

Resources:**Conviction List:
Ritual Child Abuse****Ritual Abuse, Ritual
Crime
and Healing**

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Conviction List: Ritual Child Abuse

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Many ritual child abuse cases never are prosecuted due to the disbelief of authorities or the unlikelihood that young, severely traumatized children will be able to withstand cross-examination. A 1993 survey by the American Bar Association's Center on Children and Family Law determined that 26 percent of prosecutors nationwide have handled cases involving "ritualistic or sexual abuse." (Ross, 1994). The ritualistic aspects of the crimes often are not presented in court but are clearly indicated in the victims' accounts.*

Arkansas**West Memphis**

Three teenagers were convicted in the cult killings of three 8-year-old boys. Michael Wayne "Damien" Echols, 19, and Charles Jason Baldwin, 16, were convicted March 18, 1994, on three counts each of capital murder. (Chicago Tribune, 1994). A jury recommended the death penalty for Echols and life in prison without parole for Baldwin. (Sullivan, 1994). A third teenager, Jessie Lloyd Misskelley, Jr., 18, was convicted in February 1994, of one count of first-degree murder and two counts of second-degree murder. He is serving a prison sentence of life plus 40 years. (Beifuss, 1994)

Misskelley confessed to his role in the killings, telling police the murders were linked to a cult ritual that included the rape and mutilation of victims. (Chicago Tribune, 1993). West Memphis police detective Bryn Ridge testified that elements in the case pointed to the work of a satanic cult. (Sullivan, 1994).

Steve Branch, Christopher Byers and Michael Moore disappeared while riding their bicycles in

May 1993. Their nude bodies were found the next day in a drainage ditch. The boys had been bound, raped and beaten. (Chicago Tribune, 1993). One child had been sexually mutilated. One witness testified that one of the defendants drank the victim's blood. (Sullivan, 1994).

During the trial prosecutors presented evidence suggesting that Echols was a satanist. Acquaintances said Echols carried a cat's skull to school, wrote satanic poems, and claimed to worship the devil. (Chicago Tribune, 1993). During his first police interview Echols told Detective Ridge that his favorite author was Anton LaVey, author of *The Satanic Bible*. (Sullivan, 1994). Mental health records indicate that Echols' parents expressed concern about his possible involvement in "satanism or devil worship" when he was hospitalized in 1992. Just four months prior to the murders a clinician noted: "Damien explained that he obtains his powers by drinking blood of others." (Sullivan, 1994).

One item brought to the attention of police was an underground newsletter published by a cousin of Echols' 16-year-old girlfriend. The 1991 edition of the *Secret Order of the Undead* or "SOUND" featured a drawing of a winged demon molesting a woman, a list of 13 songs "suitable to accompany any ritualistic murder" and a column instructing children on how to build a homemade land mine. (Perrusquia, 1993).

California

Bakersfield

Alvin and Deborah McCuan, Scott and Brenda Kniffen, and Rodney and Linda Phelps (parents of Deborah McCuan) were indicted in 1982 on charges of sexually molesting children. The alleged victims included their own children, traded between families and used for group sex, as well as children from the Bluebird troop run by Deborah McCuan and the unlicensed day care facility in her home. The McCuans and Kniffens were convicted on all counts in 1983, drawing aggregate prison terms in excess of 1,000 years. The Phelps fled town and disappeared after being charged with 33 counts.

Ritual elements in the case were ignored by authorities at the time. (Newton, 1996).

In August 1996, a judge overturned the child molestation convictions of Alvin and Deborah McCuan and Scott and Brenda Kniffen.** (Northwest Herald, August 14, 1996).

A second intrafamilial child-sex ring was exposed and prosecuted in Bakersfield, with trials continuing into 1985. Five adult defendants were convicted, including: Richard Cox, 47 (14 counts); Ruth Ann Taylor, 31 (14 counts); Anthony Cox, 25 (7 counts); George Cox, 24 (7 counts); and Theresa Cox, 21 (3 counts). Prison terms ranged from 10 to 41 years. (Newton, 1996).

Seven defendants in another Bakersfield child-sex ring were convicted in August 1985, with multiple charges including child molestation and endangerment, assault with a deadly weapon, and production of child pornography. Wayne Forsythe, 28, was convicted on 41 separate counts. Other defendants, each convicted on a minimum of 50 counts, included Forsythe's wife, Colleen Dill Forsythe, 26; Ricky Pitts, 31, and his wife Marcella Pitts, 29; Wayne Dill, 26 (Colleen

Forsythe's brother); Grace Dill, 50 (mother of Colleen Forsythe and Wayne Dill); and Gina Miller. Cumulative prison sentences in the case came to 2,100 years. (Newton, 1996).

Leroy George Stowe III was convicted on 16 counts of child molestation and sentenced to 30 years in March 1985. Shortly after his conviction, victims in the case expanded their disclosures to include graphic descriptions of satanic ritual abuse and murders, involving nine more defendants.

In January 1987, Gerardo Gonzales (facing 117 charges) pleaded no contest to one count of molesting a 5-year-old girl, and Rev. Willard Lee Thomas (facing 43 charges) pleaded no contest on two counts, including child endangerment and unlawful sexual intercourse with a 17-year-old girl. Both defendants were released from jail on the basis of time served, and charges against the remaining defendants were dismissed as part of their plea bargain.

In February 1987, a California appeals court reversed Leroy Stowe's conviction on 12 of 16 felony counts, with the grounds cited as a technical insufficiency in the pleadings.** (Newton, 1996).

San Diego County

Robert S. Wilkins, 38, and Lori Elizabeth Bartz, 22, were convicted in July 1987 on 8 counts of sexual abuse involving children from Bartz's unlicensed day-care center. The original list of charges, dating back to 1984, included 92 counts of sex acts forced upon girls aged 10 to 15. The victims described displays of weapons, threats, and occult rituals in which Bartz pretended to channel the voice of Satan, telling the children "This is the devil; do as I say." Both defendants received long prison terms. (Newton, 1996).

Santa Rosa

Darryl Ball and Charlotte Thraikill plea bargained on molestation charges and were sentenced to substantial prison terms. The prosecutor's opening statement referred to the ritual aspect of the crimes, and child victims described satanic ceremonies which included ritual murders.

Colorado

Akron

Philip and Michael Schmidt pleaded guilty to molesting children attending the day care center operated by their grandmother, Hazel Riggs, who was sentenced on a lesser charge. A Denver Post report on the case included ritual allegations by a child victim.

Denver

William L. Acree, former heroin addict and operator of a halfway house for juvenile delinquents, was convicted in February 1983, on two counts of prostituting children and one count of sexually assaulting a child. Acree was sentenced to 90 days in jail, with 5 years suspended on the condition that he undergo psychiatric counseling for at least 4 years.

The victims were male, ages 10 - 17 years old, who displayed satanic tattoos and described themselves as members of Acree's "coven." (Newton, 1996).

Connecticut

Bridgeport

Kerri Lynn Patavino, 28, a school bus driver, was convicted in August 1996 of statutory rape for seducing a 14-year-old boy who said she engaged him in strange rituals during sex. (Northwest Herald, 1996).

The boy testified that Patavino once cut her arm with a razor blade and forced him to lick her blood. According to police, Patavino sent the boy love letters decorated with occult symbols and signed in her blood. During the trial, Patavino wore a pentagram medallion around her neck. (The News-Times, 1996).

Patavino was sentenced to six years in prison. (Northwest Herald, 1996).

Florida

Dade County

Francisco Fuster, 36, was convicted in 1985 on 14 counts of child abuse and sentenced to a minimum of 165 years in prison. Fuster had previously been convicted of lewd and lascivious assault on a 9-year-old girl and had served four years in prison for homicide. More than 50 children accused Fuster and his wife, Iliana, of abuse that included feces-eating, drugging, pornography, animal killings and anal rape with a crucifix. Fuster's 7-year-old son was treated for gonorrhea of the throat.

Iliana Fuster, a 17-year-old native of Honduras, also claimed to have been battered and sexually abused by Fuster. She confessed to her role in the crimes against the children and testified against her husband. Iliana Fuster received a 10-year sentence. (Hollingsworth, 1986).

Stuart

James Toward, 58, owner of Glendale Montessori School, pleaded guilty to child sexual abuse charges and received a 15-year sentence. His office manager, Brenda Williams, 30, was convicted in 1989 and sentenced to 6 years in prison.

Children described being threatened with guns and knives, photographed for pornographic purposes, and forced to participate in sadistic rituals. (The Orlando Sentinel, 1989).

Georgia

Hapeville

Walter P. West, Jr., a former juvenile officer, pleaded guilty on June 20, 1994, to 33 counts of sexual abuse. West was sentenced to 20 years in prison, 20 years probation, and ordered never to be alone with children.

Prosecutors said that West engaged in oral and anal sex with as many as 13 children, fondled them, forced them to engage in sex acts with other children, and filmed the assaults. Most of his victims were pre-adolescent children who had problems at school and with the law. The youngest victim named in the indictment was six years old. (The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution, 1994).

According to a case overview prepared by a special education teacher who reported the abuse, some of the children said West forced them to engage in bestiality and exposed them to animal killings. Other adults in the community were implicated but no additional arrests were made. (McCullers, 1994).

Illinois

Danville

Robbie Moore, a self-avowed "warlock," was convicted on January 30, 1997, of three counts of aggravated criminal sexual assault and one count of aggravated criminal sexual abuse. Moore, 28, of Danville, Illinois, was arrested in June 1996 when several children, some as young as 4 years old, complained of being sexually abused after joining an informal witchcraft club led by Moore and Kimberly Harris. Harris, 26, pleaded guilty in October 1996 to fondling a 13-year-old girl and is serving a 7-year prison term.

Sgt. John Howard, a juvenile officer with the Vermilion County Sheriff's Department, said that "there appeared to be a connection" between the sexual abuse and what he called "occult activity." Prosecutors said Moore talked about black magic to both lure and terrorize his victims.

Moore was sentenced to 67 years in prison. (Kelley, 1997 and S.O.A.R., 1997).

Iowa

Edgewood

Michael Joseph Schildmeyer, 22, was convicted on second-degree sexual abuse of a 4-year-old boy and sentenced to 25 years in prison. The child testified that Schildmeyer abused him at the Sunshine Preschool and Day Care Center operated by Schildmeyer's wife. The unlicensed center was shut down by the state after children began disclosing ritualistic acts involving stuffed animal decapitations, animal killings, and bondage with ropes and chains. (Hubert, 1989).

Massachusetts

Malden

Gerald Amirault, 32, was convicted in 1986 of 15 counts of child abuse, including rape and indecent assault, and sentenced to 30 to 40 years in prison. Nine children who attended the Fells Acre Day Care Center testified that Amirault sexually assaulted them in a "magic room" while dressed as a clown. One child testified that small animals were killed. (Ross, 1986).

His mother, Violet Amirault, 62, owner of the school, and her daughter, Cheryl Amirault LeFave, were given 8- to 20-year sentences.

In August 1995, a judge ordered new trials for Violet Amirault and Cheryl Amirault LeFave.** (Rabinowitz, 1995).

On March 24, 1997, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts ruled against granting new trials for Violet Amirault, Gerald Amirault and Cheryl LeFave. The court determined that any flaws at trial were outweighed by the evidence presented by the prosecution. (The Survivor Activist, 1997).

Pittsfield

Bernard Baran, Jr., a 19-year-old teacher's aide at a day care center, was convicted of child molestation in January 1985. He was sentenced to life, with parole possible in 15 years. Children testified that he threatened to kill their parents if they disclosed the abuse. (Newton, 1996).

Michigan

Niles

Allan Barkman, co-owner of Small World Preschool, was convicted in April, 1985, of molesting a 5-year-old boy and sentenced to 50 to 75 years in prison. Children told authorities they were driven to barns where Barkman photographed them and tore off the head of a chicken. Children said Barkman's wife, who was not charged, dressed up as a witch. (Ross, 1986). Barkman's conviction was later reversed on appeal.** (Newton, 1996).

Sanilac County

On October 20, 1994, Stephen Rogers, 30, and his live-in girlfriend, Trudy O'Connor, 32, were found guilty of first-degree child abuse of a 9-year-old girl. The girl, Roger's daughter, was found in a dark walk-in closet by Sanilac County sheriff's deputies. The child was shackled by her ankle to a urine-soaked bed. Her arms had been tied behind her back with a harness made of socks and safety pins. The only other thing in the closet was a large, frightening Halloween mask, which hung directly over the bed.

Family members said that Rogers and O'Connor believed the child was "possessed." The girl's maternal grandmother reported suspected sexual abuse in 1989 and 1990, after the little girl returned from visiting Rogers. A medical examination confirmed scar tissue. Teachers from the girl's school testified that she appeared malnourished, had bruises, cuts and burns on her body, and often smelled of urine. (Flint Journal, 1994).

Minnesota

Jordan

James John Rud, a 27-year-old garbage collector with two previous sex abuse convictions, agreed to plead guilty and testify against other defendants accused of abusing children in sex orgies, in exchange for a lighter sentence. Rud gave police a 113-page statement in which he graphically

described sadistic assaults on children. (Emmerman, 1984).

Children ranging in age from 2 to 17 years old described being molested by their parents, relatives and family friends during ritualistic orgies. The children talked about playing games with adults that culminated in sexual assaults and said they had been drugged with alcohol and pills. Many referred to being photographed nude and of seeing child pornography in Rud's trailer. (Crewdson, 1984).

In addition to Rud, 24 adults were charged with molesting 37 children. (Emmerman, 1984). Two defendants were tried and acquitted when one child witness recanted his accusation of abuse. (Chicago Tribune, 1984). The prosecutor dropped the charges against all other defendants to avoid releasing 126 pages of police notes containing allegations that implicated some of the former defendants in ritualistic child murders. (Ogintz, 1984).

In January 1985, Rud was sentenced to 40 years in prison, the maximum sentence allowable by law. (Chicago Tribune, 1985).

Mississippi

Oxford

Danny Walter Schertz, 48, a self-avowed former satanist, was sentenced to 9 years in prison without parole for selling a 16-year-old girl into prostitution. Schertz pleaded guilty to charges of kidnapping by trickery and transporting a minor across state lines for prosecution.

F.B.I. agent Leonardo Floyd of Columbus, Mississippi, said Schertz controlled the girl with stories of his satanic powers and threats of harm to the girl and her family. Schertz forced the girl to have satanic symbols tattooed onto her leg and buttocks and to have body piercings in her private parts without anesthesia. (Kraft, 1996).

Nevada

Carson City

Martha Helen Felix and her nephew, Felix "Paco" Ontiveros, were convicted of crimes against children who were placed in their babysitting service. At a preliminary hearing in 1985, children referred to drinking blood, killing animals, and other rituals. Defendants' photographs of "mummified children" were produced at the hearing. (Ross, 1986).

These convictions were later reversed on appeal.**

New Jersey

Maplewood

Margaret Kelly Michaels, a teacher at the Wee Care Nursery operated by an Episcopal Church was convicted in April 1988 on 115 counts of child sexual abuse and sentenced to 47 years in prison. Nineteen preschool-aged children testified that Michaels sexually abused them and subjected them to rituals involving urine, feces, peanut butter and jelly, bloody tampons and penetration with silverware.

Her conviction was overturned in March 1993 by an appeals court on the grounds that Michaels was denied a fair trial because expert testimony was introduced that should not have been allowed and because child witnesses were allowed to testify via closed-circuit TV.** (Chicago Tribune, 1993).

In December 1994, prosecutors dropped the charges against Michaels in order to spare the children the ordeal of testifying in a second trial. (Chicago Tribune, 1994).

Michaels is suing the prosecutors, seeking \$800,000 in attorneys fees. (Chicago Tribune, 1996).

New York

Mount Vernon

Jeannette Martin, 51, was accused of holding children down while they were raped and sodomized at an unlicensed day care center. Martin was convicted on a misdemeanor child endangerment charge in February 1987, and sentenced to one year in jail.

Co-defendant James Watt, 31, was convicted on 11 rape counts, 5 sodomy counts and one count of child endangerment, and sentenced to 55 - 165 years in prison. In January 1992, an appellate court split 3 to 2 in favor of overturning Watts' conviction on the grounds that the dates of the offenses alleged in the indictment were "too vague." ** Two dissenting judges voted to uphold the conviction on 6 counts related to a single victim, but were overruled.

Three female victims were diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases. (New York Times and New York Law Journal).

North Carolina

Edenton

Robert F. Kelly, Jr., co-owner of the Little Rascals Day Care Center, was convicted in 1992 on 99 of 100 counts of sexually abusing children. Kelly was sentenced to 12 consecutive life terms, one for each child who testified against him. (Chicago Tribune, April 23-24, 1992).

Twelve children testified that Kelly sexually molested them, forced them to have sex with other children while being photographed, and engaged in sexual acts in the presence of children. The children described being forced to eat feces, threatened with snakes, penetrated with toys, sticks and other objects, hung from trees and tied in bags, and being present while infants were killed. (Allegood, 1991-1992).

Kelly's conviction was overturned on appeal in 1995.** The court ruled that parents' testimony about children's behavioral symptoms was outside the boundaries of permissible opinion from lay witnesses and that testimony from a victim's father, who had previously been retained as Kelly's defense attorney, should not have been allowed. (Richissin, 1995).

On May 23, 1997, prosecutors dropped all remaining charges against Robert F. Kelly, Jr. and Kathryn Dawn Wilson. Assistant District Attorney Nancy Lamb said the children's parents were reluctant to put them through the ordeal of another trial. (Thompson, 1997). Kelly is awaiting trial on eight new counts of sexual abuse unrelated to the day care case. The eight new indictments charge Kelly with raping, abusing and taking indecent liberties with a 9-year-old girl

during the summer of 1987. Kelly is free on bond while awaiting trial. (News & Observer, 1996).

Kathryn Dawn Wilson, 27, former cook at Little Rascals, was sentenced in 1993 to life in prison after being convicted of one charge of first-degree sex offense and four charges of taking indecent liberties with a minor. Four children testified that Wilson touched their genitals, forced them to participate in sexual acts, and had sex with Kelly in front of children. (Allegood, 1993).

Wilson's appeal for a new trial was granted because information about an "irrelevant" theft and Wilson's history of drug abuse was prejudicial and should have been excluded.** (Richissin, 1995).

Kelly's wife, Elizabeth T. "Betsy" Kelly, 38, pleaded no contest on January 21, 1994, to 30 charges of abusing 16 children. She was sentenced to seven years in prison. (Allegood, 1994).

Willard Scott Privott, 45, a former video store owner, pleaded no contest June 16, 1994, to over 30 charges of sexually abusing children at the Little Rascals Day Care Center. Sixteen children said that Privott sexually fondled them, forced them to commit sexual acts with other children, with him and with day care employees, and photographed and videotaped the assaults. (Quillin, 1994). Some children allege Privott dressed as a pirate and took them on a boat where they said he molested them, and that he killed babies and fed them to sharks in a tank.

Smithfield

Patrick Figured, a former electronics firm executive, was sentenced to three consecutive life terms in 1992, after being convicted of sexually abusing three children in 1988. The children, who were between the ages of 2 and 5 years old when the abuse occurred, testified that Figured and his girlfriend, Sonja Hill, molested them at the unlicensed child care center Hill's mother operated from her home.

The children testified that they were drugged and videotaped during sexual assaults, sodomized with a screwdriver, and forced to participate in satanic rituals in which adults wore capes and masks, lit candles, burned Bibles, and forced children to drink urine and blood. (Soloway, 1992).

Sonja Hill pleaded no contest to aiding and abetting the taking of indecent liberties with children and was sentenced in July 1993, to 10 years in prison. (Eisley, 1993).

Winston-Salem

Ricky Martin Vernon, a former Boy Scout volunteer, pleaded guilty in 1989 to taking indecent liberties with 13 teenaged boys from 1981 - 1988, and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Vernon offered to initiate the boys into "The Order of the Circle." In order to learn the ways of "The Circle," they had to participate in religious rituals that included sex acts and a service that mimicked Christian communion. (News & Observer, 1989).

[More cases \(continued\)](#)

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