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55/03/27 The Mystery Woman in the Sheppard Case, Part I

American Weekly

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THE MYSTERY WOMAN IN

All through a sensational trial Marilyn Sheppard was a shadowy figure. People everywhere asked, "What was she really like?" Now, after months of investigation, a top reporter brings her to life

Four days before last Christmas, people all over the world paused in their holiday shopping to read that one of the most publicized murder trials in the history of crime had finally ended. In Cleveland, Ohio, Dr. Sam Sheppard was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of his wife Marilyn.

The murder had been unusually vicious. Pretty Marilyn Sheppard, four months pregnant, had been bludgeoned 35 times. Her skull was crushed, her nose smashed, two teeth broken off, a fingernail ripped away (although three rings remained on the finger) and the bedroom in which she had died was blood-soaked.

No murder case in 20 years had so gripped public attention. In a state of strange dissatisfaction with the jury's verdict of "murder in the second degree" people as far away as Germany and Japan continued to argue the details of the case among themselves.

Where, they asked, was the murder weapon? What had become of the T-shirt Dr. Sam had been wearing the night of the murder? If he had been consumed by a "murder passion" that early morning, as charged, what had touched it off? On the other hand, who but he would have wiped away all but two fingerprints in the entire house? Why was the claim made that Dr. Sam had a broken neck due to a struggle with the real murderer—when X-rays taken three days afterwards showed no fracture of any kind? If he were innocent, as he still claims to be, why did he refuse to take a lie detector test on at least 15 occasions?

Newspapers had published hundreds of thousands of words on these and other aspects of the case. With one exception, the principal characters had become so well known that to people everywhere they seemed like neighbors.

The exception was the victim, Florence Marilyn Sheppard, commonly called Marilyn. Although her name is a household word—along with those of Doctors Sam, Richard and Stephen, Mayor Houk, Mrs. Ahern and Susan Hayes—she remained throughout, and still remains, a woman of mystery. Her ghost was present every moment of the



An unpublished photo of Marilyn shortly before her death.

trial, but none of the witnesses was able to give it color, substance, or indeed, any of the attributes of personality. In much of the testimony—especially that of her husband—she seemed more of a wraith than the central figure of a great tragedy. A lot of the confusion that still surrounds the case undoubtedly can be traced to this single fact.

This story, the details of which were supplied by many people who knew her well, should make her less of a misty memory and help to explain how this personable young woman came to a tragic end.

Marilyn first met Sam in Cleveland Heights' Roosevelt Junior High School, when she was a pretty girl of 13 and he a darkly handsome boy of 12. He was a class behind her. "She had a crush on Sam from the minute she first laid eyes on him—and they dated fairly regularly throughout her last year at Junior High," says a schoolgirl friend. Like the rest of Marilyn's schoolmates, Sam learned at once that her pattern of living was different from that of the other students.

She had been born in Cleveland on April 14, 1923, the daughter of the former Dorothy Blake and

of Thomas S. Reese, a chemical engineer and inventor. At the time, Reese had just invented a lacquer decalcomania which has since become known all over America. It is the artificial woodgrain used on dashboards, station wagon bodies, television sets, and in other ways.

Now, at 54, he is vice-president of the big Dinoc Company in Cleveland, holds 50-odd patents on various inventions and is an authority on photographic emulsion. At the start of World War II he invented the largest camera in the world, for wartime use. A brilliant if remote man of science, he was 32 when tragedy first struck his family.

That was in March of 1929. Marilyn was almost six years old and had been told that in another two months she would have a baby sister or brother. But one Sunday her mother became violently ill and three days later she was dead of meningitis. A Caesarean section was performed at the last minute to save the unborn baby, but without success.

Says Marilyn's cousin, Dr. Keith Weigle, Jr., "Marilyn's mother died suddenly during her second pregnancy, and for this reason Marilyn had a superstitious feeling that she, too, might die under the same circumstances. She didn't really want a second baby for another reason—she knew she was an Rh negative blood-type . . . You can see how prophetic she was."

After his wife's death, Reese and little Marilyn moved into the big house of his parents on Stanwood Road. Here the child found a second home. Her grandparents lavished gifts and affection on her, and she had a ready-made family in her four Weigle cousins whose yard backed up against Grandfather Reese's yard.

She went to Prospect Grade School—where her high intelligence was rated at 132 in the third grade—and made close friendships among her cousins and the neighborhood children. Therefore, when her father remarried in 1931 and moved to the house on Silsby Road in Cleveland Heights where he still lives today, Marilyn began leading a split life. She was eight years old at the time. During the week she lived with her father and stepmother, and she spent her week ends at her grandparents' house in East Cleveland.

"The fact that she lived in two different homes all her school life seemed perfectly natural to her," says a schoolmate, "and it soon seemed natural to us, too. When she was around 11 her half-brother Tommy was born."

As soon as Sam Sheppard reached Cleveland Heights High School he and Marilyn went steadily together. They were an outstanding couple in every way. Handsome Sam was almost six feet tall, blue-eyed, with thick dark hair. Then, as later, he was extremely proud of his muscular physique. "He was crazy about sports and about keeping himself fit," says a schoolmate. "He never smoked or drank and he spent a lot of his time lifting weights and pulling springs.

"While he didn't have a brilliant talent as an athlete, he was a pluggier at all school sports—track, basketball and football. When he gradu-

wife, Marilyn, who has remained, until now . . .

THE SHEPPARD CASE

BY ELEANOR HARRIS

ated we voted him our 'most valuable all-around athlete.' He was a quiet, shy sort of guy who was usually grinning, and he was so well-liked that we chose him class president."

During those days Marilyn was a far more vibrant personality than Sam. "When you passed her in the hall, you knew it. She said hello to everyone, and everyone said hello to her," reports a Cleveland Heights graduate. "She was a slimly graceful girl and her curly light-brown hair framed a lively face with big hazel eyes. As Sam was proud of his build, she was shyly proud of her legs—the most beautiful legs I've ever seen anywhere."

A natural leader, she belonged to 10 different school organizations, was president of the Yellowjackets and captain of her basketball team. But she was also full of fun. During one pep rally she and a friend did a ridiculous "goat dance"—while the student body shrieked with laughter, Marilyn played the goat's back end, draped in a sheet and wearing long white stockings.

None of her fellow students imagined that, only a few years later, a country coroner would give a courtroom description of this vital girl as "a white woman who appeared approximately 30 years of age, 67 inches in length and weighing 125 pounds."

She spent summer vacations at her grandparents' cottage at Mentor on the shores of Lake Erie. Here Sam was a guest so often that one room was affectionately called "Sam's Room" by Grandmother Reese. Says Marilyn's cousin, Keith Weigle, whose family had the cottage next door, "Grandma adored Sam. Whenever he was coming out for a few days she made all his favorite foods—he was one of the biggest eaters I ever saw. He was a terrific milk drinker, so she always got an extra two or three quarts a day for him."

The couple swam in Lake Erie by day, danced at parties by night—and discussed the future. Whereas Marilyn's family was one of the most solidly successful in Cleveland, Sam's at that time was relatively unknown. (Then, as now, Marilyn's uncle, Worth Munn, was vice-president of the Di-Noc Company, working with her talented father. Her uncle, Keith Weigle, Sr., was one of Cleveland's foremost auto dealers. Her aunt Mrs. Weigle was to become president of the Ohio Congress of Parent-Teacher Associations, and is today on the national P.-T. A. Board.)

On the other hand, Sam's father, Dr. R. A. Sheppard, was a Doctor of Osteopathy with surgical practice, and osteopaths were not held in high esteem by Cleveland's medical profession. In 1935 Dr. Sheppard had organized the Cleveland Osteopathic Hospital, using a converted old house on Euclid Avenue. A determined man, he dreamed of a new hospital in which his three sons would work under his direction, all of them osteopathic surgeons. Sam's two older brothers, Richard and Stephen, had already agreed to the plan.

But Sam did not want to be a doctor. His real interest in life was athletics. "If he had been left alone, he'd have been a football coach," a number of his friends agree. However, during his junior year at high school, Sam gave in to the first of many insistent family pressures and promised to study osteopathic surgery.

His family, more close-knit than Marilyn's, was in some ways eccentric. He told friends that his father had himself delivered all three of his own sons. Mrs. Sheppard, despite the fact that she was devoted to her boys, ran so strict a household that Sam said, "When I'm married I'm going to have the kind of a house where I can spit on the floor if I want to."

Sheppard thrift was no secret—money was spent only after extremely careful consideration. (Years later, when her husband was worth several hundred thousand dollars, Mrs. Sheppard gave her son Sam a pair of cabana pants for Christmas and, on his birthday, gave him the matching top.)

Marilyn was graduated from high school in 1941 and went on to college at Skidmore. Behind her, in 1942, Sam graduated and got into another family argument about his future. World War II had started. Sam, the athlete, wanted to join the Army and become a paratrooper. But again he permitted himself to be dominated.

Says his brother Dr. Richard Sheppard, "My brother Steve and I talked him out of joining the Army. We told him to go on to pre-med studies at Hanover College in Indiana, and then to the College of Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons in Los Angeles. A medical student usually could be deferred by his draft board."

So, during most of World War II, Sam and Marilyn were separated only by his studies. They wrote daily letters to each other. She tired of college and returned home. In Cleveland, marking time until she and Sam could marry, she worked as a receptionist in a doctor's office. Then, after taking shorthand at a business school, she became a secretary.

Meanwhile, Sam left Hanover College after two years and in 1944 started studying neuro-surgery in Los Angeles. He and Marilyn were guests at the weddings of Richard and Stephen. Finally, in 1945, it was their turn to be married. The ceremony took place in the Hollywood First Methodist Church on February 21, 1945, and then Marilyn started housekeeping with the man who would later be convicted as her murderer.

For the Los Angeles chapter of their marriage they were, in effect, camping out. Sam had rented a small furnished house in a bungalow court at 1733½ Sitchell Street.

"I didn't know how to boil water," Marilyn told friends later. "Mrs. Sheppard stayed out in California after our wedding long enough to teach me to cook what Sam liked."

She herself ate sparingly because food meant little to her. But Sam had a voracious appetite, as well as certain definite tastes. Most of all, he liked pies; and Marilyn always made the pie crust herself. "She was sure Sam would be able to tell if she used store mix," says her maternal aunt, Mrs. Clifford Brown. "One time I used a pie-crust mix when she and Sam were coming to dinner. She was so upset she hid the box in which it had come. He didn't know the difference."

Marilyn was already discovering how lonely a doctor's wife could be. Sam was away all day and half the night while he was interning. She welcomed the birth of their son on May 18, 1947. The baby, named after Sam, was nicknamed "Chip."

With Chip, she began spending several weeks each summer back in Cleveland, visiting her relatives, while Sam remained in surgical residency at the Los Angeles County Hospital. During a trip she made in the summer of 1950, after five years of marriage, her friends and relatives in Cleveland first began noticing small indications that all was not going well between her and Sam.

She had become extremely nervous, and she smoked cigarettes continually. Most of the time her pride kept her from talking about her worries but, to close friends, she sometimes burst out her torment over letters from Sam telling of dating other women in California.

She also hinted at sex problems. Sam had an insatiable sex appetite, while she did not. (Continued on page 7)



Dr. Sam on trial for his life.

THE MYSTERY WOMAN IN THE SHEPPARD CASE

(Continued from page 5)



When Sam Sheppard and Marilyn Reese were married in 1945 they moved into a furnished house and Sam's mother stayed awhile to teach the bride to cook.

enjoy sex to the same degree. Nevertheless she longed for their marriage to last. "I can only pray that somehow things will right themselves—after all, because of me he never had the chance to date lots of girls in school like other boys," she would say sadly.

Meanwhile, in California, Sam had made up his mind that he wanted a divorce. He wrote her a letter to this effect but was talked out of mailing it by a fellow intern. However, he notified his father of his two recent decisions—he wanted to live in California instead of Cleveland, and he wanted to divorce Marilyn.

As on previous occasions, he was completely routed by his father. Dr. Sheppard was stolidly opposed to divorce. (So powerful was Dr. Sheppard's influence over his three sons that, even when they had all become husbands and fathers, they never at any time drank in his presence.)

Furthermore, two years earlier Dr. Sheppard had realized his life's dream: he had organized the new osteopathic Bay View Hospital. He had converted a mammoth five-story mansion into a 110-bed hospital, located in the comfortable residential suburb of Bay Village. In it Dr. Sheppard visualized a Sheppard surgical empire.

Already his son Dr. Richard was in charge of gastro-intestinal and general abdominal surgery there, as well as obstetrics. His son Dr. Stephen was doing genital-urinary surgery at the hospital. Dr. Sam was slated to be the neuro-surgeon, the specialist on brain, bone and periphery nerves.

With old Dr. Sheppard himself acting as general surgeon and chief of staff, the surgical work the entire hospital could be handled by the Sheppard family. Under no circumstances would he consider letting his youngest son Sam remain in California.

So it was that in July of 1951 Sam and Marilyn came back to the city where they had both grown up. Almost immediately they found the Bay Village house in which they would live out the last chapter of their life together—and in which, after three years, Marilyn was to die so brutal a death.

It was an old house, many times rebuilt, made partly of yellow brick, partly of white shingle and

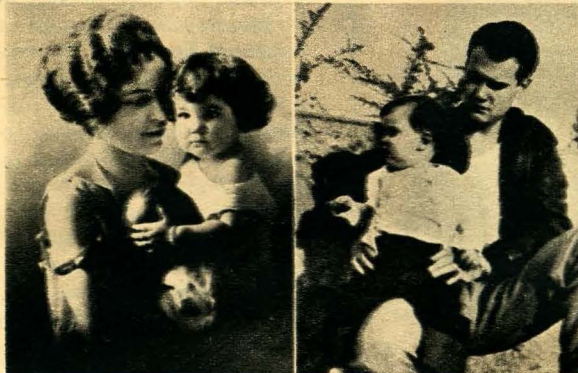
topped by a green roof. Its price was \$31,000.

Sam, influenced by the extremely thrifty atmosphere in which he had been raised, saw no reason for buying expensive new furniture. "You told me your mother had left you some things," he reminded Marilyn. So she began collecting furniture from her relatives.

From her aunt Henrietta Munn she got one bedroom set, and from storage a bedroom set left her by her mother. The twin beds in the lakeside bedroom came from her Grandmother Reese's house. In one of them she had spent half of her childhood—and in one of them she would die.

She and Sam were more than welcomed by the community. "They were new, they were young and they were fun," sums up an acquaintance. Marilyn met one neighbor by "flying across the street in her yellow shorts and long brown hair to borrow a lemon." She met others by joining the active Junior Women's Club of Bay Village.

Athletic Sam nailed a basketball net over his garage door a few days after he and Marilyn moved in, and he often played basketball in the late afternoon with some of the teen-agers in the neighborhood. "Marilyn played too—she looked like a high school girl herself," reports a 16-year-old player.



These family album pictures show Marilyn at the age of two, with her mother, and Dr. Sam with the boy that he and his brutally murdered wife called Chip.

When the Bay Village High School needed a basketball teacher for the girls' team she was recommended for the job. She spent part of each Saturday teaching classes in basketball.

By 1952 Sam was the doctor for the football team at Bay Village High School and the players hero-worshipped him. Chip, with whom both parents were strict, was considered the best-mannered and best-liked child on the lake shore.

In the early summer the Sheppards met the mayor of Bay Village, John Spencer Houk, who also owned the meat market in the shopping center. With "Spen" and Esther Houk, the newcomers purchased a 14-foot aluminum boat and, using the Houks' small outboard motor, Sam began showing neighborhood teen-agers, hospital interns and assorted neighbors how to water-ski.

Marilyn, herself a superb water-skier, liked nobody but Sam to run the boat while she performed. All summer long their driveway was jammed with cars, while dozens of Bay Villagers swarmed on their dock. But it was the boat that gave the Sheppards' new friends an insight into Sam's idea of gift-giving.

He had long complained that the Houks' small motor didn't supply enough power for fast skiing. For the Christmas of 1952 he gave Marilyn a 25-horsepower outboard motor . . . to the jeers of their friends. "Why doesn't Marilyn give *him* a bras-

siere?" demanded one outspoken woman.

Because he worked seven days a week, and because he refused to give up any part of his athletic life, Sam was chronically tired. "I wish I had a dollar for every time I've seen him sleep on somebody's couch after dinner," more than one friend had said.

Often on Sundays, when he was racing far out on Lake Erie on his water-skis, the telephone at his dock would ring to summon him to an emergency case. Marilyn would flag him from shore to return at once.

However, he received high fees for his operations, and in 1953, only a year after he had completed his residency, he is reported to have paid taxes on an income of \$131,000. That same year he presented Marilyn with an inexpensive rhinestone pin, and a straw wood-basket.

There was never any doubt in the minds of their friends as to which of the two dominated the household—Sam did. It was as if, having been repressed in all his important life-decisions by his father's powerful influence, he was determined to be kingpin in his own home.

"He'd even give Marilyn orders: 'Marilyn, run upstairs and get me this or that,' and she'd do it fast," friends report. "Yet the puzzling thing is that Marilyn wasn't the type to be bossed around. She was a personality in her own right. I suppose she was trying to make him happy every way she knew how."

She was immensely popular in Bay Village. "She was so full of bounce," people say, "so completely natural. When she came into a room you knew you were going to like her." She looked far younger than her age and because of her slimly rounded figure she was able to wear junior-sized dresses and look right in them.

All summer long (Continued on following page)

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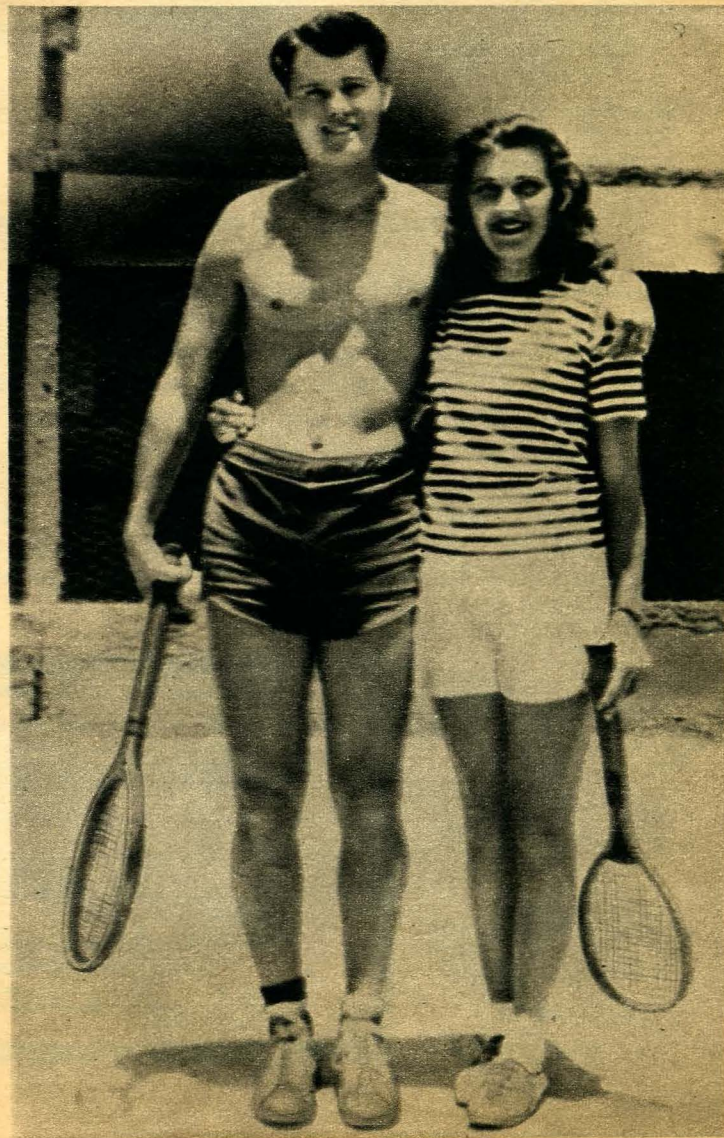
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All summer long (Continued on following page)



THE MYSTERY WOMAN IN THE SHEPPARD CASE

(Continued from preceding page)

she showed off her beautiful legs in brief shorts, while her light brown hair hung to her shoulders. Only a few months before her death she had cut her hair short and, two weeks earlier, she had recklessly gone in for a gamin cut. One of her neighbors said, "She looked 12 years old, and cute as a button."

Like her husband, Marilyn was a magnet for the teen-agers of the neighborhood. Her advice on romance was solemnly asked by the boys, as her advice on clothes was asked by the girls. She got on equally well with Bay Village adults, bowling weekly with the Junior Women's Club team, and becoming seriously interested in club meetings.

Just before her death she took up golf, playing with her close friends, Mrs. Don Ahearn and Mrs. Otto Graham, the wife of the famous football player. She also did her duty as Dr. Sam Sheppard's wife, becoming president the last year of her life of the Junior Women's Auxiliary Group of Bay View Hospital. But she told friends, "How glad I'll be when this is over. I wasn't born to preside at meetings."

Meanwhile, although their marriage appeared happy on the surface, there was activity behind the scenes. In 1952, only a few months after moving to Bay Village, Sam had quietly started to have an affair with a pretty laboratory technician named Susan Hayes, whom he met at Bay View Hospital. For a year and a half they had intimate relations together in an apartment above the Sheppard Clinic in Fairview, in her own home and, when no other place could be found, in his parked car.

Marilyn knew about Susan and argued with Sam about her. She also knew that Sam had had a family discussion, in the past few months, about his continued desire for a divorce—and that he was held back from insisting on it only by his father's rigid attitude.

Says a friend of Sam's, "I really believe that he was determined to save his marriage to please his father—but that every other drive in him wanted to get out of it." There is reason to believe that Marilyn, tortured by the situation, for awhile considered divorce herself, but her love for her husband made her abandon the idea. That their sexual incompatibility was at the base of the struggle there is no doubt.

Marilyn remained, in the words of a friend, "absolutely nuts about the guy." Doggedly determined to make the marriage succeed, in March she drove with Sam to California. Sam's reason for the trip was to complete a specific type of dissection at the Los Angeles Graduate School . . . but he also knew that Susan Hayes had moved to Los Angeles only a month earlier.

While Marilyn visited the home of Dr. and Mrs. Randall J. Chapman near Monterey, Sam spent a week sharing a bedroom with Susan Hayes in Los Angeles. Back in Monterey to pick up his wife for the return trip to Bay Village, Sam once again discussed divorce, this time with Dr. Chapman. Nevertheless, Marilyn felt that at the Chapman house she and Sam had one of the happiest periods of their married life.

Her reticence with her Bay Village friends had always been remarkable. But one day in April, shortly after her return



In the summer of 1952 the Sheppards were the most enthusiastic water-skiers in the community of Bay Village. Dr. Sam, who kept in tip-top physical condition, enjoyed teaching the teen-agers of the neighborhood to ride the waves of Lake Erie.

from California, she told her friend, Nancy Ahearn, about Sam's affair with Susan Hayes, describing its start in Bay Village and its continuation in California. At Nancy's shocked reaction Marilyn said, "Well, Nancy, it isn't the first time. There was another girl once before in California. If there were others I don't know about them. I've known all this a long time but Sam refuses to discuss it."

Pretty Mrs. Ahearn was roused to righteous anger. "Why, I wouldn't put up with that kind of thing for a minute!" she exclaimed. "Marilyn, you're young and pretty—why don't you leave Sam? If I were you I'd get a job and forget him."

Marilyn demurred. If she were working all day it would be hard on Chip. She herself had no money, she said, and she hated the idea of asking her father for any. She added, "Sam's been studying hard or working hard all his life, and he never had a chance to play around before he was married. I still hope he'll grow up to be the man I married."

Then the unhappy young wife said the sentence that explained everything about her attitude toward her marriage, "I guess it all adds up to one thing: I love the guy."

She never again referred to the morning's conversation, and for the next three months the Sheppard life in Bay Village flowed on as it had before. As before, their friends kidded Sam about his "three-track-mind"—because he seemed to be interested in discussing only cars, sports and his surgical operations.

"You couldn't get a one-sentence answer out of him; he'd talk for 20 minutes," his friends report. They add, "One reason he couldn't discuss anything but his big three subjects is that he never read the newspapers. Neither did he read books. He read only medical journals... Marilyn was the reader of the family."

Sam also was kidded about his cellar "beauty shop"—in the basement were his punching bag with which he worked out, and a sun lamp under which, while stretched on a couch, he kept a perpetual tan. And he was

kidded about his party habits of napping after dinner, and of flirting.

"He loved to be the center of attention," a friend of the Sheppards reports, "but he never looked at a woman unless she encouraged him first. Then he acted like a high school boy, flattered silly. We used to call him Adonis and the Great Lover—but if I'd been Marilyn, I'd have flattened him to the ground!"

He had another amusement at parties. When Marilyn and he had first moved back from California in 1951 he would entertain himself by suddenly tossing a human ear into people's hands. (He had taken it from the dissecting laboratory at the Los Angeles College of Osteopathy.)

As a present to Marilyn's relatives, the Munns, he also had brought back an ash tray made of the sawed-off top of a human skull. To balance the rounded bone he had cemented two finger bones at the bottom. (The horrified Munns relegated the ash tray to a shelf in the garage.)

Sam Sheppard never had hesitated to transport parts of the human body across state lines. A few weeks before Marilyn's July murder, while returning from a trip to California, he had packed into the car four human heads. All of them exhibited outstanding medical problems, such as mastoid. These, kept wrapped in old newspapers in the garage, he sometimes used to bring into his den for dissecting.

When, on Friday night, July 2nd, Marilyn and Sam dined at Stephen Sheppard's house, they told Sam's oldest brother Richard the news they had known since the end of March: she was pregnant again. "If the baby's a boy, we're going to name it Stephen Allen Sheppard, for Steve," she announced. As it turned out, however, it never was named—or even born.

For the next day was her last day of life. ◀◀

Next week, Eleanor Harris will continue to sharpen the dim portrait of Marilyn Sheppard, in a dramatic hour-by-hour reconstruction of who she talked with and what she did on the day that ended with the discovery of her broken body.