

In a chilling true story, cybercrime expert J. A. Hitchcock recalls the first documented serial murder spree in which the perpetrator relied on the internet to find and lure his victims. This cautionary tale from the author of True Crime Online is a timely reminder of the dangers that lurk in the web's dark alleys.

The First Internet Serial Killer

J. A. Hitchcock

“I’m your slave. I’m yours.” A dark-haired woman named Suzette Trouten looked directly into the video camera as she pledged her undying devotion to a 58-year-old man known as the “Slavemaster.” She sat on the edge of the motel bed and waited for the videotape to stop and the action to begin.

John Robinson just smiled.

By day, middle-aged Robinson led a seemingly normal life. Neighbors called him a wonderful guy who gardened and entertained his grandchildren; he seemed to be happily married, too. But by night, Robinson—aka the Slavemaster—had a dark side as a well-known master of a troupe of sex slaves, most of whom he first met online.

Robinson trolled the internet hunting for new victims, although he says his killing spree started long before the internet was created. He won’t admit to how many women he killed, but police can link him to the murders of at least five.

Between 1969 and 2000, Robinson spent some 15 years off and on in prison for an assortment of theft and fraud charges. During the time that he was serving one of his sentences between 1987 and 1993, he met and wooed prison librarian Beverly Bonner. Robinson convinced Beverly that he was in love with her, and they decided to get married after Robinson was released. Robinson started using the alias of James Turner after he left prison, and he and Beverly moved to Olathe, Kansas, after she divorced her husband. Beverly started

working for Robinson, who was then president of HydroGro, Inc. No one ever heard from her again.

Beverly had told her ex-husband and friends that she was traveling abroad on business with Robinson and gave them a post office box for her mail. Her ex-husband sent the alimony checks there on a regular basis, and Robinson routinely cashed the checks, so no one was ever suspicious. When Robinson tired of Beverly, he made sure she disappeared without a trace. He rented a storage unit and moved her belongings into it. Among the items that he tucked into the storage unit was the 55-gallon chemical drum that held Beverly's body, along with two other similar drums containing the bodies of two other women. The other two women had been receiving government checks, which Robinson continued to cash for pocket money.

Robinson managed to keep his double life a secret for years, even from his wife, Nancy, to whom he'd been married since 1964. While Nancy managed the mobile home park where they lived, Robinson had launched his own venture: a magazine about mobile home living that became relatively successful. Robinson's employment options were somewhat compromised by his prior criminal record, so Nancy was pleased that her husband had found interesting work to keep him busy. Little did she know that he had become the Slavemaster in his off hours.

Robinson kept a regular daily routine. He waited for Nancy to leave for the office and then browsed various chat rooms online to find women who were interested in BDSM—an acronym combining the terms *bondage* and *discipline*, *dominance* and *submission*, and *sadism* and *masochism*. He often posted online about his ideal woman: submissive and willing to engage in virtually any imaginable sex act. When the internet and chat rooms were no longer enough to satisfy his deviant needs, he combed through the classifieds in alternative newspapers for local women who were looking for rough sex.

The women Robinson met online were easily seduced by his charming prose, and he shared photographs of himself with a select few. Some agreed to meet him in person in Kansas City, Kansas, on an all-expenses-paid trip to do his bidding, no matter how perverse

his sexual request. It was a wild but brief rendezvous for some; for others, it would end in death.

In late 1997, Robinson met Izabela Lewicka, a 21-year-old Polish college student living in north central Indiana with her university professor parents. Izabela wrote online about her interest in gothic horror stories and bondage, which intrigued Robinson so much that he offered her an “internship” as his slave. She accepted his invitation and told her parents she was dropping out of college and moving to Kansas City, fabricating a story about a rich publisher who had offered her an opportunity she couldn’t refuse.

When Robinson met Izabela in Kansas City, he dazzled her with an engagement ring, whisked her off to the county registrar’s office, and paid for a marriage certificate that he never picked up. Izabela assumed they were legally married, and she signed a 115-page slave contract that gave Robinson control over her life, including access to her bank accounts. From that point on, she communicated with her parents only via email.

Less than 2 years later, Robinson told friends that he and Izabela were going on a long trip. After the couple left Kansas City, no one ever saw her again.

Even before Izabela’s disappearance, Robinson had been trolling chat rooms and websites in search of a replacement sex slave. He soon found the perfect woman. Like Robinson, 28-year-old Suzette led a double life. By day, she was a caring, licensed practical nurse; by night, she submitted to a host of masters as a sex slave.

Suzette was lured into Robinson’s trap when he told her online that he was a wealthy businessman who needed a full-time nurse for his elderly father. He promised her a salary of \$60,000 per year, plus a series of all-expenses-paid trips around the world for the three of them. And, of course, she would agree to be his slave.

Suzette told her family and friends that she had accepted “a dream job.” When she moved to Kansas City in February 1999, she left Robinson’s name and telephone number with her mother in case of emergency. In her last email to a friend, Suzette wrote, “We all finally find what we want and need and I found mine.”

Suzette's mother received several typed letters from her daughter by post, but something wasn't right. Suzette didn't spell well, yet the spelling and grammar in the letters was flawless. The envelopes carried postmarks from Kansas City rather than the foreign destinations she had described. Deeply concerned, Suzette's mother called one of the emergency phone numbers her daughter had given her. When Robinson answered the phone, she asked to speak to her daughter, but Robinson refused, insisting that Suzette had stolen money from him and run off with one of his friends. He cut the conversation short by hanging up the phone.

Highly suspicious of Robinson, Suzette's mother called the police to file a missing person's report. When one of the officers recognized Robinson's name from previous missing persons inquiries, the authorities stepped up their investigation, hoping for the break they needed to catch a serial killer.

Unaware of the investigation, Robinson soon returned to his BDSM chat rooms. He even posed as Suzette when members expressed curiosity over her sudden disappearance. When some members began asking tough questions, Robinson stopped posing as Suzette, instead posting as the Slavemaster and another persona he called "JA Robinson." Some of Suzette's friends decided to check out the Slavemaster and took turns chatting with him. Once again, Robinson appeared to have his pick of willing slaves. He set his sights on Lore Remington, a young woman living in eastern Canada.

Lore told Robinson she was very interested in becoming his slave. The chat room messages progressed to emails and then to phone calls. The Lenaxa, Kansas, police department had previously tapped Robinson's phone as part of the ongoing investigation. Authorities took a gamble and contacted Lore to let her know about the investigation and asked if she would help with the case. She agreed.

Although Lore tried to get Robinson to make overt promises or admit guilt about his past dealings with women, his responses remained guarded. As she recalled, he "offered nothing other than that I would be financially taken care of and never have to work." Lore hedged, telling Robinson she didn't seem to be his kind of slave.

Neither would commit to taking the next step, so the relationship went no further.

Robinson soon met a woman named Vickie Neufeld in one of the chat rooms he frequented. Vickie had just been laid off from her job and was depressed, making her a perfect target. Robinson's many emails and phone calls convinced her that his many connections would help her find a good job. Of course, part of the deal was that she would become his slave. She didn't want to move from Texas to Kansas City, but he offered to take care of all of her expenses and assured her that she could pay him back when she found a job. The police, who were monitoring Robinson's calls by this time, were certain the Slavemaster was circling his next victim.

Robinson wired money to Vickie, who came to Kansas City armed with more than \$700 worth of sex toys and BDSM accessories. Robinson reserved a motel room and prepared for a night of rough sex with Vickie. As the police monitored the encounter from the next room, Vickie complained that Robinson's demands as a master were too much for her. He didn't like her attitude. He tied her up, beat her, and took photos of her in compromising positions. When the physical abuse finally ended, he left her tied up and alone in the motel room for a few days. The police did not intervene, just in case Robinson returned or if he was watching to see if she escaped. When Robinson did return, he told her to go back to Texas and wait for further orders. As his slave, she left obediently in keeping with his wishes, and he kept her collection of sex toys.

This became a pattern that Robinson repeated with several women. He brought them to the same motel, had rough sex with them, assaulted them, took photos of the bruises and marks on their bodies, and then left them alone in the room for a few days to think about their roles as slaves. When he returned, he would send them home to await his further orders.

A woman named Jeanna Milliron would turn out to be more resourceful than the rest. As usual, Robinson ordered her to come to Kansas City, and she followed his demands. He assaulted her and abandoned her in the motel, as he had done with the others, but

Jeanna found a way to free herself from Robinson's bondage and called the police.

Now that a credible witness had come forward, county prosecutor Paul Morrison agreed to issue a warrant for Robinson's arrest, but concerns remained. Issuing a warrant for sexual battery was one thing, but in order to prosecute Robinson for the unsolved murders, the prosecutor needed more evidence—ideally, another victim he could tie the Slavemaster to.

New evidence was produced through the police phone tap on Robinson. He was communicating with a woman in Tennessee about her plans to move to Kansas City to become his latest slave; police were alarmed to discover that she planned to bring her 8-year-old daughter with her. Combing through the list of women Robinson was known to have brought to the motel, police located Vickie in Texas; they were able to convince her to file a complaint against Robinson for sexual battery and theft.

In June 2000, authorities arrived at Robinson's mobile home and arrested him. The police not only had search warrants for his mobile home but for a ranch he owned about 30 miles away. Robinson didn't believe the police had any incriminating evidence against him, as he was unaware of the phone taps and ongoing surveillance.

Robinson's "ranch" was no more than an old, deserted mobile home and a dilapidated barn on the edge of a large pond overrun by tall grass. The Kansas Bureau of Investigation brought in cadaver-sniffing dogs and began to inspect every inch of the property.

On one side of the barn, two 55-gallon yellow chemical drums were barely visible among the tall weeds. After darting around the barn briefly, the cadaver-sniffing dogs sat down in front of the drums and refused to move.

"It was horrendous," Sgt. Rick Roth testified at the trial, recalling that when they took the lid off the first drum, the smell of decaying flesh made investigators gag. Inside the drum was the body of a young woman partially submerged in fluid. The police didn't bother opening the second drum; they already knew what it contained. Both drums were taken to the county morgue, where officials found the

badly decomposed body of a second woman. The remains were eventually identified as those of Izabela and Suzette.

Just over the state line in Missouri, police obtained a search warrant for the storage facility where Robinson had rented two units. They found three more chemical drums inside, all containing bodies in various stages of decomposition. One victim was identified as Beverly; the two others were women who had been reported missing after telling family and friends they were going to work for Robinson in Kansas City.

Autopsies later revealed that all five women had died quickly from blunt-force trauma to the head. The report offered their families some relief; at least the women hadn't suffered long. But authorities knew these were all premeditated killings.

Police obtained a third search warrant to gain access to the apartment that Robinson had rented for Izabela. The landlord told authorities that while most of the apartment had been dusty and unkempt when Robinson left with Izabela's furniture and belongings, the bedroom looked like it had been cleaned and repainted. Authorities sprayed Luminol—a blood-detecting chemical that glows under ultraviolet light—on the bedroom walls and floor and found traces of blood.

Although police didn't uncover any additional bodies at the time, incriminating evidence was found linking Robinson to two other missing women. The county prosecutor in Kansas City charged Robinson with theft and sexual battery against his motel victims as well as three counts of murder (of Suzette, Izabela, and Lisa Stasi, a third victim). Missouri prosecutors added three more capital murder charges to Robinson's list of crimes. He was held on a \$5 million bond in maximum security.

Robinson's Kansas trial took place in October 2002. His public defender, Byron Cerillo, chastised the media for sensationalizing the trial, saying, "I resent the fact that people are now claiming that Mr. Robinson, either directly or indirectly, is a serial killer."

Robinson's family released a statement that read, in part, "As each day has passed, the surreal events have built into a narrative that is almost beyond comprehension. While we do not discount the

information that has and continues to come to light, we do not know the person whom we have read and heard about on TV. The John Robinson we know has always been a loving and caring father.”

During the trial, the evidence included the infamous 40-minute video of Robinson and Beverly having sadomasochistic sex in a motel room, which the jury was required to watch. Most of them covered their eyes during parts of the video.

Early in the video, Beverly said, “This is what you wanted me to tell you. I’m your slave ... Everything is yours.”

Robinson responded by telling her, “The most important thing in life is you are my slave.”

More than 100 witnesses testified for the prosecution during the 3-week trial. The jury deliberated quickly, finding Robinson guilty on three counts of murder. In January 2003, judge John Anderson III sentenced Robinson to death for each count of murder, plus a life sentence.

The state of Missouri also wanted to try Robinson for three murders, but the defendant knew Missouri judges were much more favorable to death penalty sentences than their Kansas counterparts and he fought to postpone extradition for the Missouri trial. After a seemingly endless round of negotiations between his lawyers and Missouri prosecutors, the parties agreed to accept guilty pleas for the murders in exchange for life without parole.

Robinson’s wife Nancy filed for divorce in February 2005. But because there was no follow-through by either party, the divorce was never granted.

In July 2009, Robinson appealed his conviction, claiming he had not received a fair trial. Paige Nichols, his attorney, said Nancy had been coerced into cooperating with officials by hinting that she had helped Robinson commit the murders.

“That attitude pervaded this case, led to multiple illegal searches, and resulted in rushed pretrial proceedings and a patently unfair trial,” Nichols wrote in the appeal.

Nichols also claimed that the judge who issued the search warrant leading to the discovery of Suzette's and Izabela's bodies did not have jurisdiction.

That appeal was denied, and Robinson remains on death row at the El Dorado Correctional Facility in Kansas.



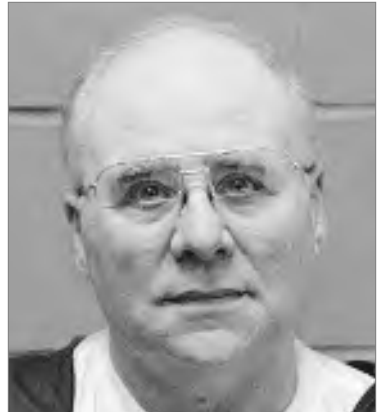
Suzette Trouten, murdered by serial killer John Robinson [Courtesy of Lenexa Police Department]



Beverly Bonner, Robinson's apparent first victim [Courtesy of Lenexa Police Department]



Izabela Lewicka, a Polish student killed by Robinson [Courtesy of Lenexa Police Department]



Robinson after many years spent in prison [Courtesy of Lenexa Police Department]

About the Author



Breathless Focus Photography

Jayne A. Hitchcock is an internationally recognized cybercrime expert. She volunteers her time to work with the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime, the National Center for Victims of Crime, and numerous law enforcement agencies worldwide. As a valued resource to these agencies in solving internet-related crimes, she has also worked with legislators to draft and to pass many U.S. internet laws.

She also conducts law enforcement training seminars for local, county, state, military, and federal law enforcement agencies. Her speaking engagements on cybercrime and cyber safety include presentations at elementary, middle, and high schools, universities, and

colleges. She also lectures at libraries, conferences, and corporations, while traveling extensively for presentations and workshops in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, South Korea. She has been interviewed on several television shows including *America's Most Wanted*, *48 Hours*, *Primetime*, and *Good Morning America*, as well as local, national, and international newscasts, and in *Cosmopolitan* and *TIME* magazines. She was named a "Champion For Change" by Lifetime Television in 2004.

In addition to serving on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Cyber Crimes and Criminal Justice*, she writes for several magazines. She is also a member of Operations Security Professionals Society, Sisters in Crime, Inc. (national and New England divisions), National Rifle Association (lifetime member), the American Legion Ladies Auxiliary, and the Third Marine Division Association (lifetime member).

As president of two all-volunteer organizations, Working to Halt Online Abuse (WHOA) at www.haltabuse.org and the Kids/Teens Division (WHOA-KTD) at www.haltabusektd.org, Jayne continues her mission to educate adults and children about safety online.

This article originally appeared as a chapter in *True Crime Online: Shocking Stories of Scamming, Stalking, Murder, and Mayhem* by J. A. Hitchcock.

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