

Manson Girls Escape Attempt from SBI

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Charles Manson was a career criminal and drug user who dealt in stolen cars and car parts. He believed that a race war, which he referred to as “Helter Skelter,” was going to occur in the near future. Manson was an expert at manipulating others to commit crimes. He decided that his followers should murder Caucasians and make it appear as if they were killed by blacks so that it would expedite the race war. To start the race war off, he convinced some of his followers to kill actress Sharon Tate and Leno and Rosemary LaBianca. Manson was arrested for conspiracy to commit murder for conspiring with his followers to commit these killings. Three of the Manson Girls, Susan Atkins, Leslie Van Houten, and Patricia Krenwinkel were arrested and confined in the Sybil Brand Institute for Women while they were on trial for murder.



Susan Atkins

When the three Manson girls arrived at the Sybil Brand Institute for Women known as SBI, Deputy Sheryl Endresen was working there as a senior deputy. She supervised the deputies who worked the module that housed the Manson girls. The three girls were housed in separate cell blocks until they were sentenced.



Leslie Van Houten

Once they started receiving publicity on T.V., and in the newspapers for the murders they committed, the girls started acting differently. They walked around like they were super stars, bragged about the killings they were involved in and what a rush it was to stab someone. They even sold their autographs to other inmates. The Manson girls' attorney kept submitting and receiving court orders for special privileges for them. One example is Leslie Van Houten who was allowed to visit with her child in the SBI Captain's office. When the Manson Girls received a visit they would be placed at the front of the line. All inmates were limited on the number of books they could keep in their cells but the Manson girls were allowed to keep extra books.

Charlie's girls carved “x's” in their foreheads after Charlie told them to do it to draw attention to themselves. Right after they carved the “x” in their foreheads, they walked into the mess hall with bandages over the “x.” Once they appeared in court and the information about the “x” carved in their foreheads was common news, they walked around the jail with their foreheads and the “x” exposed.



Patricia Krenwinkel

After the Manson Girls were convicted of murder and sentenced to death, they were moved to the bottom floor of SBI to module 5001. After being confined there for a short period, they planned on escaping on New Year's Day. The 5001 cell block of SBI was a module with two rows of single person jail cells. The single cells were considered special housing that housed high security and mentally unstable inmates. The three Manson girls were allowed recreation time together in the dayroom on both A.M. and P.M. shifts.

Another inmate who was housed in a cell on the same row as the Manson girls told her module deputy that she wanted to speak to Deputy Endresen. The inmate told Deputy Endresen that the Manson Girls were planning something. Deputy Endresen notified her sergeant about her informant's statement. The sergeant requested additional deputies and they searched the module. The search did not reveal anything that the Manson girls were planning. The informant inmate talked to Deputy Endresen again and said, "I am telling you, the Manson girls are planning something."



Deputy Endresen

On December 31, 1972, Deputy Endresen decided to search again but this time decided to also search the dayroom. She searched the dayroom and at the end of the search she decided to check the bars on the window. When she checked the bars on the second window over, six of the bars came loose in her hand. She discovered that the bars had been cut and removed and then replaced using soap. The girls were planning on escaping the next morning. The dayroom was on the ground floor so they could just climb out the window to the ground without having to climb down the building. After they crawled out the window they were going to walk to the bottom of the hill to the freeway and Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme was going to pick them up there.

Deputy Endresen discovered that the single hack saw blade used to cut the bars was hidden in the spine of a book that was stacked among other books in Susan Atkins cell. A second hack saw blade was found in the cell door rolling mechanism. To place the cut bars back in place they mixed soap with flakes of paint that matched the paint on the bars. This concealed the location where the bars had been cut.

During a further search, deputies discovered several hundred dollars in twenty dollar bills. The bills were hidden inside cigarettes. The tobacco had been removed from individual cigarettes and then the twenty dollar bills were rolled up and placed into the rolled up paper where the tobacco had been. Tobacco was then placed back in both ends of the cigarettes, concealing the cash. At that time, inmates were not allowed to possess \$20 bills. This money was going to be used by the inmates after they escaped.

After the escape attempt, the Manson girls were separated and housed in different areas of the jail. This was the first time, red wristbands had been placed on female inmates at SBI. The red wristbands indicated that the inmates were high profile and must be escorted anytime they left their cell. Shortly after that, the Manson Girls were transferred to the California Institution for Women. In 1972 the California Supreme Court abolished the Death Penalty so the Manson girls' sentence was commuted from the death penalty to life with the possibility of parole.

The Manson Girls were all returned to SBI so that they could attend court and be resentenced to life in prison. Upon their return, the girls bragged to Deputy Endresen that when they were confined in SBI during their trial that they were getting letters that contained LSD on the back of the postage stamps. The girls also told her that their attorney was the one who brought them the hack saw blades to cut the bars and the twenty dollar bills for after their escape.

As Susan Atkins was being loaded on the bus to return to Chino Prison, she turned to Deputy Sheryl Endresen and told her that she was going to have her killed for discovering the cut jail bars and preventing their escape. Since that time, Susan Atkins has died from cancer and Deputy Endresen has retired from the Sheriff's Department and is enjoying her retirement.

A Moment in History by the Los Angeles Sheriffs' Museum

Poster designed by Lieutenant Dan Waidner (Retired)