

EPILOGUE

In 1980 a man was arrested in Austin on a charge of using a stolen credit card. He was a suspect in a series of robberies in the Austin and San Antonio area and in the murder of San Antonio real estate agent, Julian Dess.

It turned out that the same man was under investigation by the Treasury Department because, while his mother's Social Security checks were regularly cashed, no one had seen the lady since 1974.¹

His name is Robert Joseph Zani. When he was arrested in March, 1980, his wife told investigating officers Paul Ruiz and Robert Martinez that he had killed his mother, hacked her body into pieces, and buried her over three states.² She also told police that Zani had killed George Vizard, "that smart-ass communist"³, in 1967.

On July 23, 1967, George Vizard, a local radical and one of the founders of Austin's underground newspaper, the Rag, was deliberately executed with two shots from a .357 magnum in the cold storage locker of the Town and Country convenience store where he worked.

Robert Joseph Zani had been a student at the University of Texas in the 1960. He ran for the office

of President of the Student Government in 1966. He advocated the abolition of student government and wore Mickey Mouse ears in a picture in the Daily Texan.⁴ He lost the election. Zani joined both SDS and the ultra-conservative Young Americans for Freedom.

Robert Zani had worked at the Town and Country store and had been fired by the manager, George's friend, Tom Mantle. He knew the store layout, procedures, safe combination, and when a clerk would be there alone -- like early on a Sunday morning. Zani was known to be in need of money. On Friday, July 21, 1967, he had tried to convince two other students to go in with him on the easy robbery of the store where he had worked. When those two students read of the murder at the Town and Country store, they called the police and gave them Zani's name and informed them of their Friday night conversation.⁵

Robert Joseph Zani had left his fingerprints on a butterscotch candy wrapper, a pastry wrapper, and a loaf of bread, all left on the counter. He had been seen by customers -- whom he had attended after the murder -- who would be able to identify him fourteen years later under hypnosis. It would have been easier then.

The Austin police had the following evidence at the time: witnesses to the probable murderer, material evidence, a person with knowledge of the store, its

procedures, a motive, and a hot tip naming an identifiable suspect. It is too simple a plot even to sell to television. Although Marian Vizard was forced to take a polygraph test the week of her husband's funeral, and other SDS members were interrogated, in 1967 the Austin police never so much as questioned Robert Zani.⁶

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¹Scott Lind, "The Politics of Murder", UTmost, Spring 1981, p. 53.

²Ibid., p. 51.

³Ibid., p. 53.

⁴Mark McKinnon, "Former student suspected in 1967 slaying", Daily Texan, July 25, 1980, p. 1.

⁵Lind, "The Politics of Murder", p. 52.

⁶Tom Knutsen, "Zani sentenced to 99 years", Austin American-Statesman, March 20, 1981, B2.