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Killer of Kitty Genovese Dies in N.Y. Prison

By DAN MCCUE

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(CN) - The man convicted of one of the most infamous murders in New York City history has died in prison at 81.

Winston Moseley died on March 28 at the Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, state prisons spokesman Thomas Mailey said.

The cause of his death is unknown. The results of an autopsy have yet to be released.

But there's no question about why his end came behind bars. He was convicted of the 1964 stabbing death of Kitty Genovese, a crime that came to stand for an era of urban decay and indifference.

It is impossible to know what Catherine Genovese was thinking as she pulled her red Fiat into a parking space at the Long Island Railroad Station in Kew Gardens the morning of March 13, 1964.

Perhaps, like anyone coming home from work at 3:15 a.m., she simply felt fatigued. After all, the 28 year old had just spent the past several hours mostly standing at her job at Ev's Eleventh Hour Bar in Hollis.

Or perhaps she was thinking of an errand she planned to run later in the day at one of the stores along the Sycamore-lined sidewalks of Austin Street.

In any event, we do know her destination as she locked the car door and headed across the street; she was headed home to her second floor apartment in the modest, faux-Tudor building at 82-70 Austin Street.

Genovese, whom everyone knew as "Kitty," was considered smart and quiet around the neighborhood, a slight woman with a friendly smile. Family members would later remember the graduate of Brooklyn's Prospect Heights High School as having an affinity for Latin music, a penchant for dancing, and strong interest in history and politics. [\[1\]](#)

Genovese had also inherited a head for business from her father Vincent, founder of the successful Bay Ridge Coat and Apron Supply Company, know-how that came in handy as night manager at Ev's. Her family said she dreamed of eventually opening an Italian restaurant with her father. [\[2\]](#)

But perhaps her defining feature was the independent streak which led her to decide, at 19, to stay in New York City after her parents and younger siblings moved to New Canaan, Connecticut.

The move had been precipitated by her mother's having witnessed a shooting near their home.

By all accounts, Kitty Genovese thrived in Queens, and, in 1963, met Mary Ann Zielonko, who would be her roommate and companion for the rest of her life.

Much of what we know about what transpired after Genovese crossed the street into darkness comes from an account that appeared in *The New York Times* two weeks later. [\[3\]](#)

As pieced together by reporter Martin Gansberg, Genovese had begun to walk from her car when she noticed a man standing under a street lamp at the far end of the parking lot, near the seven-story Mowbray apartment building.

Startled, Genovese stopped, and then began to hurry up Austin Street in the direction of Lefferts Boulevard. The man, Winston Moseley, came up quickly behind her. She passed the Austin Book Store, a neighborhood tavern called Bailey's, and had just reached the front of a dry cleaner when Moseley grabbed her and plunged a hunting knife into her back.

"Oh, my God, he stabbed me! Please help me! Please help me!" Genovese screamed.

The woman's pleas, Gansberg wrote, caused lights to go on in the apartment building. Of those roused from their sleep, one man shouted from a window, "Let that girl alone."

Moseley later testified this activity suddenly reminded him his white sedan was parked under a street light and visible to anyone who looked out of their window. He abruptly turned and left Genovese crumpled on the ground. He told detectives he went to move his car onto a side street. He then returned, he said, to attack Kitty Genovese again.

By this time Genovese had struggled to her feet and made her way around the side of the building in which she lived.

Like almost all of the buildings on Austin Street, retail shops fronted the sidewalk on the ground floor, and the entrances to the upstairs apartments were around back.

Genovese shrieked, "I'm dying! I'm dying!" *The New York Times* said.

At this point, a city bus, the Lefferts Boulevard line that ran to Kennedy International Airport, passed the scene, but the *Times* gives no indication that the driver or any riders who may have been on the bus, saw anything.

In fact, they likely didn't because Genovese managed to get inside one of the vestibules leading into the building from the alley. When Moseley found her, he would later tell a jury, he cut off her bra and panties and sexually assaulted her. He then stabbed her one more time with the hunting knife, believing he killed her instantly.

The entire attack lasted 35 minutes. When it was done, Moseley, a 29-year-old business machine operator, calmly drove to his home on Sutter Avenue in South Ozone Park, Queens. Inside, his wife and two children were soundly asleep.

On the front seat of his car were a few mementoes he taken from Genovese's pocketbook: Her keys, makeup, a pill bottle, and \$49. [\[4\]](#)

If Gansberg had been writing the day after the murder, the account above, absent details from Moseley's confession, would have likely topped the story. Writing weeks later, however, required the reporter to lead with some other aspect of the investigation.

As he sat down to type, no doubt, he knew he was about to create a sensation and chill the New York metropolitan area to its core:

"For more than half an hour, 38 respectable, law-abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks in Kew Gardens," he wrote.

"Twice their chatter and the sudden glow of their bedroom lights interrupted him and frightened him off. Each time he returned, sought her out, and stabbed her again. Not one person telephoned the police during the assault; one witness called after the woman was dead," Gansberg continued. "That was two weeks ago today."

Gansberg, who died in 1995 after a 43-year career as reporter and editor at the *Times*, then delivered what in many a newsrooms would have been called the money quote, the statement which would make the grisly crime -- one of 636 murders committed in New York City in 1964 [\[5\]](#) -- infamous.



The comment is attributed to a "still shocked" Assistant Chief Inspector Frederick Lussen, who had recently become chief of the city's 3,481 detectives and, at the time, was a 25 year veteran of homicide investigations in the city.

During that time, his most famous cases involved the shootings of mobsters. One was the 1957 non-fatal shooting of Frank Costello, known as "the boss of racketeers." The other was the 1957 slaying of Albert Anastasia, chief executioner of Murder Inc.

Another of his noteworthy cases was that of Salvador Agron, who murdered two teenagers in a Hell's Kitchen park in 1959, after mistaking them for rival gang members. The odd twist in the case was that Agron wore a cape while committing the slayings. The case would later be immortalized by Paul Simon in his Broadway musical "The Capeman."

According to Gansberg -- who would win a number of awards for his coverage of the story, including an award of excellence from the Newspaper Reporter Association of New York [\[6\]](#) -- Lussen was baffled even days after the murder that so many "good people" had failed to call the police during the attack.

"As we have reconstructed the crime," Lussen said, "the assailant had three chances to kill this woman during a 35-minute period. He returned twice to complete the job. If we had been called when he first attacked, the woman might not be dead now."

By the time police were summoned to the scene, it was 3:50 a.m. Even then, after Austin Street had fallen silent, the unidentified man who called police did so with trepidation, Gansberg wrote.

First, he called a friend on Long Island to ask for advice, then he dialed an elderly neighbor.

When the police arrived at the scene minutes later, the man sheepishly told police, "I didn't want to get involved," *The New York Times* reported.

"It was 4:25 A.M. when the ambulance arrived to take the body of Miss Genovese. It drove off. 'Then,' a solemn police detective said, 'the people came out,'" the account continued.

With Gansberg's story, the death of Kitty Genovese became every New Yorker's tragedy and a subject of national debate -- a parable about the isolation and moral dislocation of modern urban life.

So great was the vilification heaped on the neighborhood, so heavy the stigma, that many of Genovese's neighbors moved away as quickly -- and quietly -- as they could.

Then came the avalanche of academic papers, books and television programs, both fictionalized and documentary in nature, that repeatedly worked over the story of the 38 witnesses who did nothing to prevent the cold-blooded murder of an innocent woman.

The murder even opened up a whole new area of psychological study, "bystander apathy," or "the Genovese syndrome."

Even *Life* magazine, the self-proclaimed "Great American" magazine, proclaimed the killing showed the United States had become a nation of "callous, chickenhearted and immoral people."

But as the years and anniversaries of the murder came and went another interpretation of the story began to gain credence -- that the details that so inflamed the public's imagination were based on a faulty, initial police report and are simply wrong.

As Jim Rasenberger pointedly asked in an October 2006 piece on the murder for *American Heritage* magazine: "It was a story so disturbing that we all still remember it. But what if it wasn't true?"

Essentially, the revisionist school of thought on the murder is that rather than 38 potential "witnesses" to the murder, there were probably no more than six or seven due to how the attack unfolded.

While the initial story had Genovese attacked three times, the actual number was two -- the initial stabbing on Austin Street and the final, extended attack inside the foyer at the back of her building.

"It was here, out of view and earshot of nearly everyone in Kew Gardens, that the greater part of the assault occurred," Rasenberger wrote.

Many people may have heard the attack, but couldn't be sure what they were hearing -- a confrontation taken from inside Bailey's to the sidewalk outside? A lovers' quarrel? Rowdy people passing through the neighborhood?

Gansberg isn't alive to defend the story today, but his editor A.M. Rosenthal, continued to do so until his own death in 2005. In an interview with Rasenberger, Rosenthal dismissed criticism of the piece, saying that occurs any time a story gets a lot of attention.

While Rosenthal seemed to concede the exact number of witnesses could never be known, he told Rasenberger, "the whole picture, as I saw it, was very affecting."

In March 2004, a few days before the 40th anniversary of the murder, *Queens Tribune* writers Liz Goff and Aaron Rutkoff revisited the case adding yet more details to what had happened that night.

When Greta Schwartz received the call from her neighbor about what was transpiring outside, she pulled a bathrobe over her nightgown and immediately made her way down to the alley.

In a 1993 interview with the newspaper, Schwartz, who has since died, recalled that she didn't think to be afraid as she made her way in the darkness, checking each doorway she passed. Finally, she came to door number 62 and found she could only open it part way.

Wiggling her way into the foyer, Schwartz said she initially thought Genovese had fallen. Seeing the young woman's skirt was up around her waist, she instinctively pulled it back down. Only then, she said, did she realize the young woman had been stabbed.

With the police on their way, Schwartz was joined by a second, unidentified woman, and they stayed with Genovese as she died.

Mary Ann Zielenko didn't speak publicly about the murder for years, in part because of the pain; in part because many wouldn't accept the victim was gay.

However, she consented to tell her story -- and Kitty's -- for a "Weekend Edition" segment aired on National Public Radio on March 13, 2004.

Zielenko said with Genovese at work, she and a mutual friend of the couple went bowling the night of the murder.

"I was tired that night," she said. "It was probably 11:30 [p.m. when I got home]. I went to bed. And the next thing I remember is the police knocking at the door at 4 o'clock in the morning. So they took me to the emergency room, said, 'You have to identify her.'" So I did -- standard identifying a person with the white sheet. And I went outside and sat on the bench.

"They said, 'We're going to take you home,' and I said, 'I'm going to wait for her.'" With that, Zielenko sobbed. [\[7\]](#)

"I still have a lot of anger toward people because they could have saved her life," Zielenko continued. "I mean, all those steps along the way when he attacked ... And then he sexually assaulted her too, when she was dying. I mean, you look out the window and you see this happening and you don't help? That's -- how do you live with yourself, knowing you didn't do anything? That's the biggest lesson to be learned from this: Really love each other. We have to on this planet." [\[8\]](#)

Moseley was arrested on a burglary charge in Astoria, Queens six days after the murder, and confessed not just to Genovese's killing, but also to those of two other young women, Annie May Johnson, 24, of Jamaica, whom he had murdered in February 1964, and Barbara Kralik, 15, killed in July 1963.

He had no previous record at the time of his arrest. Convicted and initially sentenced to death, Moseley's sentence was overturned by the New York State Court of Appeals on a technicality and commuted to life in prison.

In the wake of Kitty Genovese's murder, Mayor Robert F. Wagner said the city faced "an urgent need for a renewal, revival and deepening of the brotherly, the neighborly, the community spirit."

Long after the event -- 25 years later to be precise -- Martin Gansberg told a colleague at the Times his article on the murder "awakened people to the fact that bad things were happening and they were doing nothing about it."

Clearly, something profound was happening to the fabric of the city. During the early years of the Wagner era, the mayor could point with justifiable pride to the fact the murder rate in New York City was below the national average.

In 1963, however, the number of murders that occurred in the city -- 548 -- was more than twice the number that had occurred a decade earlier, and by the mid-1960s violent crime in general was very much on the minds of New Yorkers.

In fact, the year would later be seen as the beginning of an alarming rise in New York's murder rate that wouldn't peak until 1990, when 2,245 met an unnatural end. [\[9\]](#)

By the time of Genovese's murder, violent crime was beginning to pervade the nightmares of many city residents, who bemoaned what they saw as a decline in decency in the metropolis around them.

Afterwards, with accusations regarding New Yorker's callousness and apathy everywhere, the City Police Department instituted the 911 for emergency calls, to make it easier to report crime by eliminating the need to look up the number for the local precinct.

At the time of his death, Moseley had spent more than 50 years in prison and was one of the state's longest-serving inmates.

He was denied parole 18 times, most recently in 2015.

Over the years he was less than a stellar inmate. In 1968 Moseley broke out of prison -- taking several hostages in the process -- and raped a woman before he was recaptured.

He also participated in the Attica prison uprising in 1971.

But it was his apparent lack of remorse for killing Genovese that most defined his time in prison.

Moseley is reputed to have once complained to a parole board that it "only took her minutes to die, and here I am spending years in prison."

In his later years, he tried a different tact in a bid to gain his release.

"I know that I did some terrible things, and I've tried very hard to atone for those things in prison," he told a parole board in November 2013.

"I think almost 50 years of paying for those crimes is enough," he said.

Photo caption:

This undated file photo shows Kitty Genovese, whose screams could not save her the night she was stalked and killed in 1964 in the Queens neighborhood of New York. (The Daily News via AP, File) Copyright , The Associated Press.

[\[1\]](#) Gado, Mark. The Kitty Genovese Murder: A Cry in the Night. http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/serial_killers/predators/kitty_genovese/2.html

[\[2\]](#) Gado, Mark. The Kitty Genovese Murder: A Cry in the Night. http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/serial_killers/predators/kitty_genovese/2.html

[\[3\]](#) Gansberg, Martin. Thirty-eight Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police. The New York Times. March 27, 1964.

[\[4\]](#) Goff, Liz and Rutkoff, Aaron. Remembering Kitty Genovese. Queens Tribune. March 11, 2004

[\[5\]](#) Cooper, Michael. Homicides Decline below 1964 level in New York City. The New York Times. December 24, 1998.

[\[6\]](#) Saxon, Wolfgang. Martin Gansberg, 74, A Reporter and Editor for 43 years at Times (Obit). The New York Times. May 4, 1995.

[\[7\]](#) Sound Portraits: Remembering Kitty Genovese. Weekend Edition. NPR. March 13, 2004.

[\[8\]](#) Sound Portraits: Remembering Kitty Genovese. Weekend Edition. NPR. March 13, 2004.

[\[9\]](#) Lueck, Thomas J. Low Murder Rate Brings New York Back to '63. The New York Times. December 31, 2007.

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