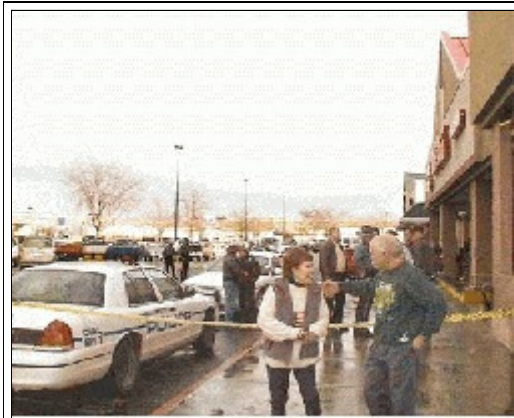


The Edward Morris Confession, Part 1 of 3

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JANUARY 4, 2003: Linda and Thom Martin (in foreground at right) spotted Edward Morris' minivan on Interstate 84. They exited the freeway to notify police only to see Morris pull into the Rite Aid on Campbell Street.

Baker City Herald file photo/Jayson Jacoby

**By JAYSON JACOBY
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When Randy Crutcher awoke that Saturday morning his leg was encased in a cast, a gift of sorts from the horse that kicked him.

The Oregon State Police sergeant figured he'd rest that day, Jan. 4, 2003.

Instead, he'd spend the afternoon listening to Edward Paul Morris.

The setting was a Baker City office, 350 miles from the place where, two weeks before, Morris killed his seven-months pregnant wife and their three children.

But as the two-hour, 18-minute interview continued, Morris' words pulled Crutcher across Oregon, to just before midnight Dec. 19 along a deserted logging road in the snowy Tillamook State Forest, where shots from a .22-caliber pistol echoed and a knife plunged and a family was destroyed.

Throughout the tale Crutcher's face remained placid, betraying neither the disgust nor the horror he felt as Morris, then 37, told how he shot and stabbed his wife, Renee, 31; how he shot their sons, Bryant, 10, and Jonathan, 4; how he stabbed their daughter, Alexis, 8; how he discarded their bodies in the dense shrubbery beside the road.

"If you show shock, horror, anger, he may decide that you no longer are a good audience," Crutcher said earlier this month as he recalled his interview with Morris almost two years ago.

"It's shocking. You go from a day off, thinking you're going to be recuperating, to being thrust in the middle of a situation that you know is going to become a media circus," said Crutcher, 52, who has worked

as a police officer for 29 years, the past 19 with the State Police.

"But you can't give away what you're feeling," said Crutcher, who teaches interview and interrogation techniques for the Oregon State Police. "You have your job to do. That takes precedence over everything."

And so Morris talked and Crutcher, along with Baker City Police Det. Kirk McCormick and Baker County Undersheriff Ken Draze, listened.

And all the while a Sony cassette recorder hummed along, preserving on a thin strip of magnetic tape every word, sob and chuckle that made up a story of mass murder.

The confession Morris surrendered during that interview was sufficient to convict him of aggravated murder had the case gone to trial, said William Porter, Tillamook County District Attorney.

The case did not go to trial.

In September 2004 Morris pleaded guilty to seven counts of aggravated murder, and in November Tillamook County Circuit Court Judge David Hantke sentenced him to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Morris also waived his right to appeal the sentence.

Porter said Crutcher, along with the Baker City Police and Baker County Sheriff's Office officials who participated in Morris' arrest and interrogation on Jan. 4, 2003, handled the unexpected situation in a manner that could serve as a textbook lesson for other jurisdictions.

"They all worked together very professionally to make this come off," Porter said earlier this month. "I'm sorry this got dumped on them, but I'm glad it happened in a place that was prepared to handle it. They didn't make a single mistake."

The taped confession that Tillamook County investigators took with them when they, along with a handcuffed Morris, left Baker City on Jan. 5, 2003, was the most important piece of evidence in the case, Porter said.

"Let's say all we had gotten was (the taped confession)," he said. "We'd have had enough."

Until he walked into that Baker City office on Jan. 4, 2003, Crutcher had spared little time to ponder the case of Edward Morris.

Why would he?

Morris lived in Portland. The murders belonged to Tillamook County, where the bodies were found.

But Crutcher certainly knew the name.

On that Saturday in 2003, two weeks after police recovered the bodies of Renee, Bryant, Alexis and Jonathan, most every Oregonian who had recently read a newspaper or watched a television news broadcast recognized the name Edward Morris.

He was the only member of the family whose corpse did not end up next to that logging road on Larch Mountain.

He was Oregon's most-wanted fugitive, the only suspect in the quadruple murder.

And although Crutcher would not have wagered even a dollar that Morris was within 100 miles of Baker City that morning, neither would he have suggested such a thing was impossible.

"He could be up in Sumpter, he could be in New York City," Crutcher said. "He could be anywhere."

But at the very instant Crutcher swung his plaster-clad leg out of bed that morning, Morris was quite a bit closer to little Sumpter than he was to the Big Apple.

Morris was, in fact, on Interstate 84 in Southern Idaho, driving his gray 1993 Dodge Caravan. He was headed west, toward Portland, toward home.

The minivan was as infamous as its driver.

Television stations had shown a photograph of an identical van dozens of times since the bodies of the Morris family were found.

Linda Martin and her brother, Thom, had seen that photo. They too were driving west on Interstate 84 on that unseasonably mild January morning.

Linda Martin, who lives in Portland, and Thom, from Washington state, remembered not only the van — a model as common on Oregon roads as sagebrush is in Baker County — but also the one thing that distinguished Morris' van from all others.

Its license plate — the plate's sequence of numbers and letters in particular.

WSH-171.

Near Durkee, about 25 miles east of Baker City, the Martins passed a gray minivan. The time was about 11:30 a.m.

Linda Martin noticed the van because of its speed — about 55 mph, she figured, 10 mph below the speed limit.

As the Martins' car passed the minivan, Linda Martin glanced at the license plate, an old habit of hers.

She looked, then looked again, sure she had misread the letters and numbers.

She hadn't.

WSH-171.

"I always look at license plates," Linda Martin said later that morning, after Morris was in police custody in Baker City. "The minute I saw the 171, I knew."

The Martins first stopped at the Durkee gas station to call police.

They returned to the freeway, passed the gray minivan a second time and sped on to Baker City, taking the first exit and following signs to

the State Police office, on South Bridge Street next to Mount Hope Cemetery.

The office was closed, so the Martins used the emergency phone outside. Crutcher said their call was routed to the OSP dispatch center in Medford.

After telling their story, the Martins decided to get back on the freeway and try to catch up to the gray minivan.

Being unfamiliar with the city's streets, they didn't retrace their route to the interstate and ended up instead on East Campbell Street.

As they drove east past the Subway sandwich shop the Martins watched, incredulous, as the same gray minivan passed, traveling west.

The Martins made a U-turn, then watched the van turn into the Rite Aid parking lot. They rushed to the pay phone outside the Safeway store, which is next to Rite Aid, and again called police.

Dispatchers alerted the Baker City Police Department, Baker County Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police.

City officer Doug Schrade drove to Safeway and spoke with the Martins. Then, at about 12:20 p.m., he rendezvoused with city Detective John Shepherd, who was off duty that day but offered to help after he heard about the situation on the police radio he keeps at home.

Just as Shepherd and Schrade strode toward Rite Aid, Morris walked out of the store.

Shepherd, who was wearing street clothes, pointed his Glock .40-caliber pistol at Morris and yelled at him to get on the ground.

"I think we caught him off guard," Shepherd said. "He stepped out (of the store) right in front of us."

Morris hesitated for a couple seconds, perhaps confused because Shepherd wasn't wearing a police uniform.

But then Schrade, who was wearing his uniform, arrived, also with a .40-caliber Glock centered on Morris.

Morris laid down on the asphalt.

Shepherd then handcuffed Morris' wrists behind his back.

Schrade said that as he was helping Morris stand up, he asked for his name.

The handcuffed man answered immediately: "Edward Morris."

Schrade said Morris then asked him a question: "Did you find my family?"

Schrade said he told Morris that police had found his family. He said Morris sighed, as though he were relieved to finally know the truth.

Less than 10 minutes later the phone rang at Crutcher's home about six miles from Baker City.

The caller's story shocked him.

But he didn't have time to be shocked.

"My first reaction was that we need to get this person some place where we can talk to him," Crutcher said. "We need to create the best atmosphere for getting information."

He decided on the office where members of Baker County's Drug Task Force sometimes meet.

"I hobbled out to my car and headed for town," Crutcher said.

Already he was plotting his interview strategy.

Time, Crutcher knew as he neared Baker City, was short.

"As time goes on, the more likely it is a person won't cooperate, will have second thoughts and decide not to talk," he said. "The minute they say, 'hey, I want to talk to an attorney,' then we're done."

But before Crutcher could question Morris, he needed information.

The Morris murders were a Tillamook County case. Crutcher knew only what he had seen on TV and read in newspapers.

He needed to know more.

He needed to talk to the Tillamook detectives.

"I don't like to go in and interview a person when I don't have all the case facts," Crutcher said. "If you don't have those you can't tell whether the person is making something up."

While he waited for a phone call from Tillamook, Crutcher introduced himself to Morris. Police had already read Morris his rights, including the right to remain silent, but Morris told them he wanted to talk.

"I basically just made small talk, building some rapport with him," Crutcher said. "I said, 'why don't you write down some things that are important to you in this whole thing.' And he did."

Not long after, Crutcher and Draze spoke to their Tillamook counterparts. The Tillamook officials outlined the case, including details that had never been released to the public, details the Baker City officers could use during the interview to determine whether Morris was lying.

Even though the Tillamook investigators had arranged to have an airplane ready to fly them to wherever Morris was arrested, Porter, the Tillamook County district attorney, knew the trip might take several hours.

Porter didn't want to wait, and run the risk that Morris would change his mind and invoke his constitutional right to ignore questions. Porter told Crutcher to conduct the interview.

"It's very important that when a suspect expresses a willingness to talk, that you're there, available to take him up on it," Porter said.

"If no one's talking to (Morris), and the enormity of what's happened

starts to settle in on him, the chances increase that he's going to refuse to talk to us."

What Porter didn't know on Jan. 4, 2003, was just how little time investigators would have to hear Morris' story.

Within hours, a Tillamook County judge would appoint an attorney to represent Morris. And that attorney would reach his client in Baker City via telephone and persuade him to stop talking to police.

But not before Crutcher had completed the interview that made the case against Edward Morris.