

# Parental Slaying: Past Troubles and Fantasy Game Explored

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## Parental Slaying: Past Troubles and Fantasy Game Explored

By GEORGE FRANK *Times Staff Writer*

The teen-ager lowered his head as he entered the small courtroom from a special annex reserved for young prisoners.

As he walked, his eyes were fixed on the floor. Only momentarily did he glance up to look at those who sat in the two rows of hard wooden benches to the rear of the juvenile courtroom.

His expression was telltale. His eyes showed fear and confusion. The handcuffs he wore and the accompanying sheriff's deputy appeared to be a nagging source of embarrassment.

Only days before, Ronald Lampasi, who looks even younger than his years, was in class at Laguna Hills High School, where, as a student, he was never disciplined or thought of as a troublemaker.

But that was before Orange

County sheriff's deputies discovered Ruth and John B. Lampasi—the boy's adopted parents—in the family's middle-class Laguna Hills home.

Ronald's father, John Lampasi,

*'I just can't give you any reason . . . Violence was not part of the boy's makeup.'*

60, had been shot once in the head. He was dead.

His mother, Ruth Lampasi, 45, suffered from a similar head wound. Miraculously, she was still alive, apparently left for dead two days earlier. Monday, she was reported in stable condition at Saddleback

Community Hospital.

About the time that the deputies made their grisly find in the Lampasi home June 4, Ronald Lampasi walked into the Costa Mesa Police Department headquarters to say

that he had been involved in a shooting. He told the desk officer he had killed his father.

What had gone wrong? What transformed a mild-manner student portrayed by neighbors and friends as a "nice kid who was very attentive to his mother" into a

confessed murderer who was forced to spend his 17th birthday Sunday behind bars?

Could young Lampasi be a product of an extremely troubled family in which there had been instance of sexual abuse? Or could the death of his father and wounding of his mother be the result of a fantasy game about good and evil?

"I just can't give you any reason why it happened," said Rolland Ray, a close family friend and a neighbor. "Violence was not part of the boy's makeup."

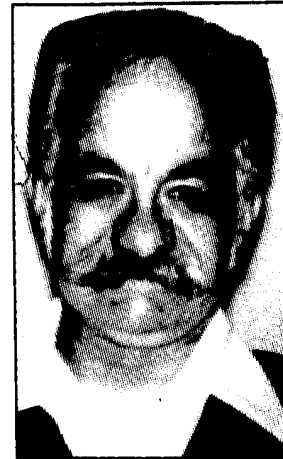
But attorney Paul Stark of the county public defender's office, who is representing the youth, is looking into Lampasi's background and home life in search of a darker side.

"I don't know if he was living in a house of horror," Stark told The

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Ronald Lampasi



John Lampasi

# SLAYING: Youth's Past Is Investigated

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Times. "I am attempting to find out if there was more going on than meets the eye.

"The kid's got emotional problems. I'm not sure at this point what they are or what the dynamics of them are," Stark commented.

But those problems, Stark added, can be like a fuse attached to explosives. "All that is needed is a match. Once the match is struck it can't be put out."

Stark acknowledged that his search for the "darker side" may take him back to an earlier incident involving the teen-ager's father and Ronald Lampasi's two natural sisters, all of whom were placed in the Lampasi home as foster children in 1970 and later adopted by Ruth and John Lampasi.

In 1968, the three children, Ronald, Sheryl and Joanna, were abandoned by their natural father, who, according to court records, suffered from a drug problem. Then, later that same year, their natural mother left the children at their grandmother's house before disappearing. The children, then ages, 1, 3 and 4, were turned over to the county.

A little more than a year later, according to court records, they were taken in by the Lampasis.

In 1977, the family adopted the children, according to public records. During the 1970s, there was nothing in public records to suggest there was any trouble in the children's new adoptive family.

But that changed on Jan. 29, 1980, when John Lampasi was arrested as a mentally disturbed sex offender.

The arrest was made after a friend of the older daughter, Joanna, told a Costa Mesa High School administrator that Joanna had been sexually abused by her father. The information was passed on to police, and Joanna and Sheryl were taken into protective custody.

Both daughters told investigators that they had been sexually abused by their adoptive father for years. When asked why they had not reported it earlier, both told police they "feared their parents' reaction, as both parents are verbally and physically abusive," according to Juvenile Court records.

Although the girls recounted their own abuse, they told authorities that their brother, Ronald, was not physically abused by their parents.

This fact, in part, has led police investigators to discount the earlier molestation incident as a motive in the recent shootings.

In a plea-bargaining arrangement, John Lampasi pleaded guilty to one count of child molestation. Lampasi, president of Tony's Building Materials in Costa Mesa, served five months of a one-year term in County Jail.

Court records pointed out that Ronald Lampasi, then 14, was present when his sisters discussed the sexual abuse with their mother, months before the matter was reported to school authorities and finally to police.

The two daughters were removed from the home and after running away from new foster homes, both girls eventually dropped from sight.

Tim Sullivan, an assistant principal at Laguna Hills High School, said that the youth was never a problem in the classroom. Sullivan described Lampasi as one of those anonymous students in the middle of the group. His grades ranged from Bs to Fs.

Lampasi is scheduled back in court Aug. 19 for a hearing to determine if he will be tried as an adult on charges of murdering his father and attempting to murder his mother.

Law enforcement officials, according to some sources, are exploring the possibility that the fantasy game Dungeons and Dragons may somehow have played a part in the shootings.

Dungeons and Dragons, which began to gain popularity in the mid-1970s, deals with good and evil and the search for treasure. It includes fanciful adventures of make-believe creatures in a medieval world full of dragons and monsters, trapdoors and magic. The game includes role-playing and imaginative dialogue.

Asked about this, Stark said he could not comment.

"If there is a link (between the game and the shootings), in my opinion, it would be a product of emotional disturbance," he said.

One law enforcement source said that investigators are still attempting to determine a motive. But, he contended, Dungeons and Dragons or various forms of devil worship would "hold as much merit" as linking the crime to past family problems.