murder of a boy in California and a death in Rock Island. In all, there were 16 murders.



UPI
Melvin Reynolds is kissed by his mother, Wanda O'Meara, last October after Reynolds' release from prison, where he had served four years for a murder later confessed to by Charles Hatcher.

In spite of all the evil, Hatcher said he wanted to right a wrong. Two years earlier, he had read of Reynolds' conviction in a detective magazine. He said an innocent man was being held in the Missouri Penitentiary.

"You're smart enough to know what those bastards in St. Joe will do for a conviction, even if they have to frame someone to get it," Hatcher said.

On July 25, 1983, Hatcher wrote a

detailed confession to the murder of Eric Christgen

Some of the authorities who had charged Reynolds with the crime did not believe the new confession. But others did, including the judge and prosecutor. Hatcher was convicted of capital murder in the Christgen case on Oct. 13. Reynolds was freed a day later.

WEDNESDAY: The attack on Duane K.

Tues., Jan. 17, 1984

Working On U.S. Clearinghouse For Serial Killings

force working to set up a national clearinghouse in the Justice Department to correlate information on unsolved, motiveless killings of a particular senseless and depraved nature.

He said that in 1977, he had become convinced of the need for an information-exchange system on a national scale. At the time, he had been working on four child murders in Oakland County, Mich., just north of Detroit. They were never solved.

"It was quite evident during that investigation that we did not have a mechanism for keeping track of those kinds of homicides," Robertson said. "I just knew these (types of) vicious crimes had taken place somewhere else and that they would continue to take place.

"It was clear there was a tremendous number of serialized murder going on. When you start checking around the country, you really become surprised how many are going on."

Statistics are hard to pin down, but Moore said among children between 5 and 14, homicide is the fourth leading

cause of death. In 1982, 4,000 children were murdered in the United States, he noted.

Robert O. Heck, program manager of the Office of Juvenile Justice in Washington, is the source of the estimate of 35 serial murderers roaming the United States. He said he had arrived at it through a survey on unidentified dead taken from medical examiners in cities of 300,000 or more.

"We're finding that about 50 percent of the victims are children or juveniles from the serial murders that we've looked over," Heck said.

"How many kids who leave home and are never heard from are victims and their bodies never recovered? There's an estimate that 560,000 kids leave their homes a year because of child abuse (in the home); but we don't know how many come back. There's an estimate of 160,000 kids we think do not come back. What happens to them?"

The task force is proposing a Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, under which police departments across the country would funnel information on vicious,

motiveless murders to a single agency. The agency would then match the crimes according to the methods used and evidence gathered, then put police in contact with one another when it appears that they are looking for the same killer.

Authorities theorize that their chances of solving serial murders would improve if clues collected on similar crimes in other jurisdictions could be assembled with the information already available. It's like putting a picture puzzle together, with police in isolated jurisdictions having pieces that other departments lack.

Right now, no official method exists for assembling the puzzle pieces.

★ ★ ★

A crime that would fit this pattern is the death of a girl, 9 or 10 years old, whose headless body was found in a St. Louis tenement Feb. 28. The girl had been sexually assaulted; she was never identified, and her head was never found. The body was buried Dec. 4.

Newspaper and magazine stories

led St. Louis police to question Henry Lucas and Ottis Toole, two of the most infamous serial murderers. But both denied knowledge of the girl's death.

Lucas, 47, and Toole, 36, have begun confessing to as many as 165 murders that have taken place across the country. At first authorities doubted their stories — until they began to piece together the facts both men were giving them.

Police have been virtually powerless to solve such crimes unless the serial murderer confesses.

After Eric Scott Christgen, 4, was killed in St. Joseph in 1978, police concentrated on local suspects. Eventually, they convicted Melvin Reynolds, 25, of St. Joseph. Reynolds was freed in October after Hatcher confessed to the crime.

Hatcher has told the FBI that he had killed 15 other people across the country, including William J. Freeman, 12, in Antioch, Calif., in 1969.

Lt. David Lewis, the detective division commander of the Antioch Police Department, said police sometimes tended to be provincial in

their approach to homicide.

"We have to keep from putting blinders on to be aware of the possibilities of transients committing them," Lewis said. He added that murders committed by those just passing through town were the hardest to solve.

"You almost have to exclude everyone locally to determine it is not a local case before you conclude it is a transient," Lewis said.

As he was being interviewed about the Hatcher case, officers under Lewis were trying to solve another child murder.

"Today, the whole population mobility is such that we've got individuals preying on kids and adults who are moving from one jurisdiction to another," Moore said. "I have medical examiners telling me that one-half of the unidentified dead out there are kids into their middle teens.

"We want to look at the whole phenomena of child abuse and sex exploitation of kids and what that leads to. What we think that leads to is antisocial behavior that may lead to killing people."

Pulled His Crazy Act How Got Out Of There'

By Terry Ganey
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff
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OMAHA, Neb. — Sixteen-year-old Duane K. and a friend had spent the afternoon at a carnival called the "Septemberfest," Omaha's annual downtown celebration. Near dusk, they split up and headed for their homes.

While waiting for a bus, Duane saw a man walking toward him. The man passed, then came back and grabbed Duane by the arm. He said he had a gun, and he forced the youth to accompany him to the man's apartment.

For the next hour, the man sexually attacked the youngster on a bed. The youth finally escaped by jumping out an open window and running to the nearby Continental Hotel, where he called police.

Duane gave officers a good description of the apartment,

including the interior. Police arrested the attacker there the next day, Sept. 5, 1978.

The arrest of the man, who identified himself as Richard M. Clark, began a two-year tour through Nebraska's mental-health system. Omaha police had dealt with Clark a few weeks before, after a woman caught him in her home with her son. Because no sexual acts had taken place, Clark got only a misdemeanor charge.

Police had Clark on a stronger charge this time — debauching a minor, a felony in Nebraska. But his wild behavior upon his arrest convinced prosecutors that he was insane. Instead of pressing charges, they sent him to the Norfolk Regional Center, a state mental hospital in Nebraska. It became Clark's shortcut to freedom.

"It was a solid felony, but he

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Hatcher

From page one

pulled his crazy act and was shipped to the regional center, and somehow he got out of there," said Omaha Police Lt. Dennis Howard, who had arrested Clark. "They kick them out faster than we get them there."

Although Clark was fingerprinted, Howard said, the prints were never sent to the FBI, because by the next day he was out of the police department's hands and in a mental institution.

If the police had checked into his background, the authorities would have treated Clark differently. They would have learned that:

— His real name was Charles Hatcher, a man from Missouri with a lengthy prison record, including several escapes.

— He was still wanted in California for violating parole in 1977.

— He was considered a dangerous sexual offender who had been convicted of a brutal sexual attack on a boy, 6, in San Francisco in 1969 and the attempted abduction of a boy, 16, in St. Joseph in 1959.

— He had a history of manipulating the mental health system to avoid prosecution.

But the police had no way of knowing then that Hatcher had murdered a boy, 4, in St. Joseph a few months earlier or a boy, 12, in Antioch, Calif., in 1969. He confessed to those crimes only last year.

"When he was jailed, he curled up into a ball and wouldn't talk to anybody," said Sam Cooper, Douglas County deputy prosecutor in Omaha. "They got him to a county hospital, and he was committed. He was in and out through our state mental institution."

"I don't think it's rare that someone is arrested and then let go," he added. "Cities all over the country release people wanted in other jurisdictions, if you have no particular reason for holding them. I suppose if he stayed in the criminal system here, ultimately we would have tried to do some background on him and tried to

"He was in and out of our custody so quickly, I think everybody thought, 'He's crazy, and he's not coming back to court,' and that was the end of it. I don't know how you stop a guy like that."

How long Hatcher was detained at the Norfolk Regional Center is difficult to determine, because hospital officials say confidentiality requirements of federal law bar them from discussing Hatcher's case, including whether he was ever a patient there. What kind of treatment he got or what security precautions were taken to keep him there remain a mystery.

Psychiatrists who treated Hatcher are not really accountable. The law that protects Hatcher's privacy also protects his doctors from examination on the thoroughness of their treatment and the ground on which they based their belief that it was safe for him to be returned to society.

Whether he escaped or was released, Hatcher somehow got free again. On July 8, 1980, Omaha police arrested him again in the assault of another man during a quarrel over sex, according to police reports.

"Suddenly the suspect flipped out and began beating his head against a cruiser window," the police report said. "They had to restrain him and take him to the police station. When they took the cuffs off him, he started banging his head on the table."

Again, no charges were filed. Hatcher was returned to the Norfolk Regional Center. Douglas County Sheriff's deputies say Hatcher escaped Sept. 9, 1980, and a month later was arrested in Lincoln, 60 miles west of Omaha.

Lincoln Police Lt. Jerry L. Smith says Hatcher, still using the name Clark, was arrested Oct. 9, 1980, on charges of molesting a retarded youth, 17, he had met in a restaurant. When police brought Hatcher to the station, they informed him he was being charged with third-degree sexual assault.

"Then he went bananas," Smith said. "He just kind of flipped out. He got rowdy, began tipping over chairs and tables and appeared to lose his mental control." Police concluded that Hatcher was insane, so they took him under emergency commitment status to the Lincoln Regional Center,

In Nebraska, a four-member panel monitors hospital commitments. It decides, based on the doctor's recommendation, whether someone should remain in an institution. The panel must determine whether the person is mentally ill and is a danger to himself or others.

"The fact that he has a mental health history is not enough to commit him," said Mariclaire Thomas, the Lancaster County assistant public defender who handled Hatcher's case.

"Once Richard (Richard Clark, his alias) was stabilized at the regional center, he was doing well enough to be dismissed from the jurisdiction of the mental health board. There was no clear and convincing proof that Nebraska could hold him."

Although police in Omaha and Lincoln had dealt with him in connection with four sexual encounters over the previous two years, Hatcher was released from the Lincoln Regional Center on Oct. 30, 1980, according to the Douglas County sheriff's office.

Dr. Klaus Hartmann, center superintendent, refused to discuss the specifics of Hatcher's case. But he talked about the commitment of sex offenders in general.

"Sometimes, while a person is here, the charges are dropped — after one month, two months, six months," Dr. Hartmann said. "If a mental patient gets involved with the law, the legal system should have a system for keeping track of them."

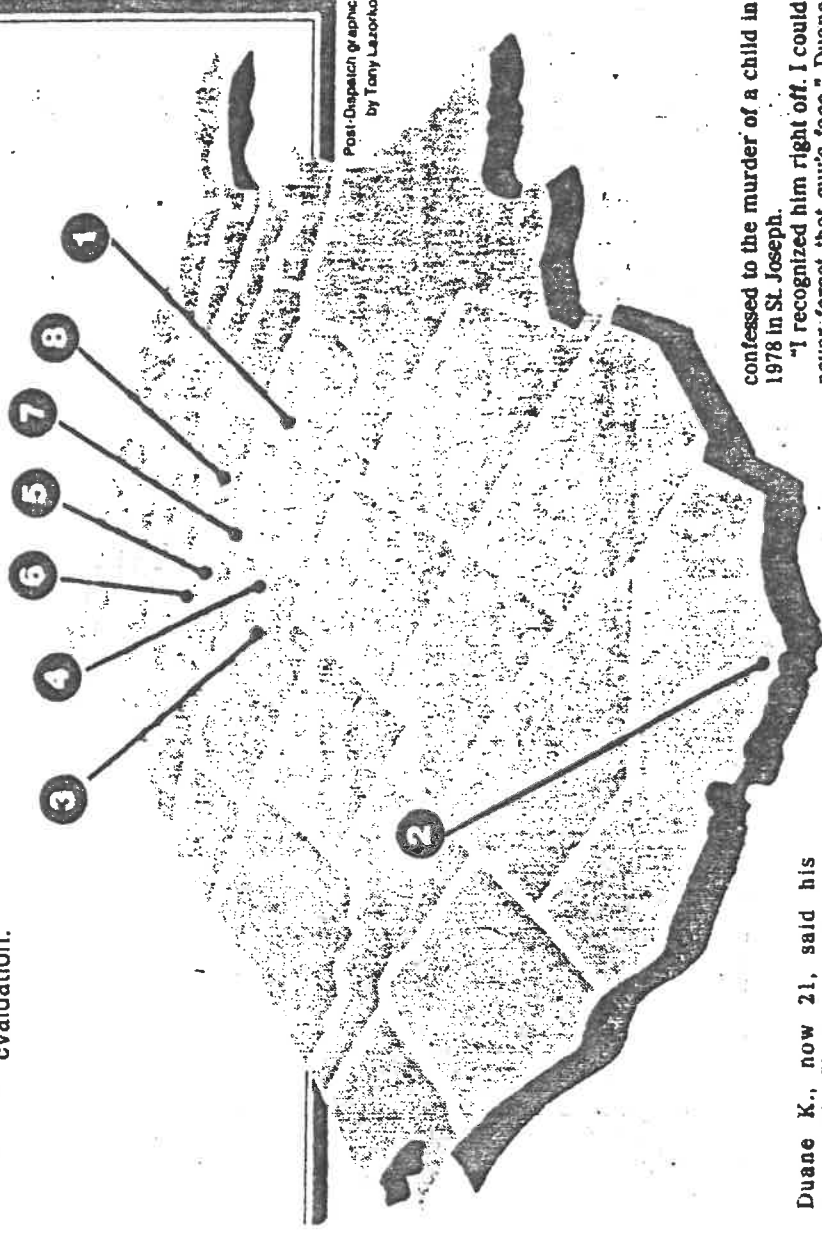
"We can take in a patient here with a florid psychosis, and with modern treatment techniques, we can improve that patient," he said. "Once that happens, our job as clinical people is concluded. Whether he should be contained or confined is another matter. The cost is too great to have that done here."

"The problem, from a legal point of view, is that although he may still be dangerous, he is done here. There is no legal basis to confine the person. This is where a person may fall through the cracks, because this is what we must do under the law. The legal system has no authority to hold him. These things can happen — and, I fear, do happen."

ent Trail Of Charles Hatcher

sexual attack on a 6-year-old boy.

- 3 Norfolk Regional Center, Norfolk, Neb.**—Admitted after being arrested in 1978 in sex attack on 16-year-old boy; three mental exams find him incompetent to stand trial. He escapes or is discharged in July 1980 and is arrested after assaulting a man in an argument over sex. He is returned to Norfolk, and escapes in September 1980.
- 4 Lincoln Regional Center, Lincoln, Neb.**—Involuntarily committed in 1980 after being found unfit to stand trial for molesting a 17-year-old retarded youth. Discharged Oct. 30, 1980.
- 5 Iowa Medical Security Facility, Oakdale, Iowa**—Found competent to stand trial in 1981 for trying to abduct an 11-year-old boy from a supermarket.
- 6 Mental Health Institute, Mount Pleasant, Iowa**—Treated twice in 1981 and in 1982 after a knife attack on a man and an attempt to abduct a child. Hospital officials refuse to discuss case. Discharged May 1982.
- 7 St. Joseph State Hospital, St. Joseph, Mo.**—Admits himself July 30, 1982, the day after abduction and murder of Michelle Steele, 11.
- 8 Fulton State Hospital, Fulton, Mo.**—Found competent to stand trial in 1983 on murder charge in Michelle Steele's death after court-ordered psychiatric evaluation.



Post-Dispatch graphic
by Tony Lazorko

Duane K., now 21, said his encounter with Hatcher had left him with nightmares for months. He discussed the case with the understanding that his last name would not be used.

"I was very upset — I had nightmares about it," he said. "It's like a woman being raped. I remember most of it. It's not one of those things you can live down. I was really in a state of shock. I didn't sleep for a week."

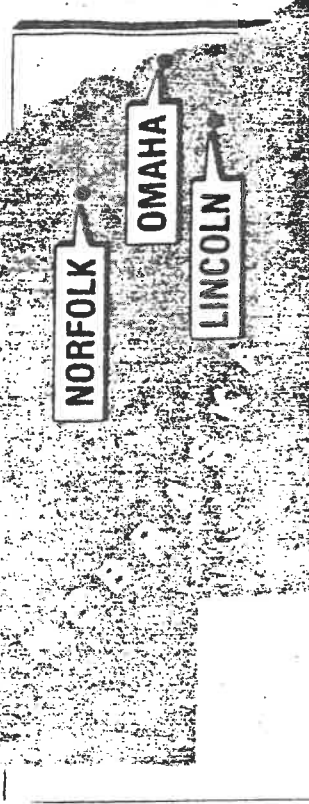
Duane said he had heard from police that Hatcher had been

committed to the murder of a child in 1978 in St. Joseph.

"I recognized him right off. I could never forget that guy's face," Duane said. "They shouldn't have let him on the streets again."

committed to a mental institution. He heard no more about it until last year, when Hatcher's picture appeared in a newspaper in Omaha after he had

TOMORROW: The attack on Todd P. and the murder of James Churchill.



Post-Dispatch graphic by Tony Lazorko

The Violent Trail Of Charles Hatcher

Dim Outlook For Sex-Offender Cure

By Terry Ganey

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

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Psychiatric experts nationwide say few successful treatment programs exist for persistent, dangerous sexual offenders like Charles Hatcher.

And they say psychiatrists are lowering their expectations for curing or treating such cases because of shortages of personnel and lack of training at the state and local levels.

The problem, they say, is compounded by a lack of cooperation between law enforcement officials and the mental health system. Also, prosecutors and judges are untrained in recognizing the behavior patterns of sex offenders — and cannot afford the experts who can.

"I think people can be treated, but most places have little or nothing available within the departments of corrections that would address this problem," said Dr. A. Nicholas Groth, director of the sex-offender program at the Connecticut State Prison in Somers, Conn.

"All that happens is that the offender gets recycled into the community no better able to handle his life than he could before."

Between Hatcher's frequent trips to mental institutions, he carried on a career of sexual misconduct. The staffs of mental hospitals in Nebraska and Iowa discharged him for trial runs in society.

But a few weeks later, frustrated and angry policemen brought him back after a sex offense, and the whole process would restart. Doctors who treated Hatcher were unaware of his lengthy criminal history; neither could they know of the child murders to which he later confessed.

Hatcher has told the Federal Bureau of Investigation that he killed William J. Freeman, 12, in 1969 in Antioch, Calif., and Eric Scott Christgen, 4, in 1978 in St. Joseph, Mo. He drew a map leading authorities to the body of James L. Churchill, 38, in Rock Island, Ill. He is to go on trial soon on a charge of capital murder in the rape and strangulation of Michelle Steele, 11, in 1982 in St. Joseph.

Hatcher's treatment at the hands of the mental health system resembles the way the system dealt with Theodore F. Frank, a former St. Louisan awaiting execution at California's San Quentin prison.

Frank was committed to state mental hospitals three times and was declared each time as safe for release. Meanwhile, he continued to molest children — 130 in all. He was sentenced to death in 1980 for molesting, torturing and killing a toddler in California.

Like Frank, Hatcher fell between crime and disease. Sometimes he was considered mentally ill; other times, he was judged a criminal. Apparently he never underwent the careful study and testing by experts that would have determined if he could be safely released.

Richard Lanyon, a professor of psychology at Arizona State University, has worked with the law and more than 150 cases of men with sexual deviation.

"To deal with these men, you need a specialist in this area — someone who has seen many of them before," Lanyon said. "But courts choose the least expensive methods. An average psychiatrist or clinical psychologist doesn't come into contact with people like this very often. The average psychologist can be fooled."

Dr. Groth noted that no college in the United States prepared psychiatrists or lawyers — who may become judges — for the behavioral problems they might encounter. He said that universities should teach the psychology of criminal behavior, or basic courses in "victimology."

Lanyon lists three types of child molesters. The most common and most easily treated is a man of relatively normal sexual behavior who, under stress, might fondle a child.

Another type, more difficult to treat, is the man who does not have a normal sexual relationship with women. Such men appear to be fixated with children.

The third category, where the potential of successful treatment is

small, involves the child rapist. For such people, sexual pleasure is derived from hurting people.

"They are very rarely in a position to get competent treatment," Lanyon said. "They would be difficult to treat under even the best of circumstances."

Dr. Groth said such failures of the system as Hatcher seem to get all the attention, while those treated successfully go unheralded.

"I think it's less than 10 percent of the sex offenses that fit that (incurable) category," he said. "It's a very small percentage that pose the danger to the community."

Karl A. Menninger, director of forensic services in the Missouri Department of Mental Health, said that he, too, liked to consider Hatcher's case an exception.

He said it showed the need for better coordination among agencies. For example, he said, no formal exchange of information exists between state corrections and mental health agencies.

"With so many more transients, these cross-checks should be done a lot more," he said.

Menninger added that the mental health system lacked a good method of treating sex offenders and people with anti-social personalities.

"It's a problem that's difficult, if not impossible, to treat," he said. "If the hospital feels a person is not mentally ill or dangerous, he is released. Short of a major breakthrough, it looks like there will be people continuing to go in and out of the state hospital system — and they will continue to commit crimes."

He said that the prevailing attitude was that a sex offender should be treated in a prison rather than a hospital.

"We tried punishing them, and that didn't seem to work. We've tried treating them, and that doesn't seem to work," Menninger said. "To treat them all as prisoners is an admission that we can only detain them to prevent them from committing other crimes, as we would any other criminal."

Strategy:

Cover In The Mental System

By Terry Ganey
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff
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BETTENDORF, Iowa — On a summer day in 1981, Todd P., 11, went back into Randall's Supermarket at his mother's request. She had forgotten a bag of ice and sent Todd back to get it while she waited in the car out front.

Inside, the boy was grabbed on the shoulder by a man who identified himself as a security guard.

"Come with me," the man said as he began marching the boy down an aisle toward the rear of the store. They went through an "employees only" door and out a rear exit. Todd went along but protested that he hadn't taken anything. He tried to show the receipt that proved the ice was paid for.

"Come with me," the man again demanded.

Once outside the rear of the store, the man and the boy hustled across a parking lot and headed toward some woods.

"Where are we going?" Todd asked.

"I'm taking you to see your mom," was the reply.

Todd knew better. His mother, worried and angry by this time, was waiting for him in front of the store. Terrified, the boy broke away and sprinted for a Target store adjacent to the supermarket.

The man tried to catch him, but Todd's soccer-seasoned legs kept him from being snatched again. Todd told a security guard at Target that a man had tried to kidnap him, and police were called.

Bettendorf police responded quickly enough to catch the man, whom Todd identified as his

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Hatcher

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kidnapper. Kathy Rader, a clerk at the Target store, also identified him as having hung around for several hours talking to juveniles.

When police frisked the man, they found a toy plastic pistol and two lengths of nylon rope.

"I didn't touch any boys," the man said when police began to take him to a squad car.

Police say the man, who identified himself as Richard Clark, started kicking at the windows of the car and violently striking his head against the cage. They had to hold him to keep him from hurting himself.

The officers did not take Clark to the police station but instead drove him to Mercy Hospital in neighboring Davenport, where he was sedated. The next day, when detectives sought to question him, doctors informed them that the man was under medication and could not answer.

The man Bettendorf police knew as Clark was slipping out of their grasp, and heading for cover in Iowa's mental health system. It was a maneuver that had worked before in Nebraska.

As a result, police in Bettendorf did not identify him as Charles Hatcher, a fugitive whose criminal career dated back 33 years to northwest Missouri and included sexual attacks on children and adolescents.

They did not know, for example, that three years earlier, Hatcher had convinced a 16-year-old boy in Omaha just before a sexual attack that he had a pistol. They did not know that Hatcher had possessed a length of wire when San Francisco police arrested him after a sexual attack on a 6-year-old boy in 1969.

Because police in the Iowa community did not identify him, they did not know that 10 years earlier Hatcher was thought to be feigning mental illness to avoid prosecution and was considered capable of committing "dangerous sexual offenses."

The Bettendorf incident occurred on July 16, 1981, Hatcher's 52nd birthday. It was the latest in a string of violent offenses that dated back to 1959 in St. Joseph, Mo., when Hatcher threatened a 16-year-old newsboy with a butcher knife.

On Aug. 6, 1981, a judge in Scott County court found that Hatcher was suffering from "a mental disorder which prevents him from appreciating the charge" against him. Hatcher was sent to the Iowa Medical Security hospital in Oakdale five days later for a psychiatric evaluation.

"One thing with him was he wasn't very open about his past history," said Dr. Curtis C. Frederickson, who examined Hatcher at Oakdale. "He also came here in a catatonic state. He was treated with medication, and that

cleared up. But after he was out of his catatonic state, he didn't want to talk about his past history."

Hatcher was returned to Bettendorf on Nov. 10, 1981. When police prepared to take his fingerprints in the Scott County jail, he collapsed. They managed to get the prints, but the prints were never sent to the FBI for identification.

"I know it's a screw-up on our part," said Bettendorf Police Sgt. Decker Ploehn. FBI records show the prints were finally sent off a year later, after Hatcher was charged with killing an 11-year-old girl in St. Joseph.

Dr. Frederickson filed a report with the court on Dec. 7, 1981, saying Clark was competent to stand trial.

For Todd, who was having trouble sleeping at night, the ordeal continued. He had to appear in the same courtroom with Hatcher and identify him as the man who grabbed him.

"I learned a great deal about the system as a result of this," said Todd's father, who works for John Deere & Co. in Moline, Ill., just across the Mississippi River. He and his wife discussed what happened to their son on the condition that his last name would not be used.

"He had bad dreams and spent nights sleeping downstairs near us," his mother said. "But he seems to be over the ill effects that he had."

Thomas J. Yeggy, Hatcher's court-appointed attorney, asked for another psychiatric evaluation. Dr. Truce Ordon was appointed, and found that Hatcher could not help in his own defense. As a result, Yeggy intended to use an insanity defense in Hatcher's trial.

Dr. Ordon later said in an interview that a psychiatrist could easily be misled by a patient.

"A psychiatrist is very easy to fool by anyone," Dr. Ordon said. "That is why I always warn patients that they can fool me. Any psychiatrist who pretends he cannot be fooled is either crazy or insecure. I hope I'm not either one."

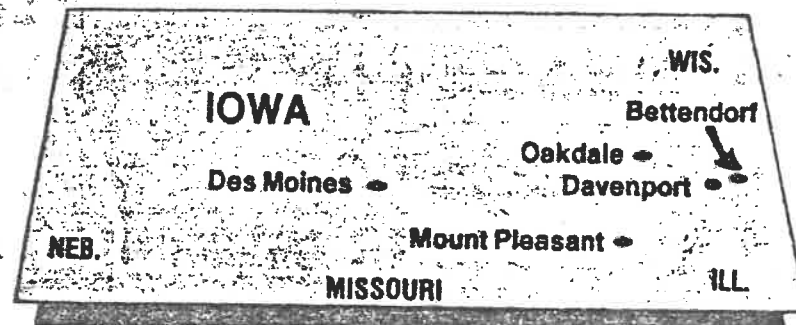
Dr. Ordon also noted that in making his diagnosis, he had lacked all the records of Hatcher's background. (Last month, Dr. Ordon was suspended by the board of Mercy Hospital in Davenport for one year after a verbal dispute with a patient.)

On March 18, 1982, Hatcher was sent to the Mental Health Institute in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, on an involuntary commitment.

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Went Trail Of Charles Hatcher

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Post-Dispatch graphic by Tony Lazorko

he had no criminal record. His prints were never sent off."

Ottesen said that because of the psychiatrists' opinions, Hatcher could not be charged. There was no choice but to commit him involuntarily to Mount Pleasant.

"He would be there for so long as the medical staff deems him dangerous and needs to be confined," he said. "We assumed he would be there for a considerable period."

Hatcher was discharged 49 days later.

The trip to Mount Pleasant may have been Hatcher's second. Although officials there refuse to discuss his

case, it's believed that he was there about a year earlier, after he was arrested in Des Moines on a charge of assault.

On Jan. 13, 1981, Hatcher pulled a knife on another man in the Salvation Army Rehabilitation Center in Des Moines. When police arrested him, he "became loud and abusive and attempted to struggle." The judge in that case found Hatcher was seriously mentally impaired and had him committed.

Stephen R. Anfinson, assistant superintendent of the Iowa Mental Health Institute, said most of the information the institute got about

patients came from the patients themselves.

"Unless it's documented, we don't have a way of running a check like the police do using fingerprints and the FBI," Anfinson said. "It's possible to fool the system to get in and get out. The nature of the business is you're highly relying on verbal reports to identify problems and determine if there's been improvement."

He said the mental health system was forced to balance the needs of protecting society against the needs of the individual. He said court decisions over the last decade that seek to limit and review incarceration of mental patients have swung the pendulum in favor of the individual.

Had they known more about him, Anfinson said, Hatcher would have been handled differently.

"I don't think we had any way of suspecting the extensive criminal history or involvement that this person had," Anfinson said. "Certainly if there had been any inkling that there was something like that, our approach would have been different."

He added that drifters like Hatcher were hardest to treat. Once they are released, they wander away from the

community support that could provide backup treatment.

"Do you just continue to hold them indefinitely and provide room and board? Or do you make the decision to discharge them?" Anfinson asked. In Hatcher's case, he was released and given a bus ticket that took him out of Iowa.

Anfinson said such a step was frequently taken if officials believed that the patient has relatives elsewhere.

Less than two months after Hatcher was turned loose in Iowa, an 11-year-old boy reported to St. Joseph police that a man had tried to abduct him on the East Hills Shopping Center Mall. The man had identified himself as a police lieutenant and said he was arresting the youth for shoplifting.

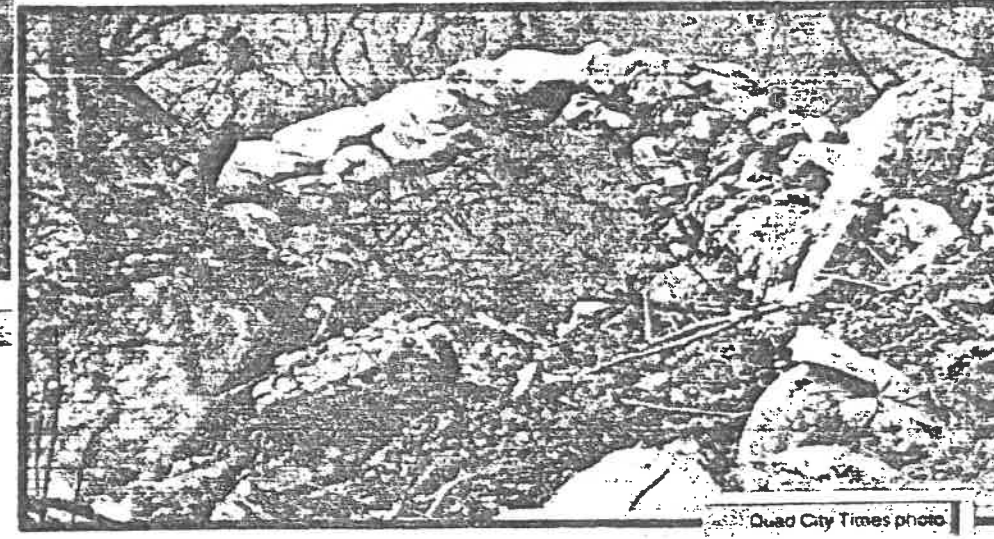
The boy was sharp enough to question the identification; he then eluded the man. But police were unable to make an arrest.

Within days, in the final week of July 1982, St. Joseph Police were investigating the murder of a little girl.

TOMORROW: The murder of Michelle Steele.

ent Trail Of Charles Hatcher

tims 'Will Never Be Missed,' Slayer Says



Because the Mississippi River was high last May, workers had to build a sandbag dam around the crude gravesite so they could pump away the water to allow them to recover the remains. The body was found buried under rocks at the foot of a steep embankment.

Rock Island Coroner Eugene Sullivan said there was no evidence to determine what caused Churchill's death. "There was no skull fracture; no fractured ribs," he said.

Hatcher is to go on trial soon in St. Joseph in the rape and strangulation of Michelle Steele, 11, on July 29, 1982. He has confessed to the sexual attack and strangulation of Eric Scott Christgen, 4, in 1978 in St. Joseph and given details of the murder of William J. Freeman, 12, in 1969 in Antioch, Calif.

Workers in Rock Island, Ill., on May 4, 1983, unload sandbags to build a wall around the body of James L. Churchill, found in a slough at the Rock Island Arsenal. At right, the sandbagged area. Charles Hatcher, above, led authorities to Churchill's body.

Insensitivity Adds To Strain Of Child Who Was Killed

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — Michelle Steele, freckle-faced and red-haired, had an appointment with her orthodontist in downtown St. Joseph. She had made the trip from her home by bus many times before. The bus picked her up in front of her house and dropped her off half a block from the dentist's office.

It was July 29, 1982. The 11-year-old girl showed up for the 11 a.m. appointment, but she never made it home. When her mother, Annette, arrived home from work at about 3 p.m. and did not find her daughter, she immediately called police.

Officers at first were skeptical, and asked if perhaps Michelle had run away to punish her mother for something. They even searched Mrs. Steele's home. They also wondered whether the girl's father, Leonard, might have taken her somewhere, because Leonard and Annette Steele were separated.

But by 7 p.m., officers began to be more concerned. Finally, at 11 p.m. Michelle was officially declared missing because it had

been 12 hours since the girl had last been seen.

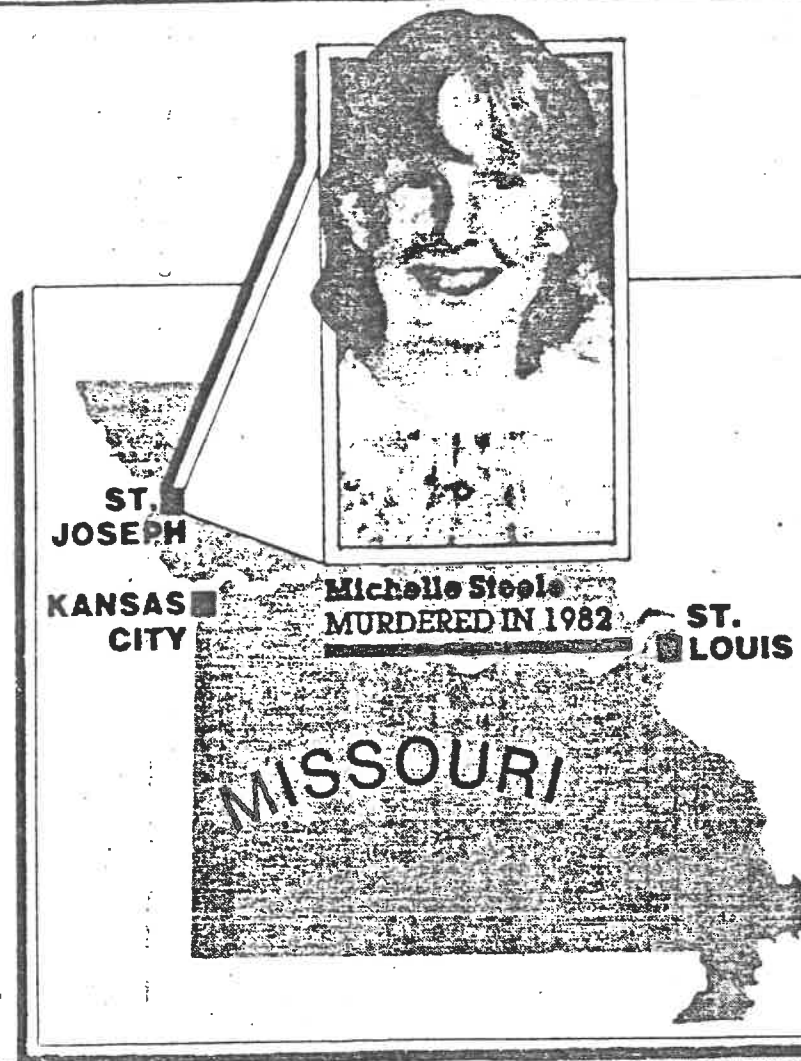
Between 60 and 70 volunteers joined police to look for the girl. While searching along the Missouri River, officers noticed a man near an interstate highway overpass pillar. When the man was questioned, he identified himself as Richard Harris. He produced a bus ticket that showed he had arrived in the area almost a week before.

The next morning, deputies, volunteers and relatives of the missing girl were searching the same area. They first found the missing girl's tennis shoes, and then her nude body nearby. She had been raped, beaten and murdered.

After an uncle identified the girl's body, police allowed the information to be made public over a television station in St. Joseph. That's how Annette Steele found out her daughter was dead.

"The day they found out my daughter was dead, the cops were eating doughnuts and drinking

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POST-DISPATCH GRAPHIC/ED KOHORST

If A Stranger Asked, Would Your Child Go?

By Terry Ganey
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Your 10-year-old daughter is playing with a group of friends in a park.

A man she does not know approaches and says: "Your parents have been hurt in a serious auto accident. I am from the hospital. They need to see you. Come quick."

The man seems sincere. Would she go?

Your 8-year-old son is alone in a toy store. A man grabs him and says he is a police lieutenant. He may even show a badge. "Come with me," the man says.

Would he go?

Experts in the field of protecting children suggest that parents should ask themselves these disturbing questions. It may help them determine how well they have taught their children to protect themselves from sexual attacks.

The adage "Don't take candy from strangers" is no longer enough.

"What's a stranger?" asked

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coffee in front of my house," Mrs. Steele said in a recent interview. "There were cups and boxes all over the yard, and I had to clean them up."

Insensitivity on the part of the press, police and prosecutors has left Annette Steele, 37, filled with bitterness and hatred. She said that the night her daughter had been missing, St. Joseph Police Chief James R. Hayes had asked her and her husband why they had let the girl go downtown where it wasn't safe.

"Don't you know there are all kinds of perverts down there?" Mrs. Steele quoted Hayes as saying.

"He made me cry, and he made my husband cry," she said. "But the next day, the paper said police thought Michelle's abduction was an isolated incident, that it was safe to go downtown."

Efforts to interview Hayes were unsuccessful. He said he had been ordered by the St. Joseph City Council not to discuss any aspects of the child murders in the community.

Michelle's body was found along the riverbank, less than 2 miles downstream from the spot where four years earlier, searchers had found the strangled and sexually abused body of 4-year-old Eric Scott Christgen.

Because Michelle's body was found by her uncle, Michael Montgomery, police at first considered him a suspect. He was arrested, handcuffed and held for several hours until one of Annette's seven sisters arrived at the police station to account for his whereabouts.

The day Michelle's body was found, the man who had identified himself as Harris the night before had checked into the State Mental Hospital in St. Joseph under the name of Richard Clark. Police arrested him there. On Aug. 3, he was charged with the murder.

For the next several months, authorities referred to him as Clark, until the spring of last year. By then, they had begun to piece together the background of the man, Charles Hatcher.

Born in northwestern Missouri and in trouble with the law early there, Hatcher had traveled the country committing sex crimes. A court clerk remembered the case in 1959 in which Hatcher had threatened a 16-year-old newsboy with a knife. Police in San Francisco, Omaha and Bettendorf, Iowa, provided information on Hatcher's sex crimes in those cities.

Hatcher helped them. He confessed to the Christgen boy's murder, freeing Melvin Lee Reynolds, who had been convicted of the crime in 1979. Hatcher also directed authorities to the body of James L. Churchill, 38, at the Army Arsenal at Rock Island, Ill. Churchill had been missing since 1981. Hatcher also gave detailed information about the unsolved murder of William J. Freeman, 12, in 1968 in Antioch, Calif.



Charles Hatcher after his arrest in St. Joseph, Mo., in 1982 for the murder of Michelle Steele.

In all, Hatcher told FBI agent Joseph Holtslag, he had killed 16 people across the country. But he flatly denied having killed Michelle Steele.

Over the last 18 months, Hatcher's trial in Buchanan County Circuit Court has been delayed repeatedly. The latest trial date, next Monday, has been put off because Hatcher has had a falling-out with his public defender, Richard Dahms. A new public defender has been appointed, and he needs time to familiarize himself with Hatcher's case.

"For me to go on, it's got to be over," Mrs. Steele said. "Right now, I want this trial over. Why can't I get it over with? I'm too angry to live with myself. I'm not a nice person right now, I'm full of hate."

Mrs. Steele says the only compliment she would give to the legal system that now holds the man accused of killing her daughter would go to the victim-witness advocate program in Buchanan County. The advocate, Debbie Burich, acts as a liaison between the prosecutor's office and the victim.

"I go to her, and I cry to her, and I blith to her," Mrs. Steele said.

As Hatcher did in several other states, he has made the rounds of Missouri's mental institutions for psychiatric evaluations since his arrest. But this time, the doctors know about his background.

"I don't believe he is suffering from any mental disorder" that would keep him from standing trial, said Dr. Anasseril Daniel, a psychiatrist at the Fulton State Hospital. Dr. Daniel performed a court-ordered examination of the defendant last year. At that time, Hatcher refused to speak.

"This person has benefitted from remaining mute in the past," Dr. Daniel said. "He's using the same symptom now when he is faced with serious criminal charges. The only time he can break his muteness, probably, is when everything is over."

Authorities are waiting for Charles Hatcher to talk again. They want to know where other bodies are buried. They want to know if it's possible that others may be serving sentences for crimes he has committed.

Protection

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Michigan Highway Patrol Capt. Robert Robertson. "If I talk to a child every day over a period of several days, am I a stranger? It gets complicated."

In the first example, the girl may momentarily drop her guard because her first concern is for her parents' welfare. In the second case, the boy may automatically respond to someone he perceives as an authority figure.

"You have to teach them they don't have to go along with adults all the time," said Debi Courtney, coordinator of a child sexual abuse treatment program in Johnson County, Kansas. "They have that tape in their head telling them they have to go with adults."

"You have to teach them as early as you can, when they start talking," Ms. Courtney added. "You can do it in a non-fearful way. Teach your kids not to be afraid of everybody, but tell them that they should be aware of what's happening around them."

"It's good to teach your kids that it's OK to call attention to themselves if someone approaches them acting strangely." She suggested parents tell their children: "Stand up and scream to attract attention to yourself."

Robertson said molesters who have been interviewed say they singled out children who are alone.

"If he sees mom drop off the kid at the ice rink or the ball game and drive away, we've got a potential victim," Robertson said. "They seem to be looking for the child starving for attention and for love."

In 1981, an 11-year-old boy in Bettendorf, Iowa, was grabbed at a supermarket by Charles Hatcher, who identified himself as a security guard. Todd, the boy, was suspicious and bolted when Hatcher said he was taking him to see his mother.

Todd's mother said he had participated in a school program in which children had been warned about strangers. The family reinforced the warning after a man had tried to strike up a conversation with one of the boy's brothers at a bus stop.

Four-year-old Eric Scott Christgen was abducted, sexually assaulted and strangled by Hatcher in 1978. Eric had participated in a police safety program, "Safetytown," in which children had been warned about strangers.

"That was the summer before he went away," said Edwin Christgen, the boy's father. "I don't know what else could have been done. He had been taught to like everybody but not to go off with anybody. He was very outgoing."

In Antioch, Calif., Josie Freeman

said she did not recall that her son, William, had ever gone through a formal program designed to acquaint children with the dangers of child molesters.

William, 12, stopped to talk to a man in a car in 1989 and was found strangled a day later. Hatcher has since told police he committed the crime.

Since her daughter was abducted, raped and murdered in St. Joseph in 1982, Annette Steele has been asking herself how it happened. Her 11-year-old daughter, Michelle, went to a dental appointment downtown and was found strangled a day later.

Hatcher denies involvement in that crime.

"She knew not to go with people who were bad," Mrs. Steele said. "I don't know. We'll never know what he said to her. I have to believe she thought he was a policeman or something."

"You can't teach your children to hate everybody. You cannot live in fear. It's not healthy for them if they don't talk to anybody. They'll end up being introverts."

"If Michelle were alive today and had a dental appointment, I don't think I would have told her anything different. You can't lock your kids up."