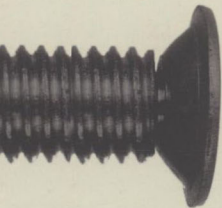
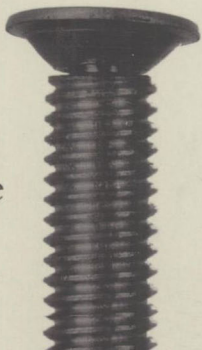
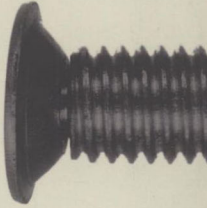


GARY L. STUART

INNOCENT UNTIL



INTERROGATED



The True Story of the  
Buddhist Temple Massacre  
and the Tucson Four

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Buddhist Temple Massacre  
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THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF ARIZONA  
PRESS  
TUCSON

The University of Arizona Press  
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[www.uapress.arizona.edu](http://www.uapress.arizona.edu)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stuart, Gary L., 1939–

Innocent until interrogated : the true story of the Buddhist  
temple massacre and the Tucson four / Gary L. Stuart.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8165-2924-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Murder—Investigation—Arizona—Maricopa County. 2.

Judicial error—Arizona. I. Title.

HV6533.A6.S78 2010

364.152'309791776—dc22

2010006814



Manufactured in the United States of America on acid-free,  
archival-quality paper containing a minimum of 30 percent  
post-consumer waste and processed chlorine free.

15 14 13 12 11 10 6 5 4 3 2 1

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The fascination that the police have for the thief is manifested by the thief's temptation to confess when he is arrested. In the presence of the examining magistrate who questions him, he is seized with giddiness: the magistrate speaks gently to him, perhaps with kindness, explaining what is expected of him; practically nothing: an assent. If only once, just once, he did what was asked of him, if he uttered the "yes" that is requested, harmony of minds would be achieved. He would be told, "That's fine," perhaps he would be congratulated. It would be the end of the hatred. The desire to confess is the mad dream of universal love; it is, as Genet himself says, the temptation of the human.

—*Jean-Paul Sartre*

# Illustrations

*following page 40*

Wat Promkunaram Buddhist Temple of Arizona

Aerial photo of the temple

Maricopa County Sheriff's Office crime scene diagram

Maricopa County Sheriff's Office victim chart

Michael Lawrence McGraw arrest photo

Michael Lawrence McGraw photo lineup card

Leo Valdez Bruce arrest photo

Leo Valdez Bruce photo lineup card

Marcus Felix Nunez arrest photo

Marcus Felix Nunez photo lineup card

Dante Parker arrest photo

Dante Parker photo lineup card

Victor Perez Zarate arrest photo

Victor Perez Zarate photo lineup card

The prop room

The butcher-paper chart

Alessandro "Alex" Garcia

Rolando Caratachea

Johnathan Doody

## Author's Note

The temple murders and the related murder of Alice Marie Cameron are heavily documented. They spawned more than five hundred thousand digital records and six thousand pages of court transcripts, pleadings, motions, and opinions. Long before the trial began, file cabinets all over Phoenix accumulated the official reports from dozens of agencies, public and private individuals, and more than fifty lawyers. There are thousands of still photographs, hundreds of audiocassette tapes, scores of videos, and an incalculable number of private images in the hands of the lawyers, investigators, witnesses, suspects, victims' families, journalists, and authors involved in the cases. It took more than four years to resolve the criminal and civil litigation. Even with all of that, some of the facts are not only unknown, they are unknowable.

Just how many young people in West Phoenix knew who the real killers were before their apprehension is unclear. Some estimate the number at a handful; others at a dozen or more. However many there were, none of them came forward voluntarily to help solve the crimes. The number of people who investigated, analyzed, reviewed, prosecuted, defended, judged, consulted, and managed the criminal and civil cases spawned by the ten murders likely extends to the thousands. And yet, despite their prodigious efforts, no one can say with certainty exactly what happened inside the temple on August 10, 1991, or at Alice Marie Cameron's campground twenty miles away and six weeks later.

The first two chapters in this book are a reconstruction of the basic story from the forensic evidence, the confessions of the killers, the recollections of those who knew them, and the opinions of experts who second-guessed everyone, including one another.

The remaining chapters, particularly the courtroom scenes and interrogations, necessarily present only a small part of the reality. I conducted more than fifty personal interviews and read the entire trial and appellate records in the cases. I reviewed three years of print and broadcast news

coverage and read the police reports and the transcripts of all custodial interrogations and official interviews.

In addition, I downloaded the digital discovery exchange between prosecutors and defense lawyers into an ISYS database containing digital files from Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, the Maricopa County Attorney's Office, and nonprivileged files from various defense lawyers. I examined the exhibits admitted in evidence in the Doody trial, along with original court pleadings.

This book is an excerpted and condensed narrative of what happened. The full truth lies in the interrogation transcripts, police reports, trial testimony, pretrial depositions, exhibits, and sworn affidavits. To make sense of that mountain of documentation, I eliminated redundancy, translated legal jargon, and tried to clarify the narrative. While all the stated facts are true, the opinions and legal interpretations in this book are strictly my own.



INNOCENT UNTIL

INTERROGATED

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## A CIRCLE OF DEATH

# 1

On Saturday, August 10, 1991, temperatures in Arizona's Valley of the Sun were predicted to climb to 113 degrees Fahrenheit. By 10:00 a.m. the little thermometer at the Buddhist temple called Wat Promkunaram registered 94 degrees. Like everything else at the temple, the thermometer was a simple indicator of impermanence and change. Plain and unadorned, it was a metaphor for the way the monks lived, worked, and worshipped. The current temperature was merely a truth at a given time. Change was inevitable, for better or worse, as the days and the seasons unfolded. The monks lived in the moment and accepted the passage of days, weeks, seasons, and years without much fuss.

Luke Air Force Base sits some twenty miles west of the center of Phoenix. The hungry sprawl of America's fifth-largest and fastest-growing city peters out near the base. Wat Promkunaram is a mile farther west, surrounded by the large irrigated plots and well-kept farmhouses that make up the little community of Waddell, Arizona. Cotton farms and bean fields flourish here, nourished by precious Colorado River water carried by a 336-mile canal snaking east through the desert. While the Thai monks at the monastery meditate and withdraw, fighter pilots in training head for the Barry M. Goldwater Bombing Range, an area roughly the size of Connecticut. There they practice dropping smart bombs and engaging in air-to-air combat. The roar of F-16 fighter jets taking off and landing about 150 times every day pummels the temple grounds, but little else intervenes in Wat Promkunaram's pastoral tranquility.

That August, shimmering heat waves formed a dancing, translucent barrier around the tall concrete-block wall enclosing the temple and its five acres of vegetable gardens and meditation paths. The white, red-roofed single-story building was—and still is—home and meditation center to monks, nuns, acolytes, and bell ringers. The wall was not for protection; two wide paved driveways broke its continuity and gave easy access to the parking areas used by the four hundred or so members of the third-largest Thai Buddhist community in the United States.

Between the driveways was the wall's one distinguishing feature: a forty-foot section, painted white, on which bright red letters announced "Wat Promkunaram, Buddhist Temple of Arizona."

In 1991 Chawee Borders, a fifty-one-year-old Thai woman married to an American serviceman, lived in Waddell, near both the temple and the air force base. For her, August 10 began as a typical Saturday: as her husband put on his uniform and left for his job at the base, she dressed modestly to go to the temple. That morning she was to drive her friend Premchit Hash, another immigrant from Thailand, to the temple, where they would cook lunch for the monks. Women members took turns cleaning the temple and providing the monks' meals. The work was an honor, a small service they could do as part of their faith.

Borders had belonged to the temple since her arrival in Arizona in 1976, and she knew some of its residents well. Today she and Hash would fix rice and vegetables for three longtime acquaintances: Phra Pairuch Kanthong, their abbot since 1982; Surichai Anuttaro, the abbot's closest colleague since 1985; and Boonchuay Chaiyarach, who had transferred to Wat Promkunaram from a temple in the Netherlands a few years before.

Another old friend was Foy Sripanprasert, who, like Premchit Hash, had followed her daughter from Thailand to Arizona some time ago. Just recently, in her seventies, Foy had decided to become a nun. She was a happy woman, quick to laugh, devoted to the temple. The only woman living there, she had a tiny sleeping alcove off the kitchen, well apart from the monks' private quarters.

Foy's seventeen-year-old grandson, Matthew Miller, had just joined her at the temple to spend part of his summer vacation immersed in Buddhism, as other young men had done before him. Come September, he would let his shaved hair grow back and start tenth grade at Agua Fria High School.

Borders was still getting to know Chalerm Chantapim, who had come from Thailand about a year before. The two newest monks she hardly knew at all: Siang Ginggao had recently replaced the temple's former bookkeeper; Somsak Sopha had arrived just a few days ago. And there was a visitor. She thought he was a relative of the abbot's. Pairuch had brought him back from a trip to Thailand six weeks ago. He was only twenty-one, maybe a good companion for Matthew. His name was Chirasak Chirapong, but Borders and her friends just called him Boy.

At about 10:40 a.m., Borders dropped off Hash near the front door and went to park her car. The women were used to the shudder and roar of the fighter jets but were relieved, as always, to be inside the concrete walls of the temple compound.

The door was locked, and Premchit Hash had no key, so she walked toward the back of the building, where she found an unlocked door near the kitchen. Removing her sandals at the threshold as tradition dictated, she carried her grocery bags into the kitchen, then went into the main hall of the temple and propped open the double doors for her friend.

Chawee Borders saw that the ground around the building was flooded with water and wondered why. Had the monks forgotten to turn off the irrigation system? She also wondered where everyone was. There was no one tending the garden, no one walking on the paths, and no one at the door. The lack of activity made her uneasy.

But the women had come to serve the monks, not to question them. While Hash put water on the stove to boil for rice, Borders laid a bouquet of fresh-cut flowers in front of the statue of the Buddha in the main hall, then headed for the car to get the rest of the groceries. One of her questions was answered when she passed the open door to the sitting area and saw the monks, in their orange robes, lying on the floor. She guessed they were praying.

When the meal was almost ready, Borders thought she heard a telephone ringing. She moved quickly to the pay phone near the kitchen, only to find that its cord had been cut, the two ends dangling at odd angles against the whitewashed wall.

At that moment, with the dead phone in her hand and her unease turning to fear, Borders noticed that something else was very wrong. One of the people on the floor was wearing white. It had to be Foy Sripanprasert, the temple's only resident nun, lying there with the monks. This was forbidden.

Alarmed, Borders looked closer. The monks lay face down on the carpet in a rough circle, their heads toward the center. They could have been praying or sleeping. Yet most had their hands clasped above their heads, an uncomfortable position for sleep and an odd one for prayer. Borders called out to them, telling them to get up and eat.

Then she saw the blood. Pools of it. A shudder later, she began to recognize individuals in the array of bodies. She knew them all. Along with the abbot and the other monks and Foy, she now recognized Matthew Miller and the young visitor everyone called Boy. They were all so still.

Not the quiet of sleep; not the serene stillness of meditation. Borders had never seen death this close, and her heart sent a scream up to her throat.

Beginning to sob, Borders ran to the kitchen and told Hash they had to get help. As though being chased by what Borders had seen, the friends ran barefoot to their car and drove quickly to a nearby house to find a phone.

The houses were generously spread out in the old farming community, the nearest house almost two hundred feet from the temple's wall. That neighbor's dogs scared the women, so Borders drove on to the second house.

Joe Ledwidge opened his door to find two Asian women crying so hard that he couldn't understand their words. Something had happened at the temple, he thought; maybe one of the monks was having a heart attack. He hustled the women into his white pickup truck and went to find out.

Ledwidge would later describe what he saw as an execution. One look was enough. He rushed home, shouting for his wife to call 911. After the call, he drove Borders and Hash back to the temple parking lot, where the three of them sat in his truck and waited for the police.

Wat Promkunaram is in one of Arizona's "county islands." While larger communities like Phoenix and Glendale have their own police departments, smaller towns like Waddell contract with their counties for law enforcement. Accordingly, the dispatch center for the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) took all 911 calls from Waddell.

The dispatch operator logged in Mrs. Ledwidge's call at 11:09 a.m. "911 Emergency," she answered.

"Yes, emergency at the Buddhist temple," the caller began. Screams were audible in the background, but the voice on the phone was steady.

The operator made a note of the address shown on her call screen and sent an automatic signal to all patrol cars in that area, advising them of "unknown trouble." She told Mrs. Ledwidge the police were on the way.

Then another voice came on the line, heavily accented, high pitched and shrill. This was Chawee Borders. "Hi, lady?" Borders began. "I'm got a membership in the temple. I come feed them lunch today."

The operator didn't understand her. "You can do what?"

"I come feed them lunch today, my monk. They all die the same place."

Asked for details, Borders sounded frantic. “No, I don’t know. Nobody answer. I see blood all over. Come see, please officer. Please! Now! Go see now.”

News of the grisly discovery Chawee Borders and Premchit Hash had made that morning soon radiated through the Valley of the Sun. Arizona, the last of the lower forty-eight to be granted statehood, had its first mass murder. By 11:45 a.m., radio coverage was widespread; for the rest of the day, TV stations featured the story as breaking news. The first print account came the next morning, when the *Arizona Republic* devoted much of its Sunday front page to Borders’s first glimpses of the horror that had turned Wat Promkunaram, a place of peace, into a place of blood.



The first officer at the scene, MCSO deputy Don Wipprecht, slid into the temple’s parking lot at high speed at 11:21 a.m. Seeing a white Ford pickup in the lot, he radioed in its license number, then waited in his car for backup. It was a short wait. Deputies P. Ellis, G. Sanchez, and T. Lopez pulled in at 11:23; Sgt. A. Hosford a minute later; and Lt. Ron Reyer, the shift commander, soon after Hosford. Before long, the temple would be crowded with deputies, forensic investigators, technicians, and most of Sheriff Tom Agnos’s command staff. At this moment, its only occupants were the dead.

While Sanchez, Lopez, and Reyer secured the perimeter, Hosford, Wipprecht, and Ellis entered the building. Ellis went in from the west side near the kitchen; the other two used the double doors in the east wing that Premchit Hash had propped open for Chawee Borders.

Hosford and Wipprecht found themselves in a fifty-foot-square room, the temple’s main hall. The window shutters were open, allowing the harsh light of a hot desert day to flood in. Bright white walls supported a high cantilevered ceiling from which hung large ceiling-fan chandeliers. At one end of the room was a kaleidoscope of color and pageantry: an alcove six feet deep and twenty-five feet wide housing a life-size golden statue of a seated Buddha. The statue sat eight feet above the floor on an altar festooned with statuary, pictures, flower arrangements, candles, and religious symbols. Flanking the alcove were narrow doorways providing access to the kitchen and the dining and sitting areas. The main

hall also held the temple's money tree, with dollar bills dangling from its branches like leaves.

Glancing around this place of worship, the men saw nothing that seemed disturbed or out of place. Even the money tree appeared to be untouched. But this was not the time for a detailed search. To their left, through the entrance to the sitting room, Hosford and Wipprecht saw exactly what Borders and Hash had seen: bodies on the floor, arrayed like logs floating in a pond of blood. As the officers gingerly stepped through the door, more victims came into view. Wipprecht tried to count them, but he was so agitated by the grisly scene that he kept losing track and having to start over. His sergeant was having the same trouble. Eventually they counted nine victims.

Deputies would later recall that the stench of the crime scene made them gag. A trace of stale cigarette smoke hung in the air. The other, overpowering stink was one a cop never gets used to—the acrid mixture of gunpowder and clotting blood. Nine innocent people had been slaughtered here; nine lives blotted out.

As Hosford and Wipprecht stood near the doorway, their passage blocked by the prone victims, Ellis appeared on the west side of the dining-sitting area. He needed backup to search the south wing, the sleeping quarters. To join him without touching the bodies, Wipprecht had to walk across a sofa. Nearly there, he lost his balance and braced his hand against a door, a detail he was careful to include in his report. Cautiously moving down the hall, he and Ellis noted that the rooms had been ransacked but found no additional victims and no suspects.

Meanwhile Hosford stayed in the sitting area. Knowing it was hopeless, he went through the routine of checking the victims for signs of life. No need to touch them to feel for a pulse; gunshot wounds gaped in their skulls, and lividity was obvious in their toes. Crowded into the small space, hemmed in by furniture, they lay face down, shoulder to shoulder. The fallen bodies formed a strangely orderly pattern, a rough oval, with the monks' tonsured heads close together in the center. Arms, hands, and elbows touched in many places. Almost all the victims had their hands above their heads, fingers tightly interwoven. Their feet were bare, and the monks' vivid orange-and-saffron robes seemed to blanket the cluster of bodies.

Those who know Buddhist doctrine feel sure that from the moment the killers stormed into the monastery, the monks and the nun began to withdraw into a state of inner peace in which all impulses toward



resistance dissolved. Taking refuge in the Buddha, they removed the armor of life. But the two young men, lacking their elders' discipline and experience, must have felt desperate fear. And the nun, however accepting of death for herself, must have been terrified for her grandson.

The victims' last words, how they faced their fate, and how the death knell sounded for them are, to this day, known only to their killers. Only the murderers can still see the flash of muzzle fire and hear the thud of bullets ripping through flesh and bone. Most of us will never be able to fathom the depravity that allowed the invaders to annihilate nine unresisting human beings. Even so, we are not completely in the dark about what happened at the temple that August night. Much of the true story of the murders and their aftermath eventually came to light.

Forensic evidence found at the crime scene established that there had been at least two invaders. Ballistics testing identified two weapons fired from different vantage points. One was a Marlin or Revelation .22-caliber rifle; the other was a 20-gauge shotgun. These weapons, more suited to hunting small game than to a life of crime, indicated that the killers were not professional criminals. FBI profilers, called in to help with the investigation, deduced from the attackers' apparently aimless acts of vandalism—spraying fire extinguishers in the sleeping quarters, carving the word “Bloods” on the wall—that they were young and stupid.

Investigators estimated the time of the initial break-in as somewhere between 10:00 p.m. and midnight. Some of the monks were already in the sitting area. The invaders roused the others from their sleeping rooms and shoved them into the cramped L-shaped space formed by the dining table, two couches, and a loveseat. The six monks, the young visitor, and the teenaged acolyte were ordered to kneel down facing one another. Passive by both culture and training, the monks laced their fingers together behind their heads as commanded and knelt on the edge of the unknown.

At some point, possibly while pillaging the sleeping rooms, the intruders discovered an elderly woman, the nun. They wedged her into a space at one end of the oval, where she, too, knelt with her hands behind her head and faced her longtime friends. Like the others, she was barefoot. Unlike the saffron-robed monks, she wore plain white cotton: a long shirt over ankle-length pants.

For the next hour or so, the invaders took turns guarding the residents and ransacking the sleeping rooms. They upended mattresses, knocked