## Charles Starkweather & Caril Fugate

**By Marilyn Bardsley**

## Introduction

In 1958, nineteen-year-old Charles Starkweather was desperate. Desperate to marry his jailbait girlfriend. Desperate to make some money for himself so he wouldn't be broke every day of his life. Desperate to get out of the Nebraska town where everyone had figured him for a loser.

He and Caril Fugate embarked on a murder spree that horrified the country. This was the country that had elected Eisenhower and Nixon for a second term in 1956 and where the FBI's J. Edgar Hoover was firmly entrenched as the national policeman. This was also a country that was undergoing unsettling cultural changes. Frightening and offensive symbols of rebellion emerged and thrived: Elvis Presley, James Dean and the whole rock 'n roll culture focused on a new generation that challenged the status quo of the sterile 1950's.



Charles Starkweather in his James Dean pose

The country that uncomfortably watched James Dean's Rebel Without A Cause in 1956 suddenly saw a Dean-like figure in Charles Starkweather to make them really uncomfortable. What was the world coming to? Were the violence and the alienation of Starkweather just the beginning of some uncontrollable trend that would destroy the fabric of society?

Perhaps, but it would take longer than anyone then expected. The cinematic embodiments of the Starkweather murder spree took a long time to hit the market and did not take hold as a genre for over 35 years. By then, Starkweather and Fugate are merely smudged antecedents, unrecognizable as a direct characters -- present only in their angst and isolation.

This frightening rebel twosome inspired a whole series of mainstream and not-so-mainstream movies like the 1974 Badlands of Terrence Malick, Wild At Heart by David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino and Tony Scott's 1993 True Romance, Dominic Sena's 1993 Kalifornia, and Oliver Stone's 1994 Natural Born Killers.

**Charlie**

Charlie Starkweather was born into a poor, uneducated, but hardworking family in Lincoln, Nebraska, on November 24, 1938. He was the third of seven children that Guy and Helen Starkweather would have.

Despite the Depression years in which he and his siblings were born, they never went without food or shelter. They were poor, but it did not stop Charlie from having a decent childhood and good memories of the things his family did together. Their community considered the Starkweather children well behaved.

William Allen in *Starkweather* describes Guy as a "handsome and talkative" man, who was better suited for white-collar work than the carpenter's trade that he had chosen. "He didn't have the necessary physical stamina and, because of various ailments including a weak back and arthritis, did not work regularly. Helen, a small woman with frizzy red hair...was strong and kind, the one who held things together." She worked as a waitress to augment the limited family income.

While Charlie's early childhood memories are very pleasant, his school experiences were traumatic for him. The comfort he felt in his family surroundings vanished in the classroom. The children laughed at his minor speech impediment and teased him about his bowed legs.

Even though Charlie was of average intelligence, he never applied himself and was considered a slow learner. One sure contributor to his problems, which went undetected until he was fifteen, was his severe myopia. He couldn't even read the largest letter on the eye chart.

One of the only subjects in which he excelled was gym. He was well coordinated and strong. His gymnastic abilities were the only legitimate source of self-esteem that he had. The flip side of the coin was that he used those same physical abilities to fight on a continuous basis with the other boys in the school.

"He blamed all of his fights on being made fun of as a child. Sometimes his battles were brief outbursts of violence, but other times they were frenzied and prolonged, not ending until they were broken up or his opponent lay senseless. He earned a reputation for being one of the meanest, toughest kids in Lincoln..." (Allen)

In the ninth grade, he met Bob Von Busch, who after Charlie fought with him, became one of his closest friends. Bob said of him, "He could be the kindest person you've ever seen. He'd do anything for you if he liked you. He was a hell of a lot of fun to be around, too. Everything was just one big joke to him. But he had this other side. He could be mean as hell, cruel. If he saw some poor guy on the street who was bigger than he was, better looking, or better dressed, he'd try to take the poor bastard down to his size."

Both of the boys were James Dean fanatics. They saw all of his movies. There was no question that Charlie tried to imitate Dean's mannerisms, clothes and hairstyle tight jeans and cowboy boots. But Charlie was no James Dean in looks, brains or talent. He was a very flawed imitation.

What was genuine in Charlie, however, was the isolation and rebellion that Dean perfected in his talented characterizations. Jack Sargeant in *Born Bad* sees Starkweather in his autobiography (which Starkweather aptly titled *Rebellion* ) "revealed as acutely sensitive, not just to the taunts of his fellow students but also to his family's low social position and poverty. For Starkweather, poverty was a trap, he could map its confines, and trace its borders, but Charles could see no escape for himself;...He believed that his very life was rigidly controlled: he saw that he would not be able to flee the bludgeoning poverty which had characterized his working class childhood but instead would be condemned to repeat it, eventually finding himself a manual job, a wife, having children and then simply dying."

**Caril**

Charlie's close buddy Bob Von Busch began to date Barbara Fugate in 1956. Charlie eventually became interested in Barbara's younger sister Caril who had just turned thirteen. The four of them double dated on a steady basis despite Caril's youth.



Caril & Charlie

Caril was a pretty girl with dark brown hair and a ready smile. She, too, had a wide streak of rebellion in her and a mercurial temper. She was not much of a scholar and had failed a grade in elementary school. Even though her teachers considered her a slow learner, Charlie thought she was a wizard.

He treated her like a goddess. And, probably because she was so young, she thought he was really cool and had no appreciation for his serious weaknesses. William Allen states, "She was impressed by his cars, his toughness, his looks, and despite his poverty the way he could give her almost anything she wanted...Charlie said that Caril meant more to him than anything had before. Without her he would be thrust back into the world he hated so much. Caril almost even made him stop hating himself. He saw himself as reflected in her eyes and he looked good."

Charlie quit school at the age of sixteen and went to work loading and unloading trucks at the Western Newspaper Union warehouse. His boss didn't think much of Charlie: "Sometimes you'd have to tell him something two or three times. Of all the employees in the warehouse, he was the dumbest man we had."

The warehouse was near the school Caril attended so he could see her every day. He taught her how to drive even though she was too young to drive legally. One day, Caril took Charlie's hotrod and got into a minor accident. Charlie's father was part owner of the car and had to pay for the damages to the other vehicle, an event that caused a huge argument between the two men. The argument became physical and Charlie was told to find somewhere else to live.

Charlie moved into the rooming house where his friend Bob and Barbara Fugate then Bob's wife lived. Now that the relationship with his parents was very strained, Caril became the center of Charlie's life. He began telling people that he and Caril were getting married. Then he started telling his friends that Caril was pregnant with his child a lie that backfired when Caril's parents heard it.

Charlie quit his job at the paper company and started to work as a garbageman. It was hardly a career enhancement, but he did it so that he could be off work when she was through with school. The pay was only $42 a week not enough to support himself, let alone Caril too. His landlady was unsympathetic and locked him out until he came up with the rent he owed her.

Charlie began to see himself as trapped in a life of poverty. With his limited intellect, the only way out that he could envision was to do something really dramatic like rob a bank. "Every day on his route, collecting the garbage from across town, where the middle and upper classes of Lincoln, Nebraska, lived, he saw what he was being excluded from...While heaving heavy, stinking sacks of trash for a minimum wage Starkweather came to the realization that, for him, there was one great leveler of class, one way in which he would find himself equal with the rest of society which had oppressed, dominated and alienated him, a method by which he would find retribution: "dead people are all on the same level." (Sargeant)

**The First Murder**

Gradually, Charlie had convinced himself that he was going to have to lead a life of crime to get the money and respect he craved. Just the day before he had wanted to buy a stuffed toy dog for Caril at the gas station and realized that he didn't even have enough money for that. Even worse, the gas station attendant refused to let him buy the toy on credit. He would get back at these people who turned their noses down at him. He really would.

It was well below zero and the raw Nebraska winds were whipping around mercilessly on that first day of December 1957. It was almost 3 a.m. Time to begin what he needed to do.

He took with him the 12-gauge shotgun he had lifted from Bob Von Busch's cousin and the shells that he had just bought for it and drove to the gas station that had refused him credit.



Robert Colvert

Robert Colvert, the twenty-one-year-old who had humiliated Charlie the day before, was on duty at the station by himself. He was a short, slender man with a young wife and a baby on the way.

Colvert was working on a carburetor when Charlie came into the filling station. He sold him a pack of Camels and Charlie drove off. A few minutes later, Charlie turned the car around and went back to the station. Colvert was still behind counter. This time, Charlie bought a pack of gum, got into his car and drove off again.

He parked close by and put on his disguise: a bandana tied over much of his face and a hunter's hat to cover his red hair. Then Charlie walked back into the station with the loaded shotgun and a canvas bag for the loot.

By this time, Colvert was back working on the car and didn't even know anyone was there until he felt the shotgun jabbed into his back. Charlie marched Colvert back to the office and made him open the cash drawer.

Charlie scooped up the money and put it in the canvas bag. "Open up the safe," he ordered, but Colvert didn't have the combination. Only the boss knew the combination. Charlie accepted that explanation and decided that he'd just have to make do with the $100 or so that was in the cash drawer.

Charlie decided that Colvert was going for a ride. He made the terrified station attendant drive them out towards Bloody Mary's house. Bloody Mary was a crazy old woman who fired a shotgun full of rock salt at anybody who trespassed on her property.

Then Charlie made Colvert get out of the car. Later, Charlie said that Colvert struggled with him for the gun and was shot in the scuffle. However, as Colvert tried to get up on his hands and knees, Charlie shot him again right in the skull.

**The Death Deal**

The newspapers made the murder and robbery into a major news event since there was so little serious crime in that area then. Starkweather took the precaution of painting his car a different color, but then he did some dumb things that called attention to him as a suspect. It was widely reported that most of the loot from the gas station holdup was in coin, but Charlie used change to buy some clothing for himself. The authorities believed that the holdup and murder was committed by a transient so the pressure was off Charlie for the time being.

The murder gave Starkweather a feeling of euphoria and peace. "He had money. He had a girl. He had killed and not been bothered by it. It gave him an enormous feeling of power. He now operated outside the laws of man. He felt as if he were invisible, could do just as he pleased, take what he wanted. The law was helpless against him." (Allen)

The day after he robbed the gas station and murdered Robert Colvert, Charlie admitted to Caril that he held up the gas station but that someone else had shot Colvert. "She was not fooled," he told people later. The killing created a bond between them that seal their fate. He seemed to understand that this time together was all that they would have in life before the end. He could grab anything he wanted to give Caril and the two of them could enjoy that life for at least a little while before their time ran out. It didn't matter that their time was probably very short, what mattered is that they had this time together at all.

When the euphoria wore off, Charlie was left with some grim realities: he had been fired from his job as a garbageman; his landlady had locked him out in the freezing cold because he was past due on his rent; both his family and Caril's family were completely against their relationship and did everything they could to break it up. Caril had put on a little weight and her family was sure that she was pregnant. He was desperate.

**Next, Caril's Family**

On Tuesday afternoon, January 21, 1958, Starkweather drove over to the squalid dump that Caril and her family called home. The house and the yard were strewn with litter and unused construction materials. Charlie took the .22 rifle he had borrowed and some ammunition to the back door and knocked. Caril's mother Velda Bartlett came to the door.

What really happened afterwards is impossible to confirm. This account is based upon Starkweather's recollections after the fact. He claimed that he was carrying the rifle and ammunition in hopes that he could go hunting with Caril's stepfather, Marion Bartlett, with the goal of repairing their relationship. He also brought along with him two discarded carpet samples he found for Velda.

According to Charlie, Velda and Marion were both in the house. Their two-and-a half-year-old child, Betty Jean, was crying. Velda told Charlie they did not want him seeing Caril any more.

A loud argument followed and Velda allegedly hit Charlie a couple of times. He claimed that he left the house without the rifle and drove around for awhile before he came back to get the gun. When he came back again, Marion literally kicked him out the door.

Starkweather went to a pay phone, called Marion Bartlett's place of employment and told them that he was ill and would not be at work for a couple of days. Then he went back to Caril's house and waited for her to come home from school. When Charlie told Caril what had happened with her parents, she went into the house and argued with her mother. Starkweather followed her in the house.



Betty Jean Bartlett

He said that Velda began hitting him again, shrieking that he had made Caril pregnant. He hit Velda back and they struggled for a few minutes before Charlie got his gun. At that moment, Marion Bartlett came in the room, allegedly with a claw hammer in his hand, and Starkweather shot him in the head. Then, Charlie claimed that Velda came at him with a huge knife. Starkweather shot her in the face. As if that was not enough, he rammed the butt of the rifle into her head a couple of times when she tried to get up to reach her baby. Then Charlie hit the baby with the rifle butt.

Starkweather said that "I picked up that knife that the old lady had...started to walk in the bedroom...and the little girl kept yelling, and I told her to shut up, and I started to walk again, and just turned around and threw the kitchen knife I had at her...they said it hit her in the throat, but I thought it hit her in the chest...I went on into the bedroom. Mr. Bartlett was moving around, so I tried to stab him in the throat, but the knife wouldn't go in, and I just hit the top part of it with my hand , and it went in."

**Cover up**

Caril's reaction to and role in this slaughter was never satisfactorily determined. Since the only two living witnesses were Charlie and Caril, the real truth may never be known. Caril claimed that she had broken up with Charlie before these tragic events and was terrorized while he attacked her family.

What happened after the murder of her family defies belief.

Velda's body was dragged to the old outhouse and shoved down the toilet opening. Caril's baby half-sister was put in a box that had been used for garbage and taken out to the outhouse as well. Marion Bartlett was dumped on the floor of the chicken coop.

Once that was done, Caril and Charlie cleaned up the blood and mess inside and spent the rest of the evening drinking Pepsi and eating potato chips. They stayed there in the house, just a few yards away from the rotting corpses of Caril's family, for almost a week, buying milk and bread on credit from the milkman every day. Charlie would go down to the grocery store to buy a few other essentials.

In the days after the murders, a number of visitors came by the house. Caril turned most of them away with a sign on the front door saying, "Stay a way Every Body is sick with the Flue."

One day, Marion Bartlett's boss came to the door to see just how sick he was, but Caril came out and told him that her father was still very sick and bed ridden. Then Caril's sister Barbara Von Busch and her husband came to visit, but Caril discouraged them both with the story about the flu.

They were both suspicious and later Bob Von Busch came back with his brother to investigate. This time, the story had changed. In tears, Caril told them they had to leave. "Please don't try to get in. Mom's life will be in your hands if you do!" The Von Busch brothers went to the police.

Later, the police showed up and were told by Caril that the family had the flu. When the police asked why her brother-in-law would call the police, Caril told them that Bob Von Busch did get along well with her family. Since Caril seemed sincere and credible and not in any danger, they left. Later the Von Busches were told that there was no reason for alarm.

Bob and Barbara sent over one of Caril's close friends who heard a third story. Caril told her friend in a low whisper, "Some guy is back there with Chuck. He has a Tommy gun. I think they're going to rob a bank." The friend didn't tell the Von Busches, but did tell her father who called the police the next day.

**Discovery**

Pansy, Caril's grandmother came over to her daughter's house. Caril seemed to know that her grandmother wasn't going to fall for the flu story so she embroidered on one of the other stories she had made up. "Go home, Grandma. Oh, Granny, go away! Mommy's life is in danger if you don't."

Pansy became angry that Caril wouldn't let her in. "If you don't open this door this second, I'm going to go to town and get a search warrant. You've got Chuck in there with you, and don't try to tell me you don't!"

Caril refused to let her in and Pansy went to the police. Finally the police at Pansy's insistence went made a cursory look inside the house, even though they didn't have a warrant. The house was empty. The police were satisfied that there seemed to be no sign of disorder or violence inside the house.

Later that day, Bob Von Busch demanded that the police make a thorough search of the property, but they refused. Meanwhile, Guy Starkweather had been trying to get the police to pick up his son for questioning, but he too was refused.

Bob Von Busch and his brother went out to the Bartlett house and searched the property on their own. One look inside the outhouse and the chicken coop confirmed their worst fears. This time the police paid him some attention.

The police bulletin went out to pick up Charlie Starkweather and Caril Fugate. What the police did not appreciate was that this was just the second act of this escalating drama.

**Run and Kill**

Once Starkweather and Caril realized that they had better skip town, they also understood that Charlie's car was not going to take them very far. For one thing, the tires were shot. Charlie tried to repair the worst one before they left, but the repair didn't hold and soon they were looking for a garage.

One place they could find temporary refuge was Charlie's seventy-two-year-old family friend, August Meyer. By all accounts, August Meyer was a kindly old bachelor who had known Charlie since he was a boy. Meyer had a farm some twenty miles outside Lincoln where Charlie used to hunt. On January 27, they pulled onto the dirt track that led to Meyer's farm and immediately got mired in the mud.

It is hard to say why exactly since Caril and Charlie's stories were very contradictory and unsatisfactory but Charlie shot August Meyer in the head. As in the other murders, Charlie unconvincingly claimed that the killing occurred in self-defense. According to Charlie, Meyer tried to shoot him and the gun jammed, so Charlie shot back. Then Charlie wounded Meyer's dog as it ran away across the snowy meadow.

Charlie carried the body of his old friend into an out-building and hid it with a blanket. Then he and Caril went into Meyer's home, stole his money and guns, ate his food and fell asleep.

The next day, a neighbor helped them free their car from the mud and they drove up to Meyer's farm by a different road. When Charlie checked on the body of his friend, he was spooked by the fact that the blanket was suddenly gone. Fearing discovery, Charlie and Caril took their car down the path in which they first got stuck in the mud. Not surprisingly, the intellectually challenged couple got stuck once again. Taking only their weapons, they left the old Ford where it was.

**And Again**



Carol King and Robert Jensen

Hiding their shotguns, the two of them hitched a ride from seventeen-year-old Robert Jensen and sixteen-year-old Carol King. Within moments, the shotgun was at Jensen's neck and Charlie was demanding their money. He forced Jensen to drive back towards Meyer's farm to an abandoned storm cellar.

There, he put six bullets into Jensen's head. Jensen's girlfriend Carol King was shot once in the head. Her body was left half-naked with her jeans and panties down around her ankles. She had been stabbed repeatedly in the abdomen and pubic area, but there was no evidence of semen in or around her vagina.

While all of this was happening, Caril allegedly was sitting in the car. Charlie attributed the mutilation of King's body to Caril, who supposedly was angry with the dead girl for being attractive sexually to Starkweather. At another time, Charlie claimed that Caril also shot and killed the King girl when he was away from the scene for a few minutes.

The bodies of the two teenagers were left in the storm cellar while Charlie and Caril took off with Jensen's car. Even though they talked about escaping to Washington State to find refuge with Charlie's brother, they actually did something incredibly dumb. They drove back to Lincoln, where everybody knew them and everybody was looking for them.

As if that were not stupid enough, they drove past the Bartlett home to see if the bodies of Caril's parents had been discovered. They got their answer when they saw all of the police cars parked around the property. Eventually, they drove to the most affluent section of town and fell asleep in their stolen car.

The following day, January 28, 1958, Starkweather's car had been spotted in the mud at the Meyer farm. Shortly afterwards, the bodies of Meyer and the two teenagers were found.

A major manhunt was underway but there was more killing yet to come.

**Top of the World**



Lillian Fencl

Despite his poverty, Charlie was very familiar with the best part of town from his garbage collecting days. He chose the large home of C. Lauer Ward, a forty-seven-year-old close friend of the governor and president of the Capital Bridge and Capital Steel companies.

That morning, Clara Ward, the industrialist's socially-prominent wife, and Lillian Fencl, their hard-of hearing fifty-one-year-old maid, were home, as were their Chesapeake Bay retriever, Queenie, and their small poodle, Suzy.

When Lillian Fencl answered the door, Charlie pointed his gun at her. Caril stayed in the car. He ordered Lillian to lock up Queenie in the basement. Recognizing that the maid had a hearing problem, he wrote her notes to make himself understood. He told her to keep making breakfast for Mrs. Ward.

When Clara Ward came into the kitchen, Charlie assured her that nothing bad would happen. Clara was calm and agreed to cooperate. Charlie had Caril come into the house where Mrs. Ward had fixed some coffee for her. Then Caril went into the library and fell asleep.



Clara Ward

Charlie ordered Clara Ward to fix him some pancakes and serve them to him in the library. When she did so, he changed his mind and had her fix him waffles instead. Still, Mrs. Ward kept her cool and was gracious to Charlie all the while.

He exulted in his accomplishment one of the wealthiest residents of Lincoln was waiting on him, the former garbageman.

Around 1 p.m., Clara Ward asked permission to go upstairs and change her shoes. After a few minutes, Charlie went upstairs to see what was keeping her. He claimed that she had armed herself with a .22, shot at him and missed. Charlie threw a knife at her and struck her in the back. He stabbed her repeatedly in the neck and chest.

As he dragged Clara's body into the bedroom, Suzy started barking at him, so he broke her neck with the butt end of the gun.

After killing Clara Ward, Starkweather called his father and told his father to tell Bob Von Busch that he was going to kill him for interfering with Charlie's relationship with Caril.

Then he sat down to write a letter that was addressed to "the law only." It was a twisted illiterate tirade, confession and attempt at self-justification. "I and Caril are sorry for what has happen, cause I have hurt every body cause of it and so has caril. But I'n saying one thing every body than cane out there was luckie there not dead even caril's sister."

Later, the two of them loaded the Ward's black 1956 Packard with food and prepared to escape in style. They ransacked the house, taking anything that looked valuable.

**Spree Goes On**



C. Lauer Ward

Around 5:30 p.m., the Lincoln Journal arrived and Charlie was thrilled. "Hey, Caril get a load of this! We're stars! Made the front page of the Journal." He had reached his zenith. He was somebody to be reckoned with.

A half and hour later, C. Lauer Ward came home from work to face the barrel of Starkweather's gun. After a long scuffle, Charlie finally got the upper hand and shot the industrialist dead.

Then he turned on Lillian Fencl. Caril and Charlie tied her to a bed and stabbed her to death. Charlie claimed that Caril killed the maid, while Caril claimed that Charlie did it. Refreshingly, Charlie didn't try to justify the killing this time by claiming the maid attacked him.

The next day, Ward's cousin and business associate missed him at work and called the house throughout the morning. Then around noon time, he went over to the house and let himself in. He found the bodies of Ward and his wife and the maid. Downstairs, Queenie barked furiously and upstairs Suzy cowered under the bed with a broken neck.

Governor Anderson was notified immediately of the savage attack on his friend. Shortly afterwards, he called out the National Guard, "and they were soon cruising the streets with jeeps armed with mounted machine guns. Parents with guns drawn rushed to the schools and took their children home. The city was completely sealed off. A block by block search began. The FBI started an investigation. A thousand-dollar reward was offered by the mayor. Aircraft were sent up to help look for the Wards' black Packard." (Allen)

**Finale**

And where did these clever outlaws run? Why, back to Caril's parents' house, of course! Yes, they really did. But wisely, they didn't go inside because there was a car in the driveway and the house was lighted up. Somehow, they finally got the message that they could not go back and live at the Bartlett house anymore and headed west towards Washington State.

They drove all night and crossed over into Wyoming the next morning, the 29th of January 1958. Twice they were reported to the police as acting suspicious, but nothing came of either report. Along the way they looked for a car to steal and finally came across Merle Collison, a travelling Montana shoe salesman, who was sleeping in his Buick, parked along the highway.

Charlie woke up the salesman to announce that they were going to trade cars, but the shoe salesman apparently didn't agree quickly enough because Charlie shot him a number of times in the head, neck, arm and leg. Since it was a tough stretch of the imagination to expect anyone to believe that Charlie shot Merle Collison in self-defense, Charlie said that Caril did it.

With Collison dead in the front passenger seat and Caril in the back, Starkweather started the car, but could not figure out how to release the emergency brake. A few minutes later, a young geologist stopped to help the couple, figuring that they had car trouble.

"Raise your hands," Charlie told the man, pointing the gun at him. "Help me release the emergency brake or I'll kill you."

When the geologist saw the dead man slumped in the passenger seat, he realized that he would have to get the gun away from Starkweather if he wanted to stay alive. While they were struggling, William Romer, a Wyoming deputy sheriff, came by and stopped.

**The Chase**



Caril in custody

Immediately, Caril jumped out of the back seat and ran up to Romer. "Take me to the police!" she cried.

"Well, I'm a deputy sheriff," he assured her.

"He's killed a man," she blurted out, crying and pointing to the car.

By this time, Charlie had run to the Packard and was driving back towards the town of Douglas. Romer ordered a roadblock and began his pursuit. Douglas Police Chief Robert Ainslie, who happened to be in his car with Sheriff Earl Heflin of Converse County, Wyoming, received Romer's call.

When the Packard raced by them on the road to Douglas, the two men chased it at speeds exceeding 100 miles per hour. Heflin shot out the back window of the Packard with his carbine. Suddenly, Starkweather came to an abrupt halt right in the middle of the highway.

The two seasoned lawmen pulled up behind the Packard cautiously and waited until Starkweather got out. They told Charlie to put his hands up, but he didn't, so Ainslee shot the ground near Charlie's feet. This time Ainslie told him to lie down on the ground, but instead Charlie reached in back of his pants. Thinking that Charlie was reaching for a weapon in his back pocket, Ainslie shot at him again. By this time, Charlie decided to stop tucking in his shirttail and lay down like he was told to.

Why did he suddenly stop? Because he thought he had been shot. In actuality, the bleeding around his ear was a cut from the broken window glass. Heflin was disgusted. "He thought he was bleeding to death. That's why he stopped. That's the kind of yellow sonofabitch he is."

Yellow or not, he photographed well in a Hollywood-kind of way. "Bloodied, in chains, shaggy-haired, a cigarette dangling from his lips, wearing his black leather motorcycle jacket, tight black denim pants, blue and white cowboy boots with a butterfly design on the toes he was a perfect-looking young rebel-killer." (Allen) The first American teenage spree killer caught on camera.



**[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Starkweather.jpg)**

**Reckoning**

From Charlie's perspective, his options were not terribly attractive. He believed that he could go to the gas chamber in Wyoming for the murder of Merle Collison or he could go to the electric chair in Nebraska for his many killings there.� He chose Nebraska and he and Caril were extradited at the end of January 1958. What he didn't know and nobody thought to tell him was that had he stayed in Wyoming, he probably would have received a life sentence. The Wyoming governor was a death penalty opponent.

Caril, meanwhile, maintained that she was a hostage throughout the entire ordeal and that she kept going with Charlie because she feared that he would kill her family if she didn't. The only problem with that story was that she admitted being present for all of the Nebraska murders that included her parents and half-sister. So much for going with Charlie to save her family.



Body of Jensen, shot 6 times in the head

Charlie and Caril were both charged with first degree murder and murder while committing a robbery. Since both were being tried as adults, both faced the prospect of the electric chair. The prosecution chose the murder of Robert Jensen on which to try them since it had the most potential to shock and outrage the jury. Elmer Scheele was the prosecutor.

Charlie's trial began on May 5, 1958. He did nothing to improve his prospects. He maintained that he was completely sane while his lawyers were trying desperately to cobble together the makings of an insanity defense. Nevertheless, his defense lawyers entered a plea of "innocent by reason of insanity." To Charlie and his family, the stigma of being insane was worse that the stigma of being a cold-blooded murderer.

T. Clement Gaughan and William F. Matschullat were appointed by the court to perform the difficult task of defending Charlie. Somehow they had to try to show that Starkweather was completely insane. Whereas, the prosecutor had an easy comparatively easy task: to demonstrate that Charlie was sane when he robbed and killed Jensen.

Initially, Charlie told the authorities that Caril had nothing to do with the crimes. His first words to them on the subject when he was being taken to the jail in Douglas, Wyoming were, "Don't' be rough on the girl. She didn't have a thing to do with it."

**A Plea for Mercy**

As time went on and Charlie realized that Caril was trying to position herself as an unwilling hostage instead of his girlfriend, he began to implicate her in the crimes. He suggested that she was responsible for several of the murders and all of the mutilations.

"She could have escaped at any time she wanted," Starkweather said. "I left her alone lots of times. Sometimes when I would go in and get hamburgers she would be sitting in the car with all of the guns. There would have been nothing to stop her from running away."

One of the defense attorneys with a gift for acting, Clement Gaughan, made a very emotional plea. "This boy is a product of our society. Our society that spawned this individual is looking for a scapegoat. Caril Fugate should get the same punishment as this lad, and I can tell you right now that she is never going to get the death penalty. His life, my life are almost parallels until our nineteenth birthday. I stand here and weep unashamedly. I hated everybody and everything and I could lick anybody. Society treated me exactly as it treated Charles Starkweather, but the good Lord gave me, possibly, a little better parents.

"I will take you to the death house so you can see him with his trousers cut to the knees, with his arms bare, his head shaved, with electrodes attached. And when the switch is pulled, you will see the electricity snap and the smoke come from his head, his hair stand on end as the electricity goes through his body. You will see him jerk in the straps and see him fall forward. This is your responsibility, not mine. Ladies and gentleman, I ask you for the life of Charles Starkweather."

Unfortunately, Gaughan was not Clarence Darrow; Charlie was neither Nathan Leopold nor Dickie Loeb; and there was a jury of twelve people, not just a judge to make that decision.

The jury made its decision within twenty-four hours: guilty on both counts of first degree murder. The men and women of the jury specifically asked for the death penalty. Their request was granted June 25th, 1959.



Starkweather as prisoner

At Caril's trial, the defense was built upon her being a hostage, forced by Starkweather to go with him on his murder spree. It was not a very credible defense and, she, like Charlie, was found guilty of murder on November 28, 1958.

Because she was a fourteen-year-old girl, she received a life sentence instead of the electric chair. She was sent to the Nebraska Center for Women where she served her sentence until her parole in June of 1976.