

Alone and inside the mind of a serial killer

by **Rebecca Younger**

IT'S hard to imagine why anyone would want to meet a serial killer, let alone spend thousands of hours in their company but that's exactly what Esher-born journalist and actress, Victoria Redstall, does for a living.

Miss Redstall, who attended Claremont Fan School, got up close and personal with five mass murderers on death row when she was helping to make a documentary in the US.

The 36-year-old, who travelled to California when she was 19 to study broadcast journalism and now lives in Studio City, has just had a book published about her experiences

- *Serial Killers: Up Close and Very Personal.*

But why would a privately educated daughter of a chartered surveyor in Surrey want to spend her time speaking and listening to these dangerous killers?

Quite disturbingly, Miss Redstall first became interested in criminal psychology and the minds of killers when she was just a child.

She said: "A close family friend, when I was 11, was gunned down along with another family," she explained. "It was a highly publicised case in the mid-80s and four people were shot in total. Two were killed. It had a major effect on me and I became interested in the most warped minds of our

society. Killers and in particular the most depraved of all - serial killers."

Despite her interest in serial killers, the first time Miss Redstall came face to face with one was an 'absolutely frightening' experience, she said. "I felt as if I was Clarice Starling in *Silence of the Lambs*," she added. "Shaking in my shoes, I wore no make up, my hair in a baseball cap and a jacket buttoned up to my chin. Basically I looked like a boy. I faked a very bad American accent as I didn't want him to know I was English."

It's not surprising considering the first man she interviewed was Wayne Adam Ford, who mutilated and killed four women and walked into a

California police station in 1998 with one of his victim's severed breasts in his pocket.

Other killers Miss Redstall came face-to-face with included Bobby Joe Long, who assaulted and murdered at least 10 women; Gary Ray Bowles, who killed six men in the space of a year, and Robin Gecht, who was a member of the terrifying Ripper Crew.

But the worst of them all, Miss Redstall said, was Keith Hunter Jespersen, who was known as the Happy Face Killer because he sent taunting letters to newspapers and the police, signing off with a smiley face.

"He made my skin crawl as he seemed so proud of who he murdered and how," she said. "It was almost as if he enjoyed reliving the whole process while talking to me about it."

With these hardened killers refusing to open up to psychiatrists, prosecutors and other authority figures, it's a wonder how Miss Redstall has managed to get material for an entire book. This she puts down to her 'friendly personality' and not showing any fear.

Despite admitting she was friendly towards these killers, Miss Redstall said she never ever became friends with them, despite many media reports, particularly those surrounding her relationship with Wayne Adam Ford, suggesting otherwise.

"I had to compartmentalise the crimes they did from the main reason I was interviewing them - that was trying to understand how an innocent child can turn in to a raving monster," she said. "I didn't ever 'befriend' them however the media seems to have interpreted it that way.

"I have a friendly rapport with everyone I have ever interviewed whether it be a coroner, a judge, a cop, a psychologist, a victim that lived, a family member, a prosecutor.

"If any of those people want to say 'Victoria's a friend of mine' just because I've spent days interviewing them, well that's no problem with me. However, I certainly wouldn't say that I am friends with any serial killer."

So does Miss Redstall feel she is any closer to understand-

"In my opinion, no-one is born a serial killer, they were formed," she said. "There is a lethal cocktail that goes into the 'making of a monster' and that is usually a bad childhood, filled with abuse, neglect, abandonment. Sometimes a brain injury can add to the mix along with alcohol or drugs.

"I am not saying that all people with a childhood like this grows up and wants to kill, I am just saying that nearly all of the ones I have met so far, have had a very similar story to tell about their childhood. Finding all this out has made me have a better understanding as to what makes a serial killer."

As harrowing and gruesome as the stories of the men Miss Redstall interviewed may be, there is little doubt that *Serial Killers: Up Close and Very Personal* will be popular.

As Christopher Berry-Dee writes in the foreword to the book, serial killers "capture public attention because they terrify the neighbourhoods in which they trawl and prey on victims. They personify the human capacity for evil for they are the stuff of our worst nightmares and their stories put bums on seats in cinemas around the world."

But Miss Redstall, who is currently halfway through her second book, also about serial killers, says she wants to do much more than simply entertain people with her findings.

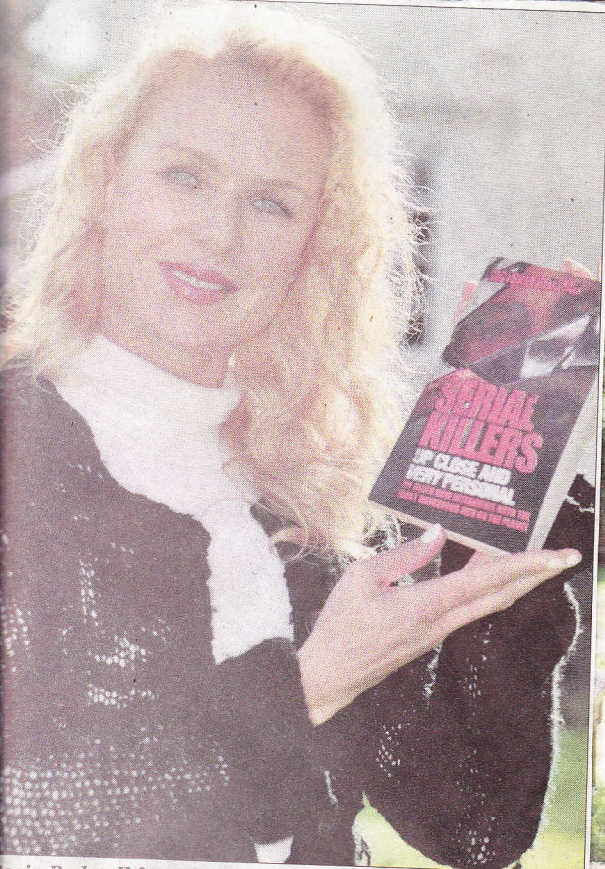
She hopes they will discourage women from going down the route of prostitution, which is where most serial killers she met found their victims.

"Most of these women were prostitutes and I didn't sugar coat it by calling them something else," she said. "They chose that profession, a very dangerous one I might add.

"I don't want anyone to think that these men climbed into people's homes at night and took children or old people out of their beds. None of them would have done that. I am very clear with why they killed these types of victims and how they did it.

"I hope this will scare women enough to not even contemplate a job like this and therefore choose another career path."

■ *Serial Killers: Up Close*



Victoria Redstall from Esher, with her book about her interviews with notorious serial killers (Ref: SLP_SHP_SAI14700_1)

