

The Malefactor's Register contains lesser-known but still fascinating true-crime stories from the beginning of the 20th Century to the present. These essays explore the people and events surrounding some of the most unusual murders in American history.

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The Malefactor's Register

An Exploration of Murder, Past and Present

by

Mark C. Gribben

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Stay Out of His Way

People who got in the way of what Robert Leroy Biehler wanted ended up dead.

Sometimes people who simply crossed Biehler's path found themselves on the wrong end of a gun, too.

In the end, it appeared that Biehler, a pimp, thief, and murderer, only knew one way to solve his problems until society took it upon itself to solve the Biehler problem once and for all.

At the end of 1966, Biehler was operating in the sordid underworld of Hollywood, California, consorting with hookers, madams, 8mm-porno actresses and other low-lives.

He had been married in the early 1950s, arrested and convicted of robbery a few years later, sent to prison until 1960 when he was paroled, and then sent back until 1966 for a parole violation. During that time his first wife divorced him and after he was released in August 1966, Biehler married a woman named Janet. He lived with Janet and her two children from a previous marriage and worked as a painter.

Apparently a guy gets lonely in prison for that long, so while he was

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in the joint Biehler met and formed a relationship with Richard “Dixie” Aldrich, a professional burglar. Through Dixie, Biehler met a criminal defense attorney named Howard Meyerson, whose clientele included Morton Molin, a 25-year-old gigolo and heroin addict who was living with a madam named Julia Cook.

Julia lived in North Hollywood with her 15-year-old son, Kenneth, and operated a string of call girls from her apartment. It was decent business for Julia, who reportedly took in between \$500 and \$1,000 each day. As a sideline, Julia sold 8mm porno loops and fenced stolen goods.

Biehler had a sexual relationship with Julia, but he really coveted her trick book that listed her girls along with the johns and their particular kinks. Although he was sleeping with Julia, his attitude toward her is evident from his statement he gave to police much later.

“Her body was scarred,” he remarked. “Her breasts were far too large for my taste; she didn’t kiss as satisfactorily as I would have liked and she didn’t function very well.”

Biehler had plans to take over the pimping operations of the entire San Fernando Valley, and in order to do so, he felt he needed to get rid of Julia. To do that, he needed a gun.

Fortunately, Dixie Aldrich knew how to get one. Attorney Meyerson’s bailbondsman had fenced a nickel-plated .32 break-top Smith & Wesson from one of Meyerson’s clients. The Saturday Night Special found its way to Morton Molin, the gigolo living with Julia.

Shortly before Julia was murdered, Janet Biehler overheard her husband talking to someone on the phone.

“Can you get me a gun?” Biehler asked.

It was Molin on the other end, and he agreed to provide Biehler with the

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.32 for \$150. The heroin junkie/gigolo turned the gun over to Biehler the next day at a bar called the Iron Horse. He recalled later that it was loaded with five rounds. After the sale, Molin returned to the Meyerson house, where he he received a phone call from Julia telling him that Bob Biehler had shown up at the North Hollywood apartment.

When Julia called, Molin inferred that she was frightened and that Julia was “muffling the phone like somebody might have been standing right next to her and she didn’t want them to overhear what she was saying,” he said.

Molin waited until nearly midnight before he headed over to Julia’s North Hollywood apartment. Inside he found Julia and 15-year-old Ken slumped in two chairs in the living room. The house had been ransacked and the TV was on.

Julia’s “trick book” was gone, and Molin, not wanting to pass up an opportunity, helped himself to some jewelry and \$800 in cash. Molin returned to Meyerson’s home and said he had not been able to get into Julia’s home.

The next day Meyerson and Dixie Aldrich convinced him to go back to the apartment to see if Julia was OK. Molin did so and reported what he saw. He told Meyerson that he had seen the bodies in the same position the day before.

Meyerson called the police, who discovered that Julia and her son had been both shot twice in the head with a .32 Smith & Wesson. A towel similar to the type that Biehler’s brother-in-law, a barber, used in his shop was found at the scene. Apparently the shooter used the towel to muffle the sound.

Suspicion quickly centered on Molin, Biehler, and the skels connected

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to Meyerson and his law office. Biehler convinced Janet to provide him with an alibi and he ditched the clothes he wore to the murder.

Although the gun used to kill Julia and Ken was never found, Molin was arrested on suspicion and soon released. On the morning after the murders, Biehler had called another friend and told her that Julia and her son had been “snuffed.” He told the friend to look in the *Los Angeles Times*, but the paper did not run anything that day.

However, the woman did talk to police and based on Biehler’s big mouth, he was picked up and charged. When the police couldn’t break Janet’s alibi, the best the authorities could do was charge Biehler with parole violations. He was sent back to the joint for that and the North Hollywood murder investigation went cold.

In August 1973 Biehler was re-paroled and was once again living with Janet and her children. They lived near Sunland, and Biehler was trying to re-establish himself as a Southern California pimp. He passed his days at a bar called the Shadow Hills Lounge, where Janet had made friends with a young, disabled Vietnam Vet named Michael Coveney, who was supplementing his meager government stipend by selling cocaine.

Biehler and Coveney had a fatal run-in on October 14, 1973 in the parking lot of the Shadow Hills Lounge. According to the bartender, he was called outside at about 10 p.m. that night to see Coveney laying on the ground with Biehler standing over him. Biehler pulled the disabled vet, who had recently broken his left leg in a motorcycle accident, to his feet and dragged him to his car and away from the bar.

He drove about a mile away to Janet’s home, where she was sleeping with her two young children. An enraged Biehler dragged the drunken

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Coveney out of the car, threw him on the front lawn and called for Janet to bring his sawed-off .30-caliber Enfield rifle.

As Janet's two children huddled under the sheets of their bed, Coveney said, "please don't kill me." Biehler pointed the sawed-off rifle at the helpless disabled vet and pulled the trigger.

Biehler then ordered Janet to help him load the body into his Volkswagen. They threw in the rifle and a shovel and drove off toward the Los Angeles Crest Forest.

Not far from a ranger station, Biehler dug a shallow grave and dumped the body in it. He buried the rifle a short distance away.

Biehler then returned home, turned on a garden hose, and had it run through the car all night long.

The next morning, he woke up Janet's children and had them clean up the mess – apparently Coveney's murder had left blood all over the grass and sidewalk outside the daughter's bedroom window.

Biehler supervised their cleaning operation, explaining to Janet that Coveney had threatened to expose him to his parole officer for owning the firearm.

He warned everyone not to say anything to the police.

Unfortunately, Coveney's temporary resting place was not deep enough (a trip to check on things revealed that "something had been digging at the grave"), and Biehler and Janet were forced to return to the site and rebury him. Moving the corpse ruined Biehler's Volkswagen, and he was later forced to burn out the interior of the car with gasoline and dispose of the car.

After this distraction from his attempts to launch another pimping operation, Biehler returned to Hollywood and began handling some work-

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ing girls through the Hollywood Call Board Answering Service under the name Carl Johnson.

Biehler and Janet fell out over his insistence that she welcome Christine Corder into their bed and Biehler moved in with Christine in early 1974.

It was at the Hollywood Call Board Answering Service that Biehler met Maida Sue Ellington, the office manager and bookkeeper, who also happened to be embezzeling from her boss by taking cash payments and not recording them.

Maida was involved with another woman, Carole Phillips, a former professional roller derby skater with a 5-year-old son. Carole went by the nickname "Flip."

Maida and Flip had a love-hate relationship that was trouble on a number of levels. Not only were they both women, but Maida was white and Flip was black. Maida was also dealing dope, working as a prostitute, and was stealing from her employer, none of which Flip thought was appropriate.

When Flip threatened to tell Maida's mother that her daughter was a dope-dealing lesbian prostitute and a thief, Maida told Biehler that she wanted Flip "burned." For \$1,800 Biehler was only too happy to oblige.

Flip's contract killing, unfortunately, didn't go as smoothly as Biehler's previous murders.

Several days before Biehler's first attempt on Flip's life, he and Christine went to a Hollywood costume shop and bought a gray wig and matching mustache. Biehler then met up with Maida, who gave him a .22-caliber handgun to use in the hit.

The plan was for Biehler and Christine to pose as plumbers in order to gain entry into the house Flip and Maida shared. In an effort to be clever,

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Biehler bought a toolbox, cut a hole in the bottom large enough to fit his hand and another in the side big enough for the barrel of the pistol. Then he wrapped the gun in a towel and tape. When he was satisfied that it was quiet enough he and Christine headed for Flip's remote Kagel Canyon home.

Maida had previously prepped Flip by explaining that a plumber was coming to fix a leak in the bathroom.

On October 5, 1974, Irma Jean Pack and Nancy Moore, two schoolteachers who lived next door to Flip and Maida, were on the roof of their house fixing a TV antenna when two people drove up and parked in front of Flip's house. One of the men got out, wearing brand new blue coveralls and a gray wig and mustache that even from a distance appeared to the teachers to be fake. The man was carrying what appeared to them to be a tackle box.

After taking a deep breath, he walked up to the house.

A few moments later they heard voices come from Flip's house and then four "banging noises."

Biehler came back to the car, handed the gun and a bloody glove to Christine and they drove away.

The schoolteachers could not get the license plate, but did manage to get a description of the car – a Volkswagen.

Biehler and Christine disposed of their clothes at a laundry and dumped the wigs and mustache in a garbage can somewhere along the way.

"She tried to run up the stairs," Biehler told Christine. "I knocked her down and told her to keep her mouth shut. This was a robbery."

Biehler told Christine that he shot Flip four times in the head and that he thought she was dead or dying when he left.

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The neighbors rushed over to Flip and found her lying in a puddle of blood. She had been hit three times in the head, twice behind the left ear and once behind the right. Amazingly, she was still alive and would recover from the attack.

They called Maida who met Flip and the police at the hospital and nearly brought the whole plot crashing down. Not knowing that Flip had told authorities that the shooter had identified himself as “the plumber,” Maida told police that they had had a plumbing problem, but that she hadn’t yet called anyone to address it.

The doctor who treated Flip vividly recalled later that Maida said, “I’m not surprised that this didn’t kill her because she has such a hard head.”

In the weeks following Flip’s attack, Maida did little to deflect suspicion. She told two coworkers that Flip was threatening to tell her mother about her lifestyle, and asked another if she would still like her “if she had Flip shot.”

On December 22, 1974, Biehler and Maida decided to try again to kill Flip. The women were celebrating an anniversary at the Hialeah Lounge while Biehler and Christine staked it out across the street. This time, they had decided it was going to look like a robbery.

When the two women came out of the bar and got into their car, Biehler got out of his Volkswagen and into the backseat of Maida’s car. Holding a gun to Flip’s head, he directed them to drive to a remote gravel road.

Christine followed in the VW and watched as Maida got out of the car followed by Biehler. He hit her with a blackjack, and Maida fell to the ground.

When he walked back to the VW, Biehler said to Christine, “This time she’s really dead.”

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Maida lay unconscious in the road for about 15 minutes until a couple who lived on the gravel road pulled up. They discovered Flip dead in the car and Maida with a bruise on her head and a broken nose.

A search of Flip and Maida's home revealed two .22-caliber pistols, each similar to the one that apparently killed Flip. The ballistics tests were inconclusive however.

Because Maida had run her mouth so much before Flip's murder, police didn't take long to link her to the killings. She was arrested on January 30, 1975, the same day as Biehler.

None of the killings would have been linked if Christine hadn't jumped parole and gone on a crime spree with an escaped federal prisoner named Michael Thompson.

The two of them were arrested months later in San Mateo County and Christine was good enough to lead police to Michael Coveney's grave on December 10th. That led to Janet's arrest on the 11th and Biehler's arrest the next day for Coveney's killing and the murder of Julia and Ken Cook.

California had no death penalty statutes at the time, so Robert Biehler was convicted of four counts of first degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole.

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