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Cary Stayner was convicted of the murders of four women: Carole Sund, her teenage daughter Juli Sund, Silvana Pelosso and Joie Ruth Armstrong

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Yosemite serial killer Cary Stayner (HLN)

It was 1999. An evil shadow hung over Yosemite National Park. What was happening? As 'Yosemite Murders part 1, The Missing Women' begins, it sheds light on a mysterious terror that threatened to drown the grandeur and serenity of Yosemite National Park. Vibrant young women were vanishing into thin air. The emergency search and rescue efforts were massive, but the missing females were nowhere to be found.

The third episode of 'How It Really Happened with Hill Harper' begins with an investigation into the serial killer from the Yosemite Murders. Weeks and months passed and the FBI investigation turned from search to recovery and finally, to foul play. Agents discovered the mountain community was a hideout for child molesters and other convicted criminals

looking to take refuge. However, all the likely suspects were cleared. Then suddenly and tragically, the murdered bodies of the four missing women were discovered. But, who committed these killings? And how did they happen? When key evidence is collected and run down, a prime suspect emerged. But as task force investigators closed in on their suspect, he packed up all his belongings and slipped through the net.

How will the lawmen finally connect the dots and solve the notorious case of "Malice in the Mountains?" The hour-long episode introduced a calm, young man named Cary Stayner — who was initially interviewed by officers but not considered a suspect in the case — and later on, he turned out to be the notorious serial killer convicted of the murders of four women between February and July 1999: Carole Sund, her teenage daughter Juli Sund, their travel buddy Silvina Pelosso and Yosemite Institute naturalist Joie Ruth Armstrong.

It was Mary Ellen Geist, a former reporter for KGO Radio who first identified him with a connection to his older brother Steven Stayner who was a kidnapping victim at 7. When Mary Ellen asked: "What's your theory about what happened?" Cary's demeanor suddenly changed into dark and dangerous. "He turned to me like this and his eyes just went black and flat. I just felt like a moment of evil. I felt in danger and I ran," she narrated. Confessing how similar it was to being one of his victims, she added, "I was in the same situation as his victims. I was alone with him. When he was alone with women, he became a predator."

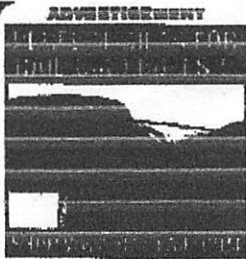
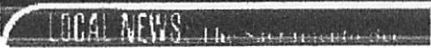
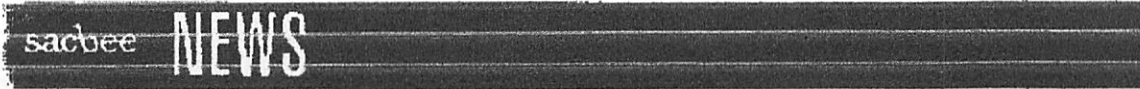
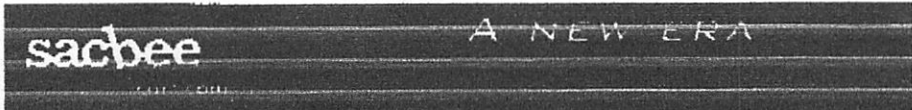
For a long time, the case remained unsolved until Joie's beheaded body was recovered from the canal. While her body was found along with several bits and pieces of clues that could lead to the killer, her head couldn't be spotted. It was then that the FBI agents came across Cary again near the canal and caught hold of his rucksack. When they tried to search it, he denied it and that's when it was clear something was amiss.

Officers were petrified that the bag might contain the head of Joie. However, the bag did not have the missing head. Instead, his bag had a copy of a novel about a crazed serial killer named 'Black Lightning' by horror novelist John Saul. The book was about two brothers — eerily similar to his real life — one of them being a stone-cold killer. Among other

innocuous items that were found in Cary's dark green pack were a camera, a Corona beer bottle, sunflower seeds, a harmonica and tanning lotion.

Soon after, FBI agents John Boles and Jeff Rinek reportedly found him at the Laguna del Sol nudist resort in Wilton. He was handcuffed and taken to Sacramento for questioning. During his interrogation, Cary had a pizza and confessed to all the crimes. He left agents shocked after he described not only Armstrong's decapitation, but the murders of Pelosso and the Sunds, and also sent out the map to find Juli's body.

Catch the third episode of 'How It Really Happened with Hill Harper' Season 5 on Sunday, August 30, from 9 to 10 pm ET.



Yosemite suspect had serial killer novel

By Cynthia Hubert
Bee Staff Writer
(Published Aug. 11, 1999)

Cary Stayner, the handyman who reportedly has confessed to murdering four women in and around Yosemite National Park, was carrying a copy of a novel about a crazed serial killer in his backpack when questioned about the slaying of naturalist Joie Ruth Armstrong.

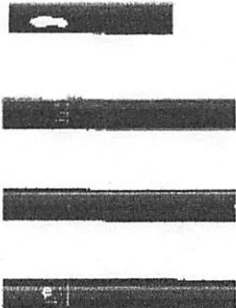
The book, "Black Lightning" by horror novelist John Saul, was among a number of seemingly innocuous items FBI agents found in Stayner's dark green pack on July 23, a day after Armstrong's beheaded body was found near her home in the park and a day before he was arrested.

Other items include a camera, a Corona beer bottle, a package of sunflower seeds, a harmonica and a bottle of tanning lotion, according to an inventory filed with U.S. District Court in Fresno. Agents also searched Stayner's room at the Cedar Lodge in El Portal on the outskirts of Yosemite, where he lived and worked, but their findings have yet to be made public.

FBI spokesman Nick Rossi refused Tuesday to discuss any pieces of evidence or their possible significance to the case.

But a retired Sacramento homicide detective who has investigated serial killings said the book finding is potentially significant.

"I would want to take a good look at the book, see if there are similarities or parallels," said Ray Biondi. "It might be a road



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similarities or parallels," said Ray Biondi. "It might be a road map for what he did on the crimes."

Michael Rustigan, a criminology professor at San Francisco State University and an expert on serial killers, said the finding offers psychological insight into the suspect's mind.

"It's very typical," said Rustigan, who teaches a course on serial killing to law enforcement agencies. "It's very common to find this type of literature on serial killers. It helps them to prepare psychologically for their murders."

Authorities have said Stayner confessed to killing Armstrong, 28, a popular and energetic naturalist who loved teaching children about their surroundings. They also have identified him as the prime suspect in the slayings of Carole Sund, 42, of Eureka, her daughter Juli, 15, and their friend Silvina Pelosso, 16, during the trio's Yosemite sightseeing trip in February. He has not been charged in those deaths, but reportedly confessed to them in an FBI interrogation after he was arrested on July 24.

Stayner pleaded innocent to the Armstrong slaying last week, which is routine even after a confession has been made, court observers said.

The paperback novel that he was carrying when questioned in the Armstrong slaying is a chilling best seller, published in 1995, about a series of killings in Seattle and a reporter's efforts to chronicle the case. The alleged killer insists he is innocent, and after he is executed the killings continue.

The book is filled with images of women's bodies being slashed with knives and power saws, and flashbacks about abusive events in the killer's past.

Rossi refused to discuss whether a weapon has been recovered in any of the slayings under investigation. But the affidavit in support of the search of Stayner's pack and home states that Armstrong was beheaded "with a fairly clean and forceful cut, probably from a very large, sharp instrument." Stayner reportedly has said he slashed Juli Sund's throat before dumping her body near New Don Pedro Reservoir.

Stayner, 37, allegedly told the FBI he had fantasies about killing women for three decades, and a reporter that he wants a TV movie to be made about his case.

"In a way, having the book helps corroborate what he has been saying about his fantasies about killing women," said Rustigan, who noted that executed serial killer Ted Bundy admitting to reading sadistic, homicidal literature. "Material like this fuels a killer's fantasies. It gets him excited."

It was not until after Armstrong's body was found July 22 that authorities connected Stayner to the Sund and Pelosso deaths. Investigators had been focusing, instead, on a loose band of methamphetamine users in Stanislaus County. At least three of

those men remain in custody on unrelated charges.

The affidavit in support of the searches of Stayner's backpack and home indicates that Armstrong's body was found, partially submerged in a stream near her home, on the afternoon of July 22. Her head was found several hours later, under water and about 40 feet from her torso.

Investigators, based on several sightings of Stayner's light blue International Scout vehicle in the area, tracked him down as he sat nude that afternoon on a river beach outside the park. They let him go but seized his backpack and searched it later, after obtaining a warrant.

In two interviews that day, Stayner denied being anywhere near Armstrong's home when she was killed.

The next day, Stayner failed to show up for work at the Cedar Lodge. He was arrested July 24 at a nudist resort in Wilton.