

SLT woman reveals connection to serial killer

By Kathryn Reed

Fear. It's a sensation that has defined a large extent of Laurie Ault's life. Fear of an unknown killer. Fear another family member would become a victim. Fear she would be a target if she spoke out.

The South Lake Tahoe woman's life was rocked in 1980 when her aunt and uncle were murdered. Ault was 23. Nothing has been the same since then.

The arrest this spring of Joseph DeAngelo on multiple murder charges has brought some peace. But it has also produced more unanswered questions for Ault and presumably all the family members whose lives were upended by the man known as the original Night Stalker, the East Area Rapist and the Golden State Killer.

"How many other people did he murder or rape?" Ault asks.

That's a question for law enforcement. Or maybe the suspect himself will confess. For now, he is alleged to have committed 12 murders, 45 rapes and more than 150 break-ins from 1976-86. The 72-year-old was arrested at his Citrus Heights home in April.

Ault also wants to know why her relatives, Lyman and Charlene Smith of Ventura, were targeted. At the time, her 43-year-old uncle was expecting to be appointed to a judgeship by Gov. Jerry Brown. Semen found on her aunt was consistent with DNA found at the site of the Contra Costa County crimes, according to court records. However, it wasn't until 2000 that detectives started linking many of crimes.

The 48-page **arrest warrant** says, “Lyman was found nude lying face down on the right side of the bed. Both his hands and feet had been bound. Charlene was found nude from the waist down, lying face up with her hands bound behind her back. Her ankles were also bound. Both victims died as a result of blows inflicted to their head by a wood log the offender had procured from the firewood pile outside the house.”



Laurie Ault thumbs through her book “Murder on His Mind” about the serial killer known as the Golden State Killer. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Ault only shared her family’s secret with the men she married and her sons. That is until now. Now she is ready for the world to know what it is like to live with such sadness, such uncertainty for decades.

Lyman Smith was her grandfather’s son, her mom’s step-brother. Family was family no matter the exact connection. Her grandparents were incredibly close to her – almost like second parents.

It was Ault’s grandparents who introduced her to South Lake

Tahoe. They had a cabin here. She has been a full-time resident since 1985.

Some of the anxiety that had gripped her when she lived in the Sacramento area evaporated after moving to the lake. Still, though, an uneasiness prevailed, as did a sadness for those close to her.

Watching her grandfather suffer was emotionally overwhelming.

"I was a shy, naïve 23-year-old. You didn't talk about it. You stocked it away as far away as you could," Ault told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I never said a word in 35 years. I kept it to myself."

With the silence came a form of post-traumatic stress. Feelings range from grief to depression to anger.

She tried to blend in, to not call attention to herself.

"I tried to make myself not be a target," Ault said. "I was always on guard."

Not knowing why her aunt and uncle were killed created an uneasiness. She was living in a perpetual state of anxiousness. Blinds were closed at dusk. Parking garages were avoided whenever possible. Her behavior went beyond the normal safety precautions. The killings weren't something she could overcome.

"I had let fear interfere with some of my freedoms," Ault said.

Ault was living blocks from where the suspect lived when he started his crime spree. She was 19 when he first struck. People were scared. They didn't know who would be next. He terrorized the area for a good two years.

"My gut told me he was always there," Ault said. "There were so many red flags on this guy. The whole time he attacked he

was a cop. Back in the day they didn't look at their own in the same way."

In January 2017, Ault published a book about the case under a pen name. Cops warned her not to reveal her connection to the case. Her desire was to stir memories in others in hopes a new piece of evidence would lead to an arrest.

Getting her thoughts down on paper as well as facts helped Ault get a handle on her fear.

Then in November 2017 she released a different version. "Murder on His Mind" was published under the name Anne Penn. She admits in that book to being a family member of a victim.

Part of the reason to write it was to honor all the victims.

Ault wishes the suspect were younger so "he'd be punished longer."

Today Ault continues her investigation as she writes another book about this man who she consistently refers to as a "creep."