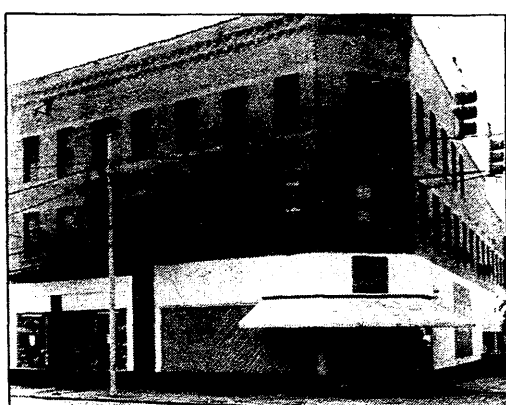
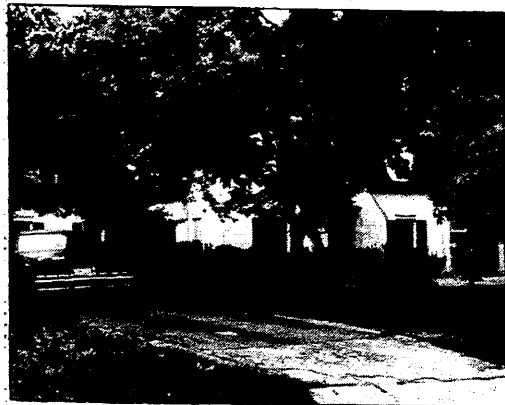


'His daddy was the only thing keeping him in this world'



Dave Nicholson/News & Record

The Klenner home was always cluttered, the second-story clinic always crowded

(From A6)

Sniffing out vulnerability

Ruth and Fritz rescheduled their wedding for Christmas 1978, and on Dec. 23, they were married at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church in Greensboro. There was no time for a honeymoon. Fritz said he had to get back to the hospital.

Ruth and Fritz moved into an apartment on Maiden Lane in Reidsville, only a few blocks from his father's house. Ruth went to work as a teacher. Fritz kept the apartment in Durham and continued leaving for the week every Monday, supposedly going off to classes, and returning on Friday to work in his father's clinic.

Dr. Klenner was boasting more and more of his son's accomplishments at Duke. He was an honor student. Eminent doctors thought highly of him. He was involved in important blood research, as well as other projects. Dr. Klenner even took blood samples from his patients and let Fritz take them for analysis.

At one point, Fritz became violently ill. He told of a hush-hush research accident that infected him and several doctors with a rare form of hepatitis. The doctors died, he said, but he was cured by his father.

He told, too, of an accident involving radioactive materials that killed two other researchers while he survived, thanks to his father.

About this time, Fritz appeared at John Forrest's gun shop with scratches on his chest and arm. Somebody had tried to kill his father, he said, taking a shot at him in the night. But he'd pushed his father out of harm's way. In saving his father's life, he had been grazed by the bullet.

Fritz frequently told of saving his father. He always made himself a hero.

In the fall of 1980, Fritz did something that would become a pattern in his life. He began an affair with a woman several years older, a woman having troubles in her marriage and emotionally vulnerable. He would repeat the pattern three times more before it turned deadly. Three of those women had adolescent sons.

Fritz had a gift for sniffing out vulnerabilities, particularly in women. He quickly could determine a person's needs, desires and fantasies. He would play to those feelings — and use them to manipulate. He was a chameleon. He could turn emotion on and off at will. He always employed emotion appropriate to the occasion.

Women often were struck by his sincerity and charm. And by his eyes. He had his father's eyes. And his father's inexplicable charisma.

Boys also were drawn by that charisma. Fritz would take time with boys, talk with them about things that interested them — camping, guns, knives, martial arts. He would carry them places and bring them presents. He genuinely seemed to enjoy the company of boys, and they loved him for it.

Fritz had another gift, perhaps his greatest. He could make people believe whatever he wanted. It was a gift he used a lot, and almost exclusively in the service of fantasy and falsehood.

The woman who began the affair with Fritz in 1980 was mesmerized by him in the early stages of their relationship. She left her husband for Fritz, gave up her home, friends and a caring relationship with her in-laws. Fritz promised marriage. They planned the house they would build on the Mountain when Fritz joined his father in practice. They talked of the son they would have.

Even after she discovered Fritz was still married, she accepted his explanations, believed the derogatory lies he told about his wife, knew that it was only a matter of time before he would leave Ruth and they would be joined in perpetual bliss.

But the bliss didn't last. She began to see his insecurities, to doubt his stories and sense his lies. She became irritated at his obsession with germs, his

perpetual spraying of Lysol. She didn't want to take so many vitamins.

There were stranger things. He began to talk of connections with the FBI. He showed her mysterious, threatening letters he claimed he was receiving. She realized he had written the letters himself. His spelling was atrocious, and all the words he commonly misspelled were misspelled in the letters.

He told her, too, that he once had to dress in women's clothing to achieve sexual satisfaction.

And there was the strange religious talk. Folded in his pocket, Fritz usually carried two pages of exotic religious text, pages he said he'd taken from a book in his father's library. She made copies of them and took them to an elderly priest, who told her that they were black magic, the work of the devil, that she should have nothing to do with the person who carried them.

Fritz seemed to be under a lot of pressure during this period, and at one point he tried to talk her into a suicide pact. From that moment she knew she had made a serious mistake and had to get out of the relationship.

By then she'd realized that Fritz was obsessed with his father. He talked about him all the time. His father was the only focus of his life, and neither she nor anybody else could ever replace him. Everything Fritz did was somehow in response to his father.

Disillusioned with Dr. Crazy

After several years of friendship with Fritz, Doug Birch also had begun to think he and his friends were right when they tagged him Dr. Crazy.

Like Fritz, Birch was a gun fancier. He, too, had worried about a collapse of the economy, an unstoppable war or some other calamity that might throw society into chaos. He and Fritz had talked at length about such things. They had made informal plans to join together to defend and care for one another should such an event arise.

To Birch that was just a remote possibility, something to think about, but he began to realize that Fritz didn't want simply to prepare himself for the collapse of society. Fritz actually wanted it to collapse, indeed longed for it. When it did, Fritz believed he would not only survive but emerge a ruler in the system that followed.

Birch knew that Fritz had become fascinated with explosives and had begun to play with cyanide and to make cyanide bullets, unseemly activities for a healer.

Fritz was filled with hatred, Birch realized, hatred for blacks, communists and anybody who sympathized with them. And deep down, Birch was convinced, Fritz hated women. He particularly hated his mother's family, the Sharps, because he thought they never had accepted his father and denigrated him.

Fritz had begun to say things, too, that indicated he had a contempt for all life.

"If things really get bad," Fritz told Birch one day with an almost maniacal smile, "you can always take something as worthless as people and make something valuable out of them — like fertilizer."

Birch, John Forrest and others had allowed Fritz to treat them and their families for minor medical problems. He gave shots, dispensed vitamins and prescription drugs, even cut off warts and other growths.

But in the spring of 1981, after Birch's wife got very sick from a treatment Fritz gave, Birch and Forrest got suspicious about Fritz's doctoring. Birch also realized his wife, too, was involved with Fritz.

Birch and Forrest began to check and discovered that Fritz had never been enrolled at Duke Medical School, that he'd never been licensed to practice medicine of any kind.

Birch gathered a bagful of drugs, syringes and other paraphernalia Fritz had dispensed and went to see SBI agent Mike Kelly. He told Kelly that Fritz was posing as a doctor, treating people and dispensing drugs, that he was a psychopath, heavily armed and dangerous. He also told him that Fritz was from a very prominent family, the nephew of retired Chief Justice Susie Sharp of the N.C. Supreme Court.

Forrest, too, told Kelly about treatments Fritz had given him and his family. He said Fritz worked in his father's clinic in Reidsville. But nothing would ever come of these reports.

Birch didn't stop at reporting Fritz to the SBI. He called Fritz's mother and told her what he'd learned. She seemed to disbelieve him.

That spring, Ruth Klenner not only discovered that her husband wasn't in medical school, as she believed, but that he also was having an affair. She left him in May, taking the BMW that he had put in her name.

Fritz's lover also learned that he wasn't in medical school. Later she and Ruth met, discussed Fritz's deceptions and fantasies and agreed that he was very sick and needed help. They decided to call his father and tell everything.

Several times they tried, but each time Fritz answered. Finally, Dr. Klenner picked up on an extension, and as Fritz tried to stop him from hearing — first by brandishing a pistol, then by threatening suicide — his father learned the truth.

Both women urged Dr. Klenner to get help for Fritz. It wasn't their problem, he told them. It was his family's. They shouldn't concern themselves with it.

Later, Ruth and Doug Birch went to a lawyer to see about getting Fritz committed to a mental institution. They gave up after learning the chances were slight.

Fritz then was driving a big, black four-wheel-drive 1980 K-5 Chevrolet Blazer that his father had bought for him. Doug Birch knew that Fritz always kept it loaded with military weapons, and he remembered the bumper sticker Fritz had on the back: "Don't Get Mad, Get Even."

For the next six months, Birch wore a bullet-proof vest wherever he went.

That summer, Ruth later told friends, Fritz said he was glad that everything was finally out in the open, that he no longer had to pretend. Duke wasn't the only medical school in the world, he said. He might go to one overseas.



Richard T. Davis

Annie Hill Klenner, a registered nurse, worked alongside her husband

Instead, that fall, he enrolled at Durham Technical Institute in a two-year-dental laboratory course on making false teeth. His heart was never in it. He attended the full two years but completed only about 60 percent of the work before he quit.

One thing he didn't quit was pretending. Only in fantasy could he satisfy his father, and only in fantasy could he live.

He still went about in a doctor's coat with a stethoscope in his pocket, still carried his medical satchel, still freely passed out drugs and vitamins. He still led family and friends to think that he was at Duke, now in his internship.

Young Dr. Klenner

In the spring of 1981, Fritz had begun an affair with a young woman who was an MS patient of his father's. She lived out of state and came to spend occasional weekends with him. He told her of his work in the Duke Hospital emergency room, often in late-night phone calls, and relished telling about the gory details of treating accident victims.

Another woman with whom Fritz became involved in the fall of 1982 also believed he was a doctor. She had known him for three years. He told her that he had incurable cancer when he first met her. She worried about him until he announced that he'd been cured. When her marriage began breaking up, Fritz offered comfort. Soon they were having an affair, which she wrote about in her diary.

He told her of serving with the Special Forces in Vietnam and indicated that he still was involved in intelligence work for the Army. Sometimes he would disappear for weeks, only to return and say he couldn't talk about what he'd been doing because it was confidential. She believed he was off to war in North Africa.

She thought of Fritz as an "inside track man," somebody who always knew somebody who knew what the real situation was.

Once, he confided to her that the government of Ghana was going to be toppled. Big deal, she thought, but she never let on that she wasn't concerned about his secret activities.

Fritz sometimes saw her as often as three times a week, but he usually left her waiting. He quoted poetry to her, told her that he loved her, spoke of marriage. Once he asked if she would consider moving to Idaho with him.

When she began to talk of marrying Fritz, her father did some checking and discovered that Fritz had never been at Duke Medical School.

It didn't matter to her. She loved him. She needed somebody, and Fritz was warm, loving and considerate. If he wanted to pretend to be a doctor to cover whatever else he was involved in, it was OK with her.

Fritz continued pretending at his father's clinic as well. He went on working there, wearing white medical

coats. He let patients believe that he soon would be licensed as a physician and join his father. They called him young Dr. Klenner and took solace in his promise.

Somebody better look out

In the spring of 1984, Dr. Klenner fell ill from heart problems that had plagued him for years. He was admitted to Morehead Memorial Hospital in Eden. He'd had a dispute with the Reidsville hospital and wouldn't go there.

During his father's sickness, Fritz continued to treat patients at the clinic.

Dr. Klenner died at age 76 on May 20. His funeral was May 22 at St. Joseph of the Hills Catholic Church in Eden. Years earlier, Dr. Klenner had left Holy Infant Church in Reidsville in a huff after a dispute with the priest.

Normally, Reidsville doctors sit in a group at the funerals of other local physicians. Only one attended Dr. Klenner's funeral — ironically, a black woman.

Fritz went about at the funeral consoling his father's patients. He was calm and reassuring — so much like his daddy, many would say. Many asked when he would be reopening the clinic. He was supposed to take the "national boards" that very week, Fritz told them, but the test had been postponed because of his father's death. Soon, he promised.

Dr. Klenner was buried at Greenview Cemetery in Reidsville. No graveside service was held. Fritz would allow no one but himself at the gravesite for his father's burial.

About a week after his father's funeral, Fritz appeared at Park Chevrolet in Kernersville, where he regularly had his Blazer serviced. He'd come to know several of the mechanics there. They thought of him as a tough guy. He'd told them stories of fighting with the Green Berets in Vietnam, of being trapped behind lines, barely escaping with his life and saving his buddies.

When the mechanics offered condolences about his father, Fritz began to tell of heroic measures he'd taken at the hospital to try to revive his father.

But this had been reality, not fantasy, and for the first time Fritz hadn't been able to save him.

Once again his father had gone to the Mountain without him, and Fritz couldn't stop him. He had failed his father.

He burst into tears trying to tell the story. In front of a large group in the waiting room, he began sobbing uncontrollably.

Doug Birch heard of Dr. Klenner's death and made one comment: Somebody better look out.

Fritz surely would blow.

"His daddy was the only thing keeping him in this world," Birch said.

All that was needed for Fritz to blow was a catalyst, and he already had found it: his first cousin, Susie Newsom Lynch.

BITTER BLOOD

A Genealogy of Murder

Sunday: The Dying Begins — Both murder scenes suggested robbery. Police suspected professionals. Family members suspected one of their own.

Today: His Father's Son — Fritz Klenner's proud Prussian papa taught him to love guns, hate commies, charm women and expect Armageddon.

Tuesday: Susie Q. — Susie Lynch lived a fairy-tale youth: May Queen at 5, high school princess, fraternity sweetheart.

Wednesday: The Gathering Storm — Fritz was ready for the world to fall apart, but not for his father to die.

Thursday: Victims and Survivors — As the family arranged funerals, the detectives analyzed alibis.

Friday: A Spy Gets Spooked — Ian Perkins dreamed of joining the CIA. He thought he had passed the first test until the police came calling.

Saturday: The Bloody End — A shootout, a chase, an explosion — now nine people were dead.

Sunday: The Unraveling — The family was devastated, the community captivated. One by one, the bizarre details surfaced.

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