

## The Torture and Savage Slaying of the East Coast Rave King

Ed LeBrun was the heart and soul of Greensboro's surging supersonic rave scene two decades ago. When Babylon opened downtown in 1994 LeBrun's frenzied First Friday parties brought down the House, booking world renowned DJs—Diesel Boy, Andy Hughes, Bad Boy Bill, Frankie Bones, Ani (On-E), Bobble, Derrick Carter, Keoki, Sven Väth—who held thousands of hyperactive, jumped-up, sweaty club kids from as far away as Florida and New York in a thrall.



The owner of Spins Compact Discs & Tapes in the Lawndale shopping center LeBrun was an essential conduit for ravers around the world, thanked on dozens of seminal dance music releases. Chris Kennedy worked at Spins, "It was the go-to spot for upcoming rave flyers, mix tapes, rare vinyl, and many other things that reflected our culture. If Ed knew you and you asked real nice and bought the blanks from him, he would make you bootleg tapes of all the parties. Mix CDs that were legal and released under a label were rare, simply because many of the records used samples that were unlicensed. This made the culture feel different and unique because having tunes to listen to outside of the party was next to impossible unless you went to Spins.

"He sold the legit Technics 1200s and did a great deal of special ordering for a lot of the DJs, music that was next to impossible to come by any other way than knowing someone who had access to the many different independent record companies, most of them overseas."

Soft spoken with a shy smile, LeBrun began promoting electronic music nights in the late 1980s at Kilroys before expanding into larger, more exotic locales that only a select few were privy to. "We had to meet someone in the UNCG parking lot on Aycock in order to get a flyer with the directions." That's how Chris Kennedy rolled, "You only really saw most of these people at parties because we all came from different walks of life and from different areas in and around the state. It was like leading a second, secret life that you really cared a lot more about than work or school. It really was it's own culture and Ed was pretty close to being the center of it for most of us.

“Ed managed to rent the Depot in downtown Greensboro on a few occasions. No one seemed to care much about the Depot at that time, since it wasn’t actively being used. What blew our minds the first time we saw it was the lighted dance floor. We didn’t know anything about the disco years other than what we heard from our parents but it seemed to us like we had found a forgotten discotheque and brought it through time with us into the future. It was amazing, one of my all time favorite party locations. For one of the last great Depot parties Ed brought in some talent, Fred Gianelli of the Psychic Tv crew, to completely blow our minds. Before they clamped down on security it was a miniature techno utopia for us.”

Ed’s First Friday jams elevated Babylon, the only nightclub downtown in the mid-1990s, to mythic status. Mike Marion was a bartender there, “We never had any fights, no guns, people weren’t getting stabbed, it was all about peace, and love, unity and respect. And yeah, we did drugs, we did a lot of drugs. It was not uncommon for us to be there until noon the next day still spinning records and partying. But Ed was a pioneer, not in facilitating drug use, but a pioneer in bringing music that most of the modern world didn’t know about and sharing it with everyone. And it changed people’s lives.”

Jeremy Elliott fell into the scene in 1995. “So all of a sudden 16-year old Jeremy, who was hanging out with gutter punks and going to Ska shows, meets two people from the Dixie and Shaun O’Connor and starts raving his ass off. They referred to me as a rave baby, because we were under 18 we had to wait until 2:30 to get into Babylon. But they would go until 5:00 or 7:00am sometimes, unleashing all these kids with big pants and huge pupils on Elm Street as the straights were trying to go to work.”

The pitfalls of promoting events predicated to a great extent on the use of illegal psychoactives were many but there was an added element of danger for Ed LeBrun, his proclivity for inviting straight, high school aged rough trade back to his home for a lesson in the three D’s—Drinks, Drugs, Destined to lead to sex. Ed’s friend Shaun O’Connor recalls a Spins employee warning, “One day one of these guys is going

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to kill you.’ And Ed, shrugging it off as Ed normally did with things, ‘Eh, yeah, that’s not gonna happen.’”

## When Pupils Grow Too Big

In late 1998 Shaun O’Connor was joining Ed for early dinners at a casual dining chain on Wendover, “He was just leaving Spins and I’d be getting off work so we would go to Fuddruckers. He liked the hamburgers, liked to build it himself.” Another reason, Babylon bartender Mike Marion was manager of that location. Following one of those visits Mike joked with busboy and recent Ragsdale High grad Zachary Grimes about being one of “Ed’s boys.” Grimes assumed, wrongly, that he knew about an incident that occurred between himself and LeBrun two years earlier.



Mike Marion recalls that exchange, “Yes. It happened. I said it. It was rumored that Ed had encounters with young men. So in that conversation where we were talking about Ed and his parties I told Zac that I had recently been in his home. Zac nodded his head and stated that he had been there before and ‘hung out’ with Ed in the past. I gave him that wink and a smile saying, ‘Oooohhhh, you’re one of Ed’s boys.’ I didn’t dwell on it or even think about it after that. I didn’t realize that it bothered him at all. He didn’t let it show. He just smiled and said, ‘Naw man, nothin’ like that.’ And that was the end of it.

“Zac was cool but there was something about him that struck me as wrong. I knew he was a criminal. I didn’t judge him for it, I never hung out with him socially but we laughed a lot at work. I remember one evening specifically, a friend of his came into the restaurant while Zac was working, gave him a backpack and just turned around and left. I’m a responsible restaurant manager, ‘Let’s see what you’ve got there, we can’t have anything illegal. I want to see what’s inside.’ It was a hammer, a crowbar, and a screwdriver, that’s it. We got into this conversation... he liked to break into cars and steal stereos. It didn’t matter what a fun guy he was to be around, he had a darker side.

“Zac would talk about Ed LeBrun sometimes, we’d get in conversations at Fuddruckers. Ed had a really nice house, he put a lot of effort into that house and did an excellent job. I talked about the nice things that were in there, or

lack of nice things, he had it very simple. I wasn't conspiring or anything like that I was just talking about this cool house I had seen. Meanwhile, back in Zac's head, I guess he's thinking, 'Huh, this is something I can rob.' That was the farthest thing from my mind. Completely irresponsible on my behalf, to talk about things like that with Zac."

Mike Marion was unaware of the true catalyst behind Grimes' frame of mind. Six months shy of his 17th birthday he had been lured to LeBrun's home by a member of his church youth group with the promise of, "a party of sorts with a wealthy guy who provided all the drugs for his get-togethers." Arriving at the tidy Wafco Mills condo it became abundantly clear this was going to be a party of three. After dropping ecstasy for the first time, two hits, and inhaling whippets, the semi-conscious 11th grader was carried to a bedroom for what's best left to your imagination. Still somewhat woozy the next morning Zac confronted his friend on the ride back about what had happened but was cut short, "You knew what the deal was." No, he didn't.

Zachary attempted to bury what uncalled-for memories festered, suppress the shame, but a yearning for retribution was fermenting. Encountering Ed at his workplace on a regular basis was an involuntary revisitation of the helplessness and humiliation associated with that night. Was Ed mocking, regaling his table mates with "Hey, I had that kid over there," whispering to his boss about it? Zac was sure of it.

In May of 1999, spotting LeBrun topping burgers with a friend, Grimes ducked into the kitchen to connoiter with a new hire manning the fry station. He'd discussed assaulting and robbing LeBrun with co-workers before but this was Robert Reid he was opening up to—a randy, disarmingly handsome 18-year old live wire who's steely gaze barely masked a percolating rage, no doubt resulting from frightening sexual abuse he'd endured as a young child. For the next three months Grimes and Reid convened with Zac's roommate Jonathon Coffey, fired from Fuddruckers and now bussing tables at Don Pablo's, to map out how they would enrich themselves at the expense of the music promoter. A Babylon habitué with deep set dark eyes that reflected a Buster Keaton-like cluelessness 19-year old Coffey was well aware of Ed's predilections, he had friends who traded sex for pills. Shaun



**Reid**

O'Connor recalls the effect Jon had on both sexes at the club, "Oh yeah, he was the heartthrob."

The 3 Fuddruckerteers bonded over those late night BS sessions. Jon told them about a scrapbook Ed was rumored to have tucked away with naked pictures of all the boys he'd drugged and had sex with. Zac wanted to get his hands on that. Robert Reid revealed himself to be a Ninja warrior, the embodiment of Joe Musashi from the arcade game 'Shinobi.' A native of Chicago, he boasted about being in a gang and leaving more than ten corpses on the ground. He'd do it again, didn't bother him one bit, happily recounting how he clubbed his alcoholic father to death with an iron pipe when he was 11-years old because the old man reared back to punch him (untrue but a great backstory nonetheless).



On the night of August 15, 1999, Zachary Grimes turned to Jon Coffey and asked, "Hey, you want to put this plan in motion?" Coffey did. At 11:30 he picked up Robert Reid who was even more enthusiastic. Back at the apartment they filled a bag with what they'd need—taser, hammers, screwdrivers, and a crowbar in case a safe needed opening. Grimes produced a syringe he'd filled with glass cleaner, "I drew the Windex up and had seen it in a movie, 'Terminator 2.' In the movie a woman escaped a mental institution and used this to kill someone by putting it in his neck." Before heading out everyone laughed at designated boy-bait Robert as he pranced and preened in his tight green shirt and baggy jeans meant to entice their intended. Coffey obtained the address they'd need from Directory Assistance; Ed LeBrun hadn't lived in his home long enough to be in the phone book. Taking two cars they parked close to the newly built brick manse on Mayflower Drive in Sunset Hills.

Robert Reid stepped up to the small enclosed porch and rang the doorbell. When he explained his car had broken down and asked to come in to use the phone Ed, speaking through the closed door, recommended a nearby curb market instead. Reid returned to his waiting accomplices. "The mother fucker would not let me in the house. He wouldn't trust me." Suggesting another try later they drove to a convenience store on Tate Street to purchase a pack of Newports and a Mountain Dew. Inside the mini-mart Zachary Grimes greeted an acquaintance, cryptically hinting weird things were going down, "If anybody asks, you're my alibi."

Pulling behind the building to smoke menthols and wash down some “Mark McGwire pills” Zac had in the vehicle Coffey asked, “What are we doing here?” Grimes indicated he was tired, wanted to go home. Reid feared his co-conspirators were getting squishy, “Are we going to do this or not?” Coffey told them “I’ll have a go of it,” agreeing to approach the door but only if the others were directly behind him. They outfitted themselves with rubber gloves and trash bags stolen from work, Reid also had a boot sheathed blade, a 6 foot long black shoestring... and a dagger.

They rolled alongside the curb quietly, lights off, parking just beyond the driveway. Grimes slipped a panty hose over his face, Reid didn’t have a mask. Coffey couldn’t wear a disguise, his face was his in. Answering the bell LeBrun likely peered from the narrow windows adjacent to the entrance to see a young man he knew from the club with a brooding boy band look and plump BJJs. With the chain latched he cracked open the door. Coffey threw his shoulder against it, tearing off the latch. Placing LeBrun in a headlock they struggled but the teenager was much stronger than his small framed opponent.

In the seconds it took for Grimes and Reid to storm through the entrance the homeowner had been rendered defenseless on the dining room floor. Recognizing Robert Reid from their earlier encounter Ed cried out, “Oh no.” Zac Grimes punched him once as Reid placed knees against Ed’s neck to tie his hands behind his back, instructing the others, “Sweep the house.” In an phony English accent Robert passed the incursion off as a simple robbery, one that would be over in a few minutes. He led LeBrun upstairs while the others ransacked.

Grimes testified, “Me and Jonathon Coffey started going through the rooms not finding anything in two rooms then eventually went to the back room. It was like a disco with glow lamps, pictures, and it also had a egg seat and I wanted, a wax lamp, and Jonathon wanted the turntables. We carried that stuff downstairs and I went back upstairs to get a picture.”

Inside a Chameleon Twist Nintendo 64 box Coffey discovered prescription pills, 8 baggies of crystal meth and 6 tabs of X. Zac Grimes uncovered a box of coins. When LeBrun told him they had sentimental value, that his grandfather had gifted them to him, the burglar put them back.

Directing LeBrun to the living room Coffey put the pill bottle to his face and asked, “Where is the rest of this?” Confiscating more pain killers from a kitchen cabinet Ed implored them to, “Get it over with and get out of my house, take what you need and get out.”

While the other two stacked their haul by the front door Robert Reid guided LeBrun back upstairs to the bedroom where he terrorized his victim with a dual-edged dagger, offering him two possible scenarios—take a tranquilizer so he can't see them leave or be put to death. Yanking the wallet from Ed's back pocket Reid asked for a pin number and got it. In his preposterous 'Clockwork Orange' affectation Robert posed the Hobson's choice again. Sedative or die. LeBrun, who remained passive throughout the ordeal, understood his hopeless situation. "I really don't have a choice." He swallowed the pill. That's when Robert brought out the syringe.

After injecting Windex into an artery Ed was shot up with air, then rubbing alcohol from the bathroom. Reid told LeBrun he needed another dose then handed the instrument over to Coffey, instructing him to find something appropriate.

Focusing his attention on the cleaning supplies under the kitchen sink Jonathon found just the right chemical for the task at hand, concentrated Simple Green, a solvent promising to eliminate even the toughest stains. He filled the syringe with the Kryptonite colored fluid then bolted back upstairs where Reid plunged the needle deep into Ed LeBrun's neck. Grimes and Coffey looked at each other, both thinking the same thing... events they should have known could spiral out of control were now playing out in the worst possible way.

Grimes told prosecutors, "Me and Jonathon went downstairs and I carried that wax lamp upstairs and put it back on the speaker and plugged it in. Jonathon put the turntables back to where he got them from. We realized Ed LeBrun was probably gonna end up dead at that point." Making their way towards the bedroom, "Ed was on the floor groggy and you could tell some pretty ill shit had just happened to him. As we were walking down the hallway I could hear Robert saying his ninja saying, 'The paths are my shadows and no one will see my face.' He had told me previous murders that he had been implicated in, that was [what] his group would say to someone before they killed him."

They each took Reid aside, pleading with him not to go through with it, to no avail. Ed had seen his face, could identify tattoos. Grimes testified, "I walked downstairs, turned around, saw Jonathon at the top by Ed LeBrun's room. Jonathon turned his head to the left like he couldn't believe what he just saw, then walked downstairs." What he witnessed was Reid straddling the 39-year old, plunging the dagger a dozen times into his chest and neck. As they fled the scene Grimes straighten out a small welcome mat that was displaced during their forced entry.

With Zac behind the wheel Robert Reid was exhilarated at “what a rush” it was taking a man’s life, bragging that his skillfully inserted initial wound was directed at an area of the body that excretes endorphins so Ed would be high, rendering each subsequent stabbing painless.

Turning on to Page Street, Grimes and Reid remembered the satchel they brought with them and LeBrun’s First Union Bank card had been left behind. Reversing course they reentered the house before rendezvousing with Coffey back at their Stonestrow Homes lair where they snorted some crystal meth, then set out to ditch the evidence. Keying in the number 0664 they extracted \$200.00 from an ATM at Super K-Mart then hit two more machines for the daily limit of \$500. Combined with the cash taken from Ed’s home that came to a little less than \$1,600.

With the other two tweaking in the living room Zac slid into bed with his girlfriend around 4:15am and told her what had happened. The alarm was set for 6:30, he was scheduled to open at Fuddruckers. Robert didn’t need to punch in until 3:00 that afternoon, after he got off work he met up with Zac and they drained LeBrun’s account of another \$500.00 before burning the debit card and receipts.

Ever hear that old cliché, the guilty always return to the scene of the crime? That’s exactly what Robert Reid and Zac Grimes did the night after the manslaughter, coasting past a phalanx of GPD investigators still on the scene of one of the most grizzly homicides in recent memory. Members of the rave community took to the internet to swap theories over who and why, clubgoers flooded the police department with leads. Neighbors were aghast over the apparent random nature of the ferocious attack.

### **How ‘Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm...**

Bulging with Benjamins the three perps got inked at Forever Yours, scored some crystal meth outside of Babylon, then further feathered their nest by burglarizing a gun collector. Now armed with a cache of weapons they boosted a Family Dollar store on September 26th, netting \$1,200 in cash and merchandise. That supermarket sweep made them anxious for another big score... and they were considering putting someone else in the ground.

Their buddy Curtis McAlister knew all about the LeBrun butchery, pretty much everybody in their circle did. Reid revealed details to anyone who listened, followed by an admonishment: “If you tell anybody I’ll kill you.” Impressed with Robert’s purloining prowess Curtis was contemplating a heist of



his own, a grab and dash to line his pockets and humiliate his asshole supervisor at the same time. On leave for a cut finger he conspired with Jon, Robert, and Zac about how to extract the \$50-80,000 in cash the Olive Garden raked in every week adding, "The manager's a pussy." If the back door wasn't open as it sometimes was, plans were made to go in heavy through the front.

Coffey, Grimes, and Reid were cruising up and down High Point Road October 13, 1999, eyes out for a business to bust-out, when they observed Olive Garden's back door ajar. Grimes idled beside the dumpsters. Bandanas up like a John Wayne movie the other two stumbled through the back door, making so much noise Coffey wanted to call it off but Reid urged him ahead.

With Reid behind him Coffey politely knocked on the office door, pushed it open and pointed a gun at manager Lewis McGraw, "Where's the money?" McGraw looked down at the pile of cash on his desk, what was left in the registers after the night deposit had been made. Reid slid his knife across the terrified manager's back, "Shut the fuck up or you will get hurt," while Coffey urged him over and over, "Leave the guy alone. We need to go. We need to go." They made off with \$2,500, a good portion of which Reid tried to swindle his compatriots out of while counting the loot.

When he learned of the caper McAlister was furious at these smooth criminals for going forward without him. He was, after all, the mastermind that made it possible for them to once again be hundred-aires. From that point on Curtis supplanted Zachary when Jon and Robert pulled their B&Es. Coins rained down in a Jamestown laundromat like a loose Vegas slot; a nighttime burglary of the Barnes & Noble at Oak Hollow Mall netted crates of Pokeman cards and Michael Jordan commemoratives.

None of this larcenous activity escaped the notice of the numerous law enforcement precincts these degenerates were thumbing their noses at. While they may have been wanted for dozens of felonies and misdemeanors what Reid, Coffey, and Grimes weren't suspected of was the murder of Ed LeBrun. During their 2 month long crime spree Greensboro detectives were confident they had the killer locked safely behind bars. In fact, GPD bagged their prey within the first 48 hours, even rounding up an accomplice, and did it without a shred of physical evidence linking them to the crime.

**On the flip side: Railroadng doesn't end at the Depot.**



**Robert Reid's demeanor during his trial**

## Reckonings

*“I was unable to sleep the night I received your letter. A lot escapes the mind after so much time, whether it be repressed or just forgotten. It reminded me what a piece of shit I was. Regardless of what I intended or did at the behest of others doesn’t change the fact crimes were committed, a man died, and my person was involved.”* Zachary Grimes has a lot to be remorseful about and plenty of time to think on it, he’s serving a 30-year sentence for his part in the torture and murder of Ed LeBrun, the east coast’s leading rave promoter.

Ed’s First Friday events were legendary at Babylon, the only nightclub in Downtown Greensboro in 1994, an after dark beacon amidst a desolate no-man’s land summoning amped-up ravers attracted by the biggest names in EDM: Sasha, Icey, Doc Martin, Huda Huda, Christopher Lawrence, Sneak, Supa DJ Dmitry, Micro, Mr. Bubble, Bjørn Svin, and Donald Glaude. Upwards of a thousand blissed-out whirling dervishes flowing in and out of 221 S. Elm Street, glow sticks twirling in each hand, furiously sucking on pacifiers, Vicks inhalers tucked into their back pockets, music blasting 130 beats per minute, humidity approaching monsoon levels.

“What’s in the middle of I-95? Greensboro. Not to mention 85 from Charlotte.” DJ Mr. Bill spun Progressive House at Babylon, “We had the biggest scene on the east coast, we were bigger than DC, we were bigger than Atlanta. Between Baltimore and Orlando, Greensboro was the spot. We owned it. Club kids would put themselves up somewhere and stay for a month because their favorite DJ was going to be here on the 15th. They’d crash at somebody’s apartment and hang out in town for weeks.”

Ground zero for MDMA, at Babylon everyone was rolling like church buses on Sunday. Young people huddled up and cuddled up along the hallways and in the more mellow upstairs lounge. DJ Mr. Bill explained, “Everybody that was in the know knew not to buy drugs at the club. You bought them like 3 days before, you made an arrangement. By the night they were sold out. People would show up from outside of Greensboro, the suburbs, and they’re expecting to find the drug of their choice and it’s gone. You buy on a Tuesday if the party’s on a Friday.”

While claiming not to be a typical raver a male student who frequented

First Fridays revealed to the Duke Chronicle why he actually *was* the archetypal Babylonian, “The music is a mirror of your roll. Even if you aren’t rolling, it’s a mirror of what you feel like. When the music’s pumping you feel like you’re gonna fly. You stop, and breathe and then it builds. If it kept going without a pause, you wouldn’t be able to handle it. I go and have guys massage me and girls kiss me at the same time. You completely leave the rest of the world. On the dance floor you focus on people’s eyes. I feel like I can see through them. I don’t know what people’s lives are like outside of the rave. But inside, everyone’s always happy. The day after you’re exhausted. You don’t really eat anything. You just feel drained. It’s depressing a few days after.”

When officers frisked an X dealer and found bags of pills that didn’t resemble any illegal substance they’d ever seen before they had no reason to believe it wasn’t Vitamin C that enabled kids to dance longer. It was a good 4 years after Babylon opened before police learned to ID ecstasy. One scenester described the action outside the club, “I was in a car with a guy who had an ounce of cocaine bumping everybody in the parking lot, he had a cooler full of liquid LSD, selling it for \$80.00 a bottle. We had a good time for a long time getting away with doing a lot of things we should never have been getting away with doing, and we did it right under the nose of the police department.”

DJ Mr. Bill remembers, “There was a guy working security, an off-duty police officer. Friday nights, Saturday nights, he’d go out in the parking lot and confiscate all the liquor he could find and take it home, that was his bonus.

“I was out of town but my girlfriend told me about this the next day—the staff and the owners one night decided to have fun and locked the front doors. They took turns DJing, the staff was on the floor, some got naked some didn’t. It was like a party of five, more or less. My girlfriend was dancing butt naked on the little platform under the disco ball. She was like, ‘I’ve got the whole place to myself!’ I’m kicking myself ‘cause I missed it. I asked her, ‘What’s that all about?’ ‘Oh, they do that all the time.’”

Besides promoting First Friday parties Ed LeBrun owned Spins Records & Tapes, the Triad’s dance music roundhouse. William Shea was a manager there, he posted this on a message board: “No, Ed did not start the scene in NC. What he did do was take it to the next level. When I learned of the music in 1992, the Trim Shop was in full swing. Folks from all over the east coast, New York, Florida, Washington, Georgia, you name it. Liter-

ally thousands of people at those events, some driving hundreds of miles to pack into a dirty ass warehouse to see a few local DJ's. It was absolute madness, the coolest thing I had ever experienced.

“From there to Babylon and First Friday, one of the longest running monthlies on the east coast. Longer than Buzz, Fever, NASA. DJ's would cancel gigs to come to Babylon because they loved playing there. They could count on good sound, good lights, a good crowd. [LeBrun] was always up front with the talent, Paul Van Dyk came to First Friday in 1995. Ed was one of the first in the USA to book Misstress Barbara and the first to book 1.8.7. after Joe became Jordana. The DJ's loved it here.”

At 2:30am doors would open for underage ravers, parents would drop their teens off at the club, presumably unaware of the goings on inside. Ed's friend Shaun O'Connor pinpoints when things turned sour, “This younger crowd came in like '97, '98. You had a bad bunch of people going around that would come in from out of town, make themselves look real cool, and sell a bunch of fake drugs. They'd be there for like an hour, sell all their drugs and leave, you'd never see them again. Greensboro tightened up after that and became more cliquish, people started hanging out at the sofa bar.”

When LeBrun didn't show up for work on August 16, 1999 his employees knew right away something was amiss. Chris Kennedy explains, “No matter what happened over the weekend Ed religiously came in to Spins on Mondays to do all his orders for records, mainly the vinyl for the DJ's. When he didn't show up to do it, that is what prompted William Shea to go by his house to check on him.”

Andy Guthrie wrote online, “I, along with my boyfriend, found Ed the day he died. I found him face down on the floor in his bedroom, blood soaked into the carpet all around him. I can still vividly recall staring at his brilliant white socks while I straddled his dead body to call the police.”

DJ Mr. Bill will never forget that afternoon, “I was working at Elizabeth's and everyone said, ‘Turn on the news.’ We had TVs in the restaurant so I could see that it was for real. I'm like, ‘You gotta be kidding me, I saw him last night.’ Elizabeth's was in the same shopping center, we were like 6 doors down from Spins. I waited until my lunch break, I walked up to Spins, the doors were locked but there were already flowers and cards, a memorial. So I did the same thing, I left flowers and cards. They were shut at least 3 days, maybe the entire week. It was tough.”

## **To Project and Serve: They Don't Call this Guilty County for Nothing**

Sunset Hills was on edge, understandably so, when news spread of the heinous attack just a block from the UNCG campus. Families slept easier when, two days later, a suspect was hauled in for questioning based on a tip and a blurry surveillance photo that matched the culprit, at least to the satisfaction of lead detective David Spagnola who wrenched a confession from 19-year old twink Tim Laney, not for murder but for using the decedent's ATM card. That admission of guilt put Laney at the center of the crime. Now the detective needed a name, who gave him the card? Laney implicated his friend Josh Gordon who was quickly jailed.

It was front page news when the arrests were made, sweet music to Zachary Grimes, Jonathon Coffey, and the guy who actually stabbed LeBrun to death, Robert Reid. They were in the clear. Perhaps Reid was the shadowy Shinobi Warrior he claimed to be.

"Had Reid said, 'Let's go kill this man' neither Jon Coffey or I would have gone." Zachary Grimes detailed how his life descended into madness in the weeks following the morning of August 16, 1999. "After the murder of Ed LeBrun we were to meet the real Robert Reid. He had the charisma of a gifted politician. Reid became ever demanding, he wanted us to do more crimes with him. He knew that we knew he was capable of murder. Jon and I complied several times but we were in too deep. We started resisting doing things, our choices were limited and my girlfriend was scared to death.

"I was sidelined while Jon and Robert continued on [committing crimes]. Reid's threats and spell were wearing off. I was tired, I'd already been thrust further than I ever intended to go with the murder of Mr. LeBrun so I just stopped.

"I was trying to salvage what I believed was the left of my life. I was trying to put the pieces back together but every one I picked up would crumble into more. A line had been crossed that could not be uncrossed. As for Jon, he was deeply affected by being involved in a murder. I believe he knew time was running out and he just gave in to the downward spiral. Jon really was a good person, the extent of his crimes before meeting Robert Reid were taking drugs and maybe selling from time to time.

"Robert began to feel the tension and rising reluctance to his every little

whim or crime he wanted to commit. Robert would come over when Kara O'Connor, Jon Coffey, Kenneth Kitts, and I were at the house. He went off about us not being loyal to him and not wanting to really 'build something.' He pulled a gun and started making threats about if we were to tell he would kill us or go to our family's homes and kill them. We knew he had no problem killing so the days leading up to the arrest were stressful. Robert shot a hole in the wall, narrowly missing Jon.

"Jon and Robert's spree would come to an end the night he stole my car, and in the days after [when he] would break into our apartment with two 16-year olds... his new crew and next to be enthralled in his charismatic clutches."

Robert Reid had a habit of boasting about his escapades to any random person then threatening their lives if they ever ratted him out. Busted with his mini-mob in the midst of a burglary in Jamestown he folded like a card table. Omitting any word of his central role in the whole affair he gave up Jon Coffey and Zac Grimes as LeBrun's assailants. The two were swept up and charged with first degree murder.

"I'm not sure who interrogated me. It was late at night when I was brought in and I had smoked weed and dosed a couple of hits." Things looked grim for Grimes, Reid fingered him as the sadist who stabbed the record store owner 12 times in the neck and chest, a premeditated rage and revenge attack. "The District Attorney's office truly believed I was the man who had killed Edward LeBrun. I would go before a Rule 24 hearing for the death penalty. I just knew Robert had won, his web of lies with a twist of truth was going to lead to my death."

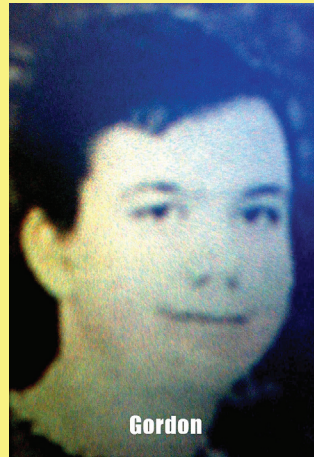
To their credit detectives noticed almost immediately the version of events they were being fed wasn't adding up. Before he could be cut loose Robert Reid was charged with being an accessory to murder. It was only the ringleader's insatiable need to grandstand that allowed the truth to finally come out. Reid bragged to his roomie about his treacherous run of burglary, butchery, and bloodshed. How he was left-handed but had the ability to stab his victims to make it look like a rightie did it. His cell soldier ratted him out... don't they always? Tossing Reid's belongings the screws found a memoir containing key details about the homicide. Combined with letters sent to one of his high school English teachers detectives now had a clearer view of what really transpired.

Tim Laney, the original suspect in the LeBrun murder who 'celebrated' his 20th birthday during the 2 1/2 months he languished in lockup awaiting a

trial date for capital murder, was roused from his cell on Friday, October 30th and abruptly and without explanation spat out on to the sidewalk. Another innocent man Josh Gordon had been sprung six weeks earlier but only after his lawyer demanded a hearing to ascertain exactly what investigators had against his client. Turns out there wasn't a shred of physical or credible circumstantial evidence against either man. Both had alibis never fully vetted.

The story Laney told the press days after his release was harrowing. A coerced confession after a 10 hour long grilling during which the suspect reportedly asked for a lawyer but was told, "This isn't TV." He had an alibi but detectives threatened his witness with life in prison if he didn't change his story. Laney was lied to about his family identifying him in the ATM photo, threatened with the death penalty—all perfectly legal, of course. (Well, except for the part about being denied a lawyer.) Police Capt. Jim Scifres was quoted as saying, "I admit it is not the norm for us to charge people [with first-degree murder charges] and then release them but when we get additional evidence sometimes that occurs." By "additional" the Captain apparently meant actual evidence.

District Attorney Jim Kimel found the incident disturbing enough to suggest police start recording interrogations adding, "If a person asks for an attorney, even if they already waived counsel, you ought to stop questioning the person."



## **Ed's Day in Court**

Coffey and Grimes pled to second-degree murder, agreeing to testify against Reid. Shaun O'Connor sat beside Ed LeBrun's father Sid in the courthouse, "Every day of the trial I was there. Robert Reid just sat there spinning his pen with a smug look on his face. I remember vividly Benny from Spins and I having to contain ourselves because all we could think of was taking that pen and sticking it into his neck and chest."



Assistant District Attorney Richard Panosh prosecuted the case for the state, “Ed LeBrun had dreams. He took those dreams and turned them into goals. He worked hard and turned them into a business.

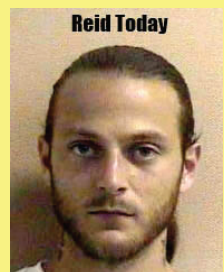
“The defendant had fantasies. His fantasy... to become a Ninja Warrior. The defendant dreamed he would form his own little army. One of the things he wanted to become was an assassin, and unfortunately Mr. LeBrun became the object of his fantasy.” Panosh hammered the point home by pounding the jury box 12 times, once for each slice of the dagger, to highlight not just the brutality and length of the assault but the dozen opportunities Reid had to stop.

The trial lasted more than two weeks, the defense declined to call any witnesses or allow the accused to take the stand. When the verdict was read LeBrun’s family and friends were jubilant; tough guy Robert Reid openly wept into his tie. Never again to breathe the air of a free man he barely escaped the electric chair.

Nine months after one of the most depraved murders Greensboro was ever witness to, and following a daisy chain of low level drug busts, police got hip to the haps on Elm Street and raided Babylon in May of 2000. Pills, tabs, baggies and origamis filled with white powder carpeted the floor after club goers dropped their drugs to avoid a possession charge. Cops broomed up more than enough evidence to shutter the nightclub for good.

Zachary Grimes is halfway through his 30 year sentence, Jon Coffey faces another 20 years on ice. Grimes’ letters to me are circumspect, riddled with regret: “Every day of this sentence I’ve been drug free, as the drugs started to be leeches from my body over time my mind started to heal. The pollution that helped magnify my ignorance and studied stupidity was now gone.

“I will never lose sight of the pain I’ve caused the people who loved [Ed LeBrun]. They never got to say goodbye and their last memory of him is tainted. It’s so clear now, I just can’t believe I was so stupid. I believe Robert Reid is a truly evil person, sadly our names will be used together as long as the internet exists. I can only pray he lives forever in this place that crushes every last thing you love.”



## About the Author

Billy Ingram launched TVparty.com in 1997 and it quickly became one of the internet's hottest spots for entertainment and information, attracting millions of users a month. *TVparty!* was the first to broadcast clips of TV shows online.

In 2002 he released the best-selling book *TVparty: Television's Untold Tales* to rave reviews from around the world. He wrote and starred in a series for VH1, *Super Secret TV Formulas*, and two series on Bravo along with *The Christmas Special Christmas Special*.

Billy Ingram produced, art directed, conducted and transcribed dozens of interviews to craft the storyline for *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, an oral history of The Rat Pack Goldiggers in the 1970s. He also produced the Eisner Award nominated book *Dear John: The Alex Toth Book*. He authored a memoir in 2013, *Punk*, and the novel *Reverend Buck Goes to College* in 2014.

He was a designer on some of the most successful Academy Award campaigns, film trailers, and movie posters of all time, for stars like Harrison Ford, Barbra Streisand, Tom Cruise, Steven Spielberg and many others.

An internationally acclaimed actor, internet pioneer, artist, and writer, Billy Ingram stars in the indie motion picture *Lake of Fire* opening wide in 2015.

The author with  
his younger  
brother.

