



Above is a photographic metamorphosis of Russell Albin Smrekar. On the left is a mug shot taken of Russell around 1973 or '74 (People Exhibit #12B, Fry murder trial). The mug shot on the right was probably taken around 1975 or '76 (Logan County Courthouse records).

"I know philosophically a murderer is not responsible for his crime, but I prefer not to take tea with him." — Albert Einstein

The Rebel "Rabushka"

Russell Smrekar had an excuse for just about everything, but what possible excuse could he have for becoming a suspected serial killer? He was a misfit who walked through life with a chip on his shoulder always pushing the envelope in an attempt to prove something to himself and the world. He was slight in stature but had a terrier-like boldness that made him absolutely fearless. He said, "If I have something against someone who treats me bad, I'll fight him. I don't care how big he is." Consequently, he was involved in fights throughout his adolescence, but what deep-seated internal conflicts were at the root of his personal turmoil?

He never had a close relationship with his parents. His mother, Martha, was a temperamental disciplinarian. His father, Albin, an ironworker, was more passive. Did Russ crave more attention? He may have, for his mother's main priority was tending to the needs of his mentally challenged sister, Donna, 24/7. Russ just tolerated Donna who was three years younger than he. In 1973, he told a psychiatrist, "I guess she had some trouble getting enough oxygen when she was born, at least that's what I heard. I don't have much to do with her, she's just around." Maybe it was his inability to communicate and interact with his sister, and the constant attention his parents devoted to her, that made him an angry loner.

He was born in Joliet, Illinois on April 24, 1955 and grew up in a modest home on Vernon Avenue. At the age of five, he claimed to have endured a month long hospitalization. Russ explained, "I remember being in the hospital and wondering why I was there. They said I had a lesion in my throat that went to my brain." Aside from this, he had no other major illnesses or physical complications but did suffer from asthma at times.

Early on, Russell was notably different from other children, and he began displaying irrational behavior. One neighbor recalled, “He would just throw his head back and burst out laughing for no reason. Even other children noticed it. Everyone knew there was a problem . . . his parents just let it get out of hand.” Russ would routinely throw tantrums to get his way. As a result of his conduct, his parents would often be overly permissive but then turn around and resort to physical punishment because he’d overstepped boundaries. Punishment was not something Russ understood or accepted. No one was going to tell *him* what to do.

When he entered elementary school he was a problem from the get-go. Mr. and Mrs. Smrekar were asked to seek professional help for their son, but they ignored the suggestion. Thus began Russell’s downward spiral and metamorphosis into the rebel “*Rabushka*,” a name he chose for his alter ego, which later appeared as an a.k.a. on his arrest card.

Albin and Martha Smrekar reportedly divorced in 1972. It seems their split may have affected Russell dramatically, for this was when his criminal record began. While enrolled at Joliet Catholic High School, he was arrested and charged with auto theft, reckless driving, attempting to elude police, and driving with no license. His attorney was able to convince the court that Russ had been falsely arrested, and the charges were dismissed. Not long after this same time frame, he was expelled from high school for fighting with other students and for truancy. The principal destroyed his disciplinary files immediately following his expulsion—an act of good riddance. Next, Russ was arrested for disorderly conduct when he allegedly lit a smoke bomb on a Joliet bus. Even though the bus driver identified him as the culprit, the charges were dropped one month later.

In early May of 1973, Russ was arrested for an arms violation and for possessing ammunition without an identification card. He had waved a shotgun around at a neighbor and threatened to shoot out his windows. He was then charged with resisting arrest and aggravated battery when he began struggling with the police officer while being cuffed. On May 31st, he was arrested for a home burglary where a TV, a radio, and an adding machine had been stolen. His bond was set at \$35,000, but his persuasive attorney got it reduced to ten grand. Russ denied any involvement in the burglary. When Joliet detectives searched the Smrekar home for the stolen items, they came across \$4,500 in old rare coins that had been taken in *another* residential burglary. The police later discovered a home Russ was using to stockpile his loot; included in the inventory were ten guns.

During all of this, Russell got into a brawl with his father over the car keys and tore up the entire house searching for them. Martha got scared and called the cops. Russell’s attorney contacted Dr. Kruglik, a psychiatrist for the State Department of Corrections, and asked that he do an examination of Russell. Russ cooperated by admitting himself to St. Joseph’s Hospital in Joliet and submitting to a series of tests—including a brain scan. During his evaluation, he admitted to being short-fused. Dr. Kruglik asked why he didn’t try to reason with a person in lieu of resorting to fisticuffs. Russ responded, “They won’t listen to reason. They only know physical things.” He rationalized his actions to the doctor by saying he never engaged in threats, fighting, or damage to property, indiscriminately, unless someone gave him a hard time or degraded him in some way. Then, in “*Rabushka*’s” mind, he figured the person had it coming.

Dr. Kruglik found no remarkable evidence of any physical or mental illness and concluded Russ was mentally competent to stand trial. His diagnostic impression was that Russell was passive-aggressive—a blend of aggressive personality and emotional immaturity. Kruglik felt Russ’s problems were related to “the process of experiential conditioning during his developmental years.” His psychiatric overview was certainly on course in 1973, but little did he

know he'd only *scratched* the surface. Kruglik's expertise could never have predicted the tumultuous path Russ would eventually choose or the extreme chances he'd be willing to take.

In August of '73, the Joliet Police arrested Russell once more for stealing a motorcycle. During his arrest, he began fighting with the officers and was further charged with resisting arrest, three counts of aggravated assault, aggravated battery, burglary, and theft. Russell's attorney arranged a plea agreement with the Will County State's Attorney, and some of the charges were dropped in exchange for guilty pleas on others. Finally, in October of '73, Russ was sentenced to 180 days in the Will County Jail and two years probation. While serving his jail term, he was released to attend Joliet Township night school, and he eventually received his high school diploma in the spring of 1974.

But a jail term didn't seem to change Russell Smrekar, or exorcise the demon "Rabushka" from his soul. He resumed his rowdy behavior and thrived off of repairing cars, speeding, and, as always, attempting to outwit the police. He developed a reputation in his neighborhood for being a "wild driver." One woman complained, "Several times he almost hit children who were riding their bikes on the street. He was reckless and dangerous." *Dangerous* was an understatement.

ARREST CARD CONTRIBUTOR - NCIC NO. - FBI Lincoln PD 700 Grandway Lincoln Ill 62654 IL 0540200		STATE BUREAU NUMBER - SO 0		LAST NAME - NAM Smrekar Russell Albin	
ARREST JACKET NUMBER - IJD IL 0540200		ARRESTEE HELD FOR PROSECUTION <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		SEX RACE COB DATE OF BIRTHDOB HEIGHT WEIGHT EYES M W I L 042455500145814	
ALSO KNOWN AS - ANA Rebuska		ALIAS DOB 042455		SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER - SOC 333502004	
DATE OF ARREST - SOA 10/18/76		DATE OF OFFENSE - SOO 100976		REFERENCE	
SIGNATURE OF OFFICER/ARRESTING OFFICER Thomas B. Maner Det		IDENTIFICATION NO.		NCIC FINGERPRINT CLASSIFICATION - PFC	
CITY OF BIRTH Joliet		RESIDENCE ADDRESS 1403 Keaton Av. Joliet Ill		COURT CASE NUMBER	
ARRESTING OFFICER - NAME Wm. KAESER - T. Maner Det.		IS OR WAS DR. OR DEPENDENT'S DRIVER LICENSE		NUMBER OF DEFENDANTS NUMBER OF CHARGES 1 2	
TYPE OF ARREST 9:55AM		CHARGE 1 3B 9-19.1 2 3B 9-19.1		DESCRIPTION OF OFFENSE MURDER MURDER	
REMOVED ASSAULTED CHOKED SOGGED HARMED YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO		PHOTOGRAPHED YES NO		WARRANT NUMBER YES NO	
WAIVED BY		WARRANT NUMBER		ISSUE DATE	
NCIC ORIGINAL HISTORY RECORD TRF AGENCY PD Lincoln Ill		BOND SET BY: (1) JUDGE OF COURT OR (2) JUDGE-ENTRY JUDGE NAME Judge Robert Thon, Nov		BOND NUMBER 2,000,000	
AGENCY INFORMATION:		TYPE BIRTH CARD DEPOSIT BOOK SIGN SIGN <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		INITIAL COURT DATE TIME 10-19-76 4:00PM?	
COPY 3 COURT CLERK		INITIAL COURT LOCATION Lincoln Ill.		0219-0988-0100-11/79	

The arrest card filed on October 18, 1976, the day of Smrekar's arrest for the murders of Jay and Robin Fry. Shown in the upper left box under "Also Known As" is the name, "Rebuska" (presumably a misspelling for "Rabushka").

Murder was just a game to Russell Smrekar. While bragging to an inmate about murdering one of his victims, he reportedly said, “A man’s just gotta take chances sometimes. And man, the high you get . . . boy, you just really feel good ’cause you pulled it off! Better than any drug I ever took.” The euphoria he derived from murder was probably the most arousing emotion he allowed himself to feel. His main goal in life was getting even, and he regarded the risks involved in killing someone as nothing more than a mere toss of the dice.

As with Charles Manson, there was something unnerving to be experienced when viewing a photograph of Russell Smrekar—something wild and menacing deep within his eyes. Do we ever really know what lies inside the eyes of a killer? We’ve been intrigued with this mystery for eons, for what drives a person to murder can’t be explained scientifically—we only have ideas and opinions to consider. We give the most credibility to the opinions of psychiatrists and psychologists, the people who devote their professional lives to understanding the complexities and idiosyncrasies of human behavior. But even those professionals can be wrong.

There’s been a recent attempt to suggest there might be a genetic propensity for someone to commit the act of murder if someone in that person’s family tree committed murder in the past. Let’s hope the answer is not as simple as this “bad seed” theory. But in case it is, we can all sleep a little more soundly knowing Russell Smrekar never became a daddy.