

# A Killer in THE FAMILY

A boy could get to thinking strange thoughts cooped up in an isolated farmhouse with relatives he hated. And young Ed, his family agreed, was no normal boy. Then one day, a surge of anger, a few well-aimed shots from a .22 rifle and it was curtains for Grandma and Grandpa Kemper.

**E**ven at 15, Ed Kemper was different. Already 1.9m (6ft 4in) tall, he was given to brooding silences and fixed stares. Other kids tended to stay out of his way.

His mother, living in Helena, Montana, thought he was 'a real weirdo'. She did not really want him around and his father had told him he could not stay with him and his new wife in Los Angeles. He shuttled back and forth a few times, and then ended up with his grandparents in what must have seemed like the middle of nowhere, a farmhouse at North Fork, in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada.



AP/Wide World

DATE file 1964

**12.8.64** Ed Kemper, aged 15, returns to his grandparents' farm at North Fork in the Sierra Nevada after staying with his mother in Montana

**27.8.64** Kemper shoots and kills his grandmother and grandfather with his .22 rifle. He then phones his mother, who tells him to report the event to the local sheriff

**6.12.64** Ed Kemper is committed to the California State Hospital for the criminally insane at Atascadero, in southern California

*Ed Kemper was a giant of a man – not only physically, but in the rage he carried around in him. He was also highly intelligent, mixing deceit with cool nerve. He began his murder spree by killing his grandparents.*





His father's mother was stricter and meted out even more punishments than his own. She particularly disliked the way her grandson looked at her, and was always threatening to call his father about it. She also frequently complained about how much he cost to feed and house.

### The grandfather

Kemper's grandmother dominated her husband. Kemper thought of him as a drab, colourless man, perhaps even a little senile, though grandfather and grandson got on well enough.

**“ That guy is a real weirdo. And you're taking a chance leaving him with your parents. You might... wake up some morning to learn they have been killed. ”**

*Kemper's mother, Clarnell, to his father*

It was 27 -August 1964, a hot, late summer morning. Kemper and his grandmother were sitting at the kitchen table. She was working; her husband was out shopping. Abruptly, Ed got up from the table and took his .22 rifle – a present from his grandfather – from the rack by

the kitchen door. He announced that he was going to shoot a few rabbits. His grandmother, not looking up from her work, just told him not to kill any birds.

Kemper stopped on the porch. Feeling a surge of anger, he wheeled around, lifting the rifle to his shoulder, sighted on the back



## UNSUSPECTING

**MAUDE KEMPER** worked as an illustrator and writer of books for children. Intelligent and strong-willed, she held a dominant position in her household. She was 65 when she was murdered.

**EDMUND KEMPER**, her husband, was six years her senior. He had worked for many years for California's Division of Highways. Since his retirement, he had led a quiet life on his 3ha (seven acre) farm.

It occurred to him to undress the body; he had an insatiable curiosity about sex, and about the way women looked without clothes. However, he dismissed this from his mind as an unnatural thought.

Then he heard his grandfather's old car cough to a halt outside. There was no going back now. Once again, he raised the rifle and, as the old man bent over to get a box of groceries from the front seat, Kemper killed him with a single shot in the head.

## The game's up

He shut the body in the garage, then attempted to hose down the blood from the dusty front yard. It was hopeless. There was no way he could cover this up. Uncertain of what to do, he phoned his mother, saying 'Grandma's dead. And so is Grandpa.' At first, he tried to say it was an accident. His mother, guessing immediately that Ed had had something to do with their deaths, was shocked at the news, but not really surprised. She had warned Ed's father that something like this might happen.

She told Ed to call the local sheriff, who drove out to arrest him. Kemper freely admitted both the killings, but when asked why, he could only say, 'I just wondered

how it would feel to shoot grandma.' As for his grandfather, he had killed him, he insisted, only to spare him the sight of his wife's body.

A court psychiatrist interviewed the boy in Juvenile Hall, and pronounced him a paranoid schizophrenic. By no means everyone agreed with this diagnosis, but the California Youth Authority decided to send him for treatment to the California State Hospital at Atascadero, which catered for sex offenders as well as the criminally insane. Ed Kemper entered this institution on 6 December 1964.

◀ After Ed Kemper's mother and father had washed their hands of him, the moody 15-year-old ended up with his grandparents in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada (left), California's great mountainous backbone.

▼ In December 1964, 15-year-old Ed Kemper was committed to the California State Hospital (below) at Atascadero – a high-security institution, with a strong emphasis on rehabilitation.



Cartier-Bresson/Magnum

of his grandmother's head through the kitchen window, and fired.

It was, he said later, as if he had lost control of his body. His mind, however, remained watchful but detached, so although he registered every detail, he felt utterly powerless to stop himself.

Mrs Kemper slumped forward. He shot her twice more, in the back, then picked up a knife, went up to her and stabbed her again and again until his fury abated. He wrapped a towel around her head to soak up the blood, and dragged her body into her bedroom.



Richard Gibson