Introduction:

* January 29th, 1979. San Diego
* Brenda Spencer, 16, uses a Ruger .22 Rifle to shoot up Grover Cleveland Elementary School from her living room across the street. She injures 9, including several children, and kills 2.
* When asked why she said that she “doesn’t like Mondays”
* Due to the flippant nature of Brenda’s response, former FBI analyst Candace Delong has labeled her a Thrill Killer. But does Spencer fit the description of a thrill killer?

WHAT is a thrill killer?

* Thrill killing is the act of committing a premeditated or random murder motivated solely by the excitement of killing.
* Often the killer commits such acts because they are driven by a need to feel powerful. Thrill killing almost always involves sadism and torture before killing.
* Spencer might have committed her shooting because she enjoyed the feeling of killing. Classmates testified that she enjoyed talking of guns, hunting, and even wanting to kill a police officer for fun.

WHAT is Antisocial Personality Disorder?

* Antisocial Personality Disorder is characterized as a disorder which features repeated disregard for morals or the feelings of others. Those with APD display arrogance and lack remorse for their actions.
* Spencer’s flippant reasoning for committing the shooting displays arrogance and a lack of remorse.
* Repeated disregard for morals is displayed in Spencer’s previous criminal activities such as truancy, petty theft, shooting in the windows of Grover Cleveland Elementary with a pellet gun, and vandalizing classrooms (these incidents occurred about a year prior to the shooting).
* APD is also likely in people who come from poor home lives. Spencer lived with her father in a state of poverty. They slept on a mattress on the floor surrounded by empty bottles.

CAN a person with APD also be a thrill killer?

* Other thrill killers have shown signs of APD
* Andrew Peter Garforth showed no remorse in the 1992 killing of nine-year-old Ebony Simpson. Garforth had a staggering criminal history with 76 prior convictions

PREMISES

1. Spencer might have committed her shooting because she enjoyed the feeling of killing.
2. Antisocial Personality Disorder is characterized as a disorder which features repeated disregard for morals or the feelings of others, a history of crime, and little to no remorse for their actions.
3. Potential sexual abuse may have led to Spencer developing symptoms of APD
4. Other thrill killers have shown signs of APD

Rationales

1. Classmates testified that she enjoyed talking of guns, hunting, and even wanting to kill a police officer for fun. In her telephone interview with the San Diego Tribune she stated that she “was having too much fun to surrender” (Milwaukee Journal)
2. Repeated disregard for morals is displayed in Spencer’s previous criminal activities such as truancy, petty theft, shooting in the windows of Grover Cleveland Elementary with a pellet gun, and vandalizing classrooms (these incidents occurred about a year prior to the shooting).
3. Spencer and her father slept on a single mattress on the floor. In her parole hearing in 2001, 22 years after the shooting, Spencer claimed she had been subjected to sexual abuse by her father. Though parole board members doubted whether these claims were true, victims of sexual abuse tend to report their abuse years, even decades, after it happens out of fear or shame (Biggs 2014).
4. Andrew Peter Garforth showed no remorse in the 1992 killing of nine-year-old Ebony Simpson. Garforth had a staggering criminal history with 76 prior convictions

Is Brenda Spencer a monster or just a troubled teen?

* In 1979 there were no high-profile school shootings, this was in fact the first instance of such a crime. Nobody knew to look out for the warning signs Spencer exhibited. There was no system to give psychological help to people before they committed such heinous crimes.
* Brenda Spencer was definitely a troubled teen. Her life was scarred by a broken family, poverty, and an emotionally abusive father. However, her decision to make schoolchildren the target of her pent-up rage and instability made her monstrous.

CONCLUSION:

* Brenda Spencer’s symptoms of APD, caused by emotional and potential sexual abuse, contributed to her role as a thrill killer

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