

Chilling tale of Tahoe area killing unfolds on tape

By Scott Smith, Stockton Record

The first murder Loren Herzog admitted to watching his buddy Wesley Shermantine carry out came in the wee hours of Sept. 1, 1984, on a drive back from Lake Tahoe.

Herzog was behind the wheel when Shermantine spotted a man passed out drunk next to his car just off the road. He told Herzog to turn back. They were on Highway 88 in Hope Valley in the High Sierra.

Shermantine beat Henry Howell and then shot him once in the back. He took Howell's wallet and \$45, which the two buddies from Linden used to buy gas in Jackson, according to Herzog's statements.

"He'd kill for nothing," Herzog nervously told investigators years later. "He's a cold-blooded killer, man. ... I told my wife, he's one person in this world I'm scared of."

This is just one violent episode captured in 17 hours of grainy videos taken 13 years ago. A string of investigators interrogated Herzog over several days at the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office after his arrest in 1999.

After hours of denials and cajoling from detectives, Herzog eventually admitted that he watched Shermantine kill five people in a 15-year drug-fueled killing spree. In all, Shermantine told Herzog of killing 24 people, Herzog told them.

Shermantine also appears briefly on video. Detectives confront him with the blood they found in his truck of missing Cyndi Vanderheiden. Shermantine stoically denies everything before

folding his arms and asking for an attorney.

Shermantine today blames Herzog for everything.

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