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# Richard Kuklinski, 70, a Killer of Many People and Many Ways, Dies

By DOUGLAS MARTIN MARCH 9, 2006

Richard Kuklinski, whose lust for publicity nearly matched the blood lust he displayed in claiming to have killed more than 100 people as a Mafia hit man, died on Sunday in the prison wing of St. Francis Hospital in Trenton. He was 70.

In announcing his death to The Associated Press, a spokeswoman for the New Jersey Department of Corrections, Deirdre Fedkenheuer, did not disclose the cause or the reason he was hospitalized.

Mr. Kuklinski promoted his own notoriety by appearing in two HBO documentaries as well as meeting with writers, psychiatrists and criminologists. He became known as the Iceman because he sometimes froze corpses to disguise the time of death.

He often listed the many ways he killed: firearms, including a miniature derringer; ice picks; hand grenades; crossbows; chain saws; and a bomb attached to a remote-control toy car. His favorite weapon, he said, was cyanide solution administered with a nasal-spray bottle in the victim's face.

Sometimes Mr. Kuklinski -- a 6-foot-5, 300-pound, tattooed, bearded man -- took his public act a step too far and told specious stories, like the dramatic role he claimed in the killing of the Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa. The authorities also impugned his claim of storing a corpse in the freezer of a Mister Softee truck for two years.

But enough of the truth emerged in a New Jersey courtroom in 1988 to convict him of five murders, for which he was serving consecutive life sentences. In 2003, his guilty plea in the 1980 slaying of Peter Calabro, a New York City police detective, added a meaningless 30 years: he was already ineligible for parole until the age of 110.

Mr. Kuklinski disclosed the killing of Detective Calabro on the second HBO documentary on his life, in 2001. In the first documentary, in 1992, he said he had killed up to 100 people.

In an interview for "The Iceman: The True Story of a Cold-Blooded Killer" (1993) written by Anthony Bruno, he said he had killed Roy DeMeo, a particularly murderous member of the Gambino crime family, but Jerry Capeci, a well-known authority on the Mafia who has written extensively about it, doubted this.

Richard Kuklinski was born on April 11, 1935, in Jersey City. He killed neighborhood cats as a youth and said he committed his first murder at 14, after which, he said, he felt "empowered." He was an altar boy and dropped out of school in eighth grade.

His crime career began after he took a job at a film lab and sold pornographic movies to the Gambinos. He longed to translate his love of killing into a living, he said, but Mafia kingpins, suspicious of his zeal, first limited him to lesser crimes.

He married his wife, Barbara, in 1961. They lived a suburban, relatively affluent life of backyard barbecuing in Dumont, N.J. In the second documentary, Mrs. Kuklinski called them "the all-American family."

The Bruno book quoted her as disclosing that Mr. Kuklinski tried to smother her with a pillow, pointed a gun at her, tried to run her over with a car and three times hit her so hard that he broke her nose.

Mr. Kuklinski's wife and three children survive him.

In a 1992 column in The Washington Post about the first documentary, Tom Shales called Mr. Kuklinski "the ultimate misanthrope, unapologetic and irredeemable," then mentioned a promise in the prologue to penetrate his mind.

"After watching, you may feel some minds are better left unpenetrated," Mr. Shales wrote.

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