



◀ Kemper smiles broadly as a detective adjusts his handcuffs. Full of feelings of inadequacy – despite, or perhaps because of, his size – he loved the company of what he felt were ‘real men’, such as police officers.

scared, he himself became anxious.

He obtained extra pleasure from revisiting the scene of the crime or the burial or by driving past the dead girls’ homes, to savour the misery of the bereaved families. His excellent memory enabled him to go over his crimes in his mind again and again, wringing every last drop of excitement from them. In this Kemper resembled the German murderer Peter Kürten, who on being arrested accurately recalled every detail of the room where he had first killed 17 years before.

The basement

It is tempting to root Kemper’s sadistic impulses in his experience of being locked in the basement by his mother. Again, there is a similarity between him and Kürten – it was while imprisoned as a teenager that Kürten incubated his fantasies of violent revenge on the world.

However, even before his mother started treating him in this cruel way, Kemper was linking sex and death. When he confessed to his sister Susan that he had a crush on his primary school teacher, she teasingly asked why he did not kiss her. She was puzzled by his reply: ‘I can’t. I would have to kill her first.’

At his trial, his other sister, Allyn, remembered how he had mutilated one of her dolls, cutting off its head and hands. According to Kemper, none of this was his fault. He blamed his older sister for torturing him and trying to kill him when he was small, and claimed she ‘lured’ him into sex games when he was just eight.

We have only Kemper’s

Thrill of THE CHASE

Psychiatrists tried to understand what drove Ed Kemper to murder. He got sadistic pleasure from it, and sexual gratification, but there were other factors, too.

Despite his long and detailed confessions, Kemper’s motives for killing remain unclear – he offered several confusing, often contradictory explanations for his behaviour.

He enjoyed verbal jousting with police and other interviewers, just as he had previously done with his psychiatrists. However, if the questioning got too close to

home, to things he would rather not talk about or even think about, he would change the subject, and begin going into detail about the killings and the dissections, indulging his penchant for morbid wit.

In many ways, Kemper epitomizes the classic sadistic murderer. His sadism is evident not only in the murders themselves, but in the pleasure that he took in frightening his victims. When Mary Ann Pesce refused to be

► As a child, Ed Kemper worshipped and identified with the famous tough-guy screen actor John Wayne (right). Wayne symbolized a manliness and strength that Kemper missed in his own sense of self.

word for this. It is possible that he borrowed stories about others' experiences that he heard at Atascadero to make himself more plausible and pitiable.

Sadistic killers are generally more difficult to catch than crazed ones; they take more care. Kemper took great pride in his 'workmanship' and planning. In a perverse way, he seemed to be asking the police – and particularly Lieutenant Scherer, whom he regarded as a father figure – if not for approval, at least for grudging admiration of his thoroughness.

Master plan

Sometimes Kemper disguised the reasons for his acts as part of a master plan. He maintained that he removed the heads and teeth of his victims to delay identification. At other times he admitted that decapitation was part of the excitement. He remembered cutting off Anita Luchessa's head: 'There was actually a sexual thrill... It was kind of an exalted, triumphant-type thing, like taking the head of a deer or an elk or something would be to a hunter.'

He played down this aspect of his killings at his trial, wishing to be seen as more mad than bad. He insisted that he had killed the girls, as he had killed his cat, to make them his: 'Alive, they were distant, not sharing with me. I was trying to establish a relationship.'

There was definitely a palpable sexual excitement in the hunt for his victims. He spoke of being 'torqued up' while he searched, and feeling 'little zapples' running through his body when he

neared his quarry.

Kemper had an insatiable desire for sexual knowledge from his pre-teen years. However, his actual sexual experience was minimal. Usually his story was that he had only once had sex with a woman, who had rejected him when he tried to see her again. Sometimes he claimed never to have had sex at all, and sometimes that he had tried but never had an orgasm.

Puritan views

Incongruously, Kemper combined his sexual deviancy with a strait-laced, even prim, morality: he apologized profusely for accidentally touching Mary Ann Pesce's breast before attacking her,

and in his confessions always referred to his victims by their surnames – Miss Koo, Miss Pesce and so on.

This Puritan streak also emerged in his belief that hitchhiking girls were just asking for it, displaying their bodies by the side of the road. Kemper's confused feelings about women in some ways seemed to mirror his relationship with his mother.

Despite his typical characterization of her as a 'domineering bitch', he regarded her with an equal mixture of love and fear.

Most psychiatric experts agreed that the six girls – and indeed his grandmother – died because Ed was working up to the murder of his mother, who had imprisoned him and, he

felt, sent away his father.

However, her death did not bring him any sense of catharsis or feelings of personal fulfilment; it simply depressed him.

Sociology

There was a sociological aspect to the killings as well. Kemper always tried to pick victims from affluent, middle-class families: 'I was trying to hurt society where it hurt the worst, and that was by taking ... future members of the working society; that was the upper class or the upper-middle class.'

He hated them because he felt inferior: 'They were flaunting in my face the fact that they could do any damn thing they wanted.'

