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FOCUS

VICTIM, from 1A

drain cleaner was poured into the eyes and mouth of a 68-year-old victim. One woman was thrown off a bridge into Tampa Bay, and another was tossed into Lake Monroe. Both were rescued hours later by fishermen.

"When I was in the hospital, this one deputy told me, he says, 'Mrs. Anderson, I promise you, when we get him, we won't bring him in alive,'" she said. "Later I was told that the only reason he was brought in alive was because the FBI was in on it."

Thomas was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to die in the electric chair. Nov. 30, he has lived more than 2,000 days and nights on Death Row, one of 192 men caged in 6-by-8-foot cells on R and S wings at the Florida State Prison 11 miles north of State.

No other state in this nation has, or has ever had, more condemned men waiting to be executed.

"The only thing I'm worried about is just the amount of pain before I die," Thomas told the Winter Haven News Chief this summer. "They put you in the chair and they turn what more than about 4,000 watts of power to you? You've got to sit there for over a minute and a half trying to die."

LIFE TOGETHER for Betty Cannon and Charles Lamar Anderson began at a radio rodeo on Sunday, his 17th birthday, Mother's Day, May 14, 1944. She was sweet 16, and both were crazy about horses.

His smile and his green eyes are what did it to me, she said. "He rode the bulls and did some calf-roping. My best friend, who introduced me to Charles, her sister was married to one of my husband's cousins. So we just found out that it was quite a small world, even if I did live in Clearwater and he lived in Largo."

Family roots — the McMillens, the Booths, the Kilgors — were deep in the pioneer soil of Pinellas County. Charles completed his bachelor's degree in 1948 and was later graduated from the University of Florida with a degree in agricultural economics. The groom was 22 and the bride was 21.

"He was the kind of person that if he couldn't say something good about somebody, he didn't say anything. The only time I ever heard him talk against anybody were politicians," said Mrs. Anderson. "I don't know of anybody who did not like him, and I'm not saying this just because he's dead and gone."

Charles was both a soldier and a sailor during World War II and later returned to Gainesville to earn a master's degree in agriculture. He was an associate professor in agricultural economics and a staff member on the University of Florida's extension service in Lake Alfred.

"We had a good life. We had bad times like anybody else. In our younger years we had financial problems and worries and children that got sick and a lot of doctor bills," said Mrs. Anderson. "But somehow, it always worked out OK."

Charles worked with 4-H Club youngsters and was on the board of directors of the Polk County Youth Fair. "He loved young people and they loved him," she said. And along came their two children, John, now 30, and Kathy, 25, and their dream home, between Polk City and Lake Alfred.

"That home was what we always wanted," she said. They kept two horses, two dogs and two goats. "The closest neighbor was a mile and a half away. We liked it that way. We liked the fact that we didn't have any close neighbors to complain about the animals."

Even the animals led by the Sport, the cut-up horse, were chums of Charles. "My husband was building the barn out there and he laid his hammer down behind him and he kept reaching back and couldn't find it," said Mrs. Anderson. "Finally, he turned around and there stood Sport with the hammer in his mouth."

And when Charles returned from the hospital and shoulder surgery, went out to get some wood for a fire, she said, and I left the door open. Before I could stop them, both goats were in the house and in the living room to see my husband."

The Anderson children grew and began families of their own, leaving their parents behind with the horses, the goats and the dogs — Catur, a 5-month-old shepherd-dog, and Sealy, a dachshund. The younger child, Kathy, married and moved out just 36 days before New Year's Day, 1978. "Thank God she was not home that night," said her mother.

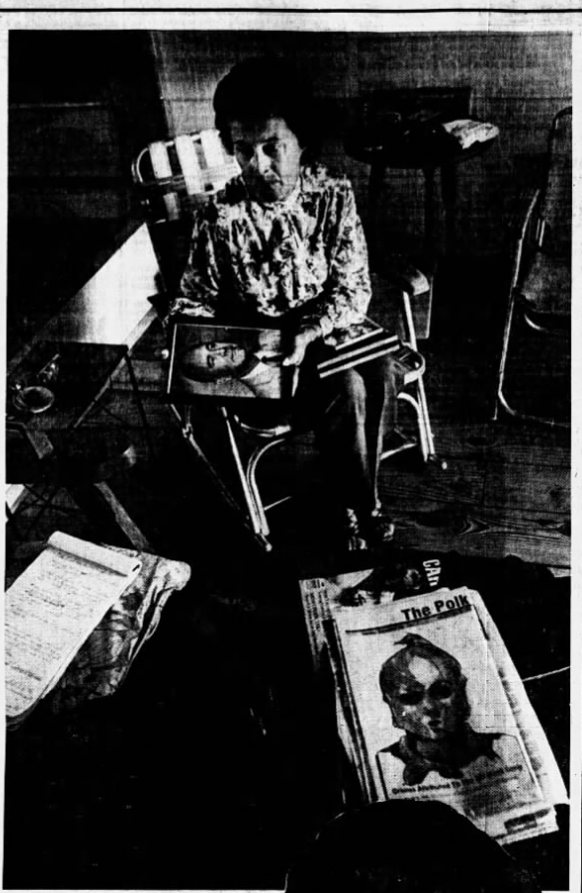
Charles Lamar Anderson, dead at 48, was buried in Largo Cemetery on his daughter's 19th birthday, Jan. 4, 1978, 28 days before the 20th anniversary of the day he married his childhood sweetheart.

"He used to say he wanted to be cremated and have his ashes scattered over the Everglades," said the widow Anderson. "He loved the Everglades. I'd say, 'You'll have to put that in your will. Otherwise, you're going to go straight to Largo or you precede me.' We were joking, you know, but Charles came home to Largo."

DANIEL MORRIS THOMAS, a black man from Mississippi, was taken from his home when he was 7, a year after he saw his mother raped by white men, he said and he lived his youth in a series of foster homes.

When Thomas was a kid, a white sheriff's deputy bullied him for taking food from a garbage can, said his court-appointed attorney, Robert Byrd of Lake Alfred. Thomas carries deep scars on his legs from that beating.

"If he has done these horrendous



Betty Anderson, in Largo, talks about her rape; she holds photo of slain husband Charles; in foreground is article about Ski Mask Gang



Anderson, '76 victim of Death Row convict, smiles now at 7-month-old grandniece, Lindsay

Photos by Bill Reinke of The Miami News

things, he's a monster that was created by society," said Byrd. "The deprivation and total dehumanization of his entire being may explain why he's exceedingly anti-white."

All 17 of the attacks on rural homes in central Florida during 1975 and early 1976 involved white victims. The three other black members of the Ski Mask Gang were convicted and sentenced to prison terms of up to 200 years.

"The death of Charles L. Anderson was a blessing compared to the agony this defendant inflicted on Betty Anderson," said Circuit Judge E. F. Thorsdahl when he sentenced Thomas to die in the electric chair.

Last Sept. 28, Gov. Bob Graham signed Thomas' death warrant, but scheduled Oct. 22 execution was stayed by a federal judge in

Tampa until the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta resolves an issue concerning the Florida Supreme Court's review of Thomas' sentence.

The issue is whether the state's high court violated the constitutional rights of Thomas and more than 130 other Death Row inmates by considering their psychiatric evaluations without informing their attorneys.

On New Year's Day, 1976, Thomas had been free on parole from convictions four years earlier for burglary and armed robbery. He had served three and a half years at Union Correctional Institution across the New River, and down the road a mile toward Rafters from the Florida State Prison and his current home, Death Row.

UP JUMPED GATOR, snarling and growling and halting the Orange Bowl game. Oklahoma vs. Michigan, in the Anderson living room 30 minutes before midnight.

"That's when we first knew that he was in the house," Mrs. Anderson said. "I had had my bath and was stretched out in my gown and robe on the couch and was dozing. I looked up and saw a flash." The doorman had been shot, limped from the room, but lived.

Charles Anderson, 5-foot-0, 165 pounds, lunged at the man in the ski mask, but was mortally wounded by four bullets. Another shot and Sealy, the yappy dachshund, lay dead. And then the killer turned his attention to the woman of the house.

"After he had satisfied himself with me, he made me go into the

bedroom and shower and he made me stay in there for about 30 minutes, while he was ransacking our bedroom," said Mrs. Anderson. The killer took her in the Anderson car to a nearby grove, where he loaded his loot into his own car. He then drove her back to the house, tied her up in the par and left, about two hours after his came in through the bedroom window. Mrs. Anderson freed herself, crept into her home where her husband lay dead and called Polk City police.

The killer had remained hidden behind the door ski mask, and the first time Mrs. Anderson stared into the face of Daniel Morris Thomas, he was on trial for his life.

"I told the officers when they asked me if I could identify him. Yes, if I could see him without his clothes on. I can identify him. They

did not allow that, but I did tell them about some scars on his legs," she said. "Then they found several of my husband's things in his possession, along with the watch he took from me."

Mrs. Anderson caught pneumonia that night in the 46-degree chill. She fled to the safety of relatives in Ohio to recover for awhile and when she returned to Florida, she sank into depression.

"A lot of victims of traumatic crimes like this do everything in their power to forget it," she said, pulling hard on a mental cigar. "I know, because I did it for over three years. I drank heavily. I don't drink at all before. I could not turn the light off and go to sleep before 2, 3 o'clock in the morning. I just wanted to hide and hibernate and I wished I could die. Many times I wished to be had hit with a train."

A new life rescued her from death. Daughter Kathy gave birth May 26, 1979, to her first child, Garrett. "What pulled me out of it was that baby, that little boy," said grandmother. "I was needed again. My daughter needed me and that baby needed me."

So John and his wife have three children and all four Anderson grandchildren were born on Mother's Day, 1978. "They'll never know the joy of going fishing with their granddaddy," said Betty Anderson.

WHEN SHE TALKS about Daniel Morris Thomas, she squeezes her thin mouth into a sour frown and her eyes harden ice-green. "I want to see him executed. I believe that any person who has done the things he's done deserves to die. I firmly believe this. It's not being in a society with law-abiding citizens."

Mrs. Anderson took 10,000 signatures on petitions collected across Central Florida to a Tallahassee on Sept. 14, urging Gov. Graham to order Thomas' execution. The governor complied. Graham, re-elected Nov. 2 to a second four-year term on a law-and-order stance, has signed 45 black-bordered death warrants since he was elected in 1978, but only one man has been executed while he is in office. The electrocution of John Spenshale on May 25, 1979, is the only time the electric chair has been used in Florida since 1964.

In the 38 states with capital punishment laws, 1,104 prisoners have been condemned to die — 1,081 men and 13 women, including 564 whites, 172 blacks and 18 Hispanics, according to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, which keeps such statistics. Behind Florida's 193 Death Row population, Texas is second with 153 and Georgia is third with 120.

A Justice Department official predicts that condemned inmates may be executed, beginning in 1983, at the fastest pace since the Great Depression.

"The situation is ripe for the nation to witness executions at a rate approaching the more than three per week that prevailed during the 1930s," said Benjamin Renshaw, head of the federal department's Bureau of Justice Statistics. "We will then have a grim arena in which to conduct our national debate on the efficiency of the death penalty."

That's fine with Betty Anderson: "It's going to make me and a lot of other victims feel like justice is finally being done."

The legal options are running out for Thomas and the 182 other men on Florida's Death Row, and the majority await with hope the 11th U.S. Circuit Court decision on their fate.

"There's something terribly, terribly wrong with our justice system when a federal court has been sitting on this thing for two and a half years," said Mrs. Anderson. "Why do we have local judges and juries and a governor and a Florida Supreme Court, when some federal judge can walk in and say, 'No, you're all wrong? They ought to pass a bill to limit the time these prisoners are using to get their stays of execution. One prisoner has been up there on Death Row for 10 years. Three years is plenty of time for them to make all their appeals.'"

A YEAR AFTER her husband was murdered, Betty Anderson sold the dream home that became a death house. "I tried to go back there and live but it just didn't work. The fear drove away all the good feelings about the place," she said.

Her son wants his name on the list to witness the execution of the man convicted of killing his father. "I believe Gov. Graham is doing the right thing," said John Anderson. "That's a way I voted for him. I think he ought to sign the death warrants, one every morning for breakfast until they're all executed."

Mrs. Anderson keeps a gun under the seat of her car for protection and she thinks dark thoughts about Daniel Morris Thomas.

"I'm not so sure that if I had the opportunity that I wouldn't just be the trigger on him," she said, combing her shoulder-length hair with the fingers of her right hand. "I don't mean the electric chair. On the electric chair, I'm talking about a gun. I'm almost positive I could do that."

She considered that image for a moment and her face took up an abetted her car onto the dirt road of Largo Cemetery and drove to the grave of Charles Lamar Anderson. There is room for her beside him, under a water cast tree lined with Spanish moss.

"All I would have to think about is my husband's last look," she said. "There's nothing the funeral home could do. My car has had so many hits. His hands were clenched in fists and the look on his face was horrible. It was not Charles. There was nothing else on his face."

TOMORROW, The con-