

Sante and the Slave Girls

by Gilbert M. Pieper (1967-1997)

The case of Sante and her son, Kenny Kimes, reads like a Stephen King novel, though it is far from fiction. It is the gruesome story of a murderous mother and son partnership. In fact, the true biographical details can be found in a book written by Adrian Havill: *The Mother, the Son, and the Socialite*, 1999. Although not an Oscar winning movie, the story was deemed appropriate enough to make a film entitled *A Most Deadly Family*, 2001 (also known as *Like Mother, Like Son*). The film starring Gabriel Olds (Kenny Kimes), Jean Stapleton (Irene Silverman), Robert Forster (Ken Kimes), and Mary Tyler Moore (Sante Kimes), was made for television. The mother and son were also featured in a 2008 episode of the television show, *Dateline*, and other TV specials including *Larry King Live*.

Sante never had a normal childhood. Growing up poor, without a father, the exquisite young girl had to fend for herself with petty theft while her mother worked the streets in Los Angeles. Fortunately, Sante was rescued from the streets and adopted by Mary and Ed Chambers. The family moved to Carson City, NV and Sante became known as Sandra. After graduating from Carson High School, she had a very brief marriage to a high school boyfriend. Her second marriage to Edward Walker lasted longer and produced her first-born, Kent. Tension grew in the marriage when Sandra reverted to her childhood ways of shoplifting, which eventually led to a divorce.

Using her former name of Sante, she supported her son Kent by petty theft which involved shoplifting, credit card fraud and eventually auto theft. She wiggled her way out of numerous scrapes with the law and even managed to land a job as a lobbyist in D.C. — despite her lack of education or experience.

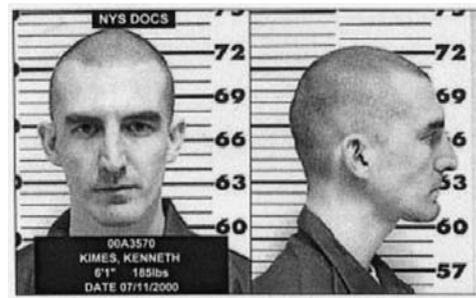
In 1971, Sante met and eventually married Ken Kimes, a wealthy developer who had made much of his money in building motels. He had numerous homes in Hawaii, La Jolla, Las Vegas and the Bahamas. There was no longer any need to worry about money. Yet, Sante continued to steal simply for the thrill of it. Although her husband, Ken, tried to discourage her nefarious activities at first, he eventually admitted that his wife's daring stunts made life more exciting and became involved in her dishonest schemes. As he was wealthy and had influential friends, he was able to escape the consequences when things went sour.

The eldest son, Kent, left home when he realized how sick the family was, joined the Army, and later became a salesman with little or no contact with his family. Sante and Kenny Kimes, however, shared a life-long mother/son criminal relationship. As his criminal mentor, Sante had the experience to become a very competent teacher. Kenny would learn at a very young age how to play con games with Mom. She would teach Kenny how to acquire the finer things in life that were there for the taking. In one situation, when Kenny was very young, she took him into a women's clothing store in downtown Honolulu. Cued by his mom, Kenny approached a woman behind the counter and told her how young and pretty she looked. As any woman would be, she was flattered by the little boy's attention. While the sales lady was busy talking to Kenny, Sante was busy throughout the store acquiring the "finer things" of life. On mother's signal, the team left the store with the goods under wraps.

I became involved with Sante Kimes when she became the subject of a Civil Rights case opened in Honolulu in 1985. The FBI case was opened as involuntary servitude and slavery, which also involved kidnapping. I had investigated many Civil Rights cases, most of which never amounted to anything, but this one was different. Before it was over



Sante Kimes



Kenny Kimes

I would have to beg the Justice Department to prosecute it. I found this case to be unique. To my knowledge few involuntary servitude and slavery cases had ever been investigated to any extent much less prosecuted. An accusation of "conspiracy to violate peonage and slavery laws," had only been made fifteen times in the United States since 1977 and prosecuted only once.

The case was initially opened in response to a call from the Honolulu Police Department. They advised that a sixteen-year-old Mexican girl by the name of Maria had shown up on the Honolulu Police Department steps as an apparent runaway. Feeling that jurisdiction would be more appropriate for the FBI, it was referred to us. As Maria only spoke Spanish and I do not, I recruited Special Agent Pete Jorgenson who did. We learned that Maria was from Mexico and Sante had hired her at the Kimes' Las Vegas home to be a housekeeper and Spanish tutor for Kenny. Later, Maria had been brought to Honolulu against her will. She was forced to stay at their home in Portlock, a very expensive and exclusive suburban area on Oahu, Hawaii. When her housework did not meet Sante's expectations, she was beaten, burned with an iron, and forced to work without pay while being confined to the house. Maria was smart enough to escape and seek help from the police.

As I began to piece together information from our indices and files, I discovered numerous cases involving Sante Kimes which had never been investigated. By this time, I had a very close relationship with the United States Attorney's Office in Honolulu, in particular Assistant United States Attorney, Mark Bennett. He and I realized that any prosecution of any Civil Rights Case must come from the Civil Rights Division, United States Department of Justice, Washington, DC. The case was assigned to Susan King, a Department of Justice Attorney. At first, she did not want to prosecute because there was only one victim, Maria. However, in light of the numerous complaints involving Sante as the subject, she was, in my mind, a ruthless individual who should be prosecuted.

A pattern began to develop through contact with the Case Agent in Las Vegas. Another victim was discovered in Las Vegas, a Mexican female, very young and pregnant. The game now changed. The Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, was now interested and wanted to prosecute. The Justice Department attorney, Susan King, was a good fit for the case: female, aggressive and very competent. There was jurisdiction in both Honolulu and Las Vegas; however, Susan King was adamant that we should prosecute in Las Vegas. So Agent Pete Jorgenson, Maria, and myself were off to Las Vegas to meet with the Case Agent and Susan King in the lobby of the hotel where we were staying. There were some amusing moments, not in our job description, when the Case Agent in Las Vegas, Pete, and I found ourselves guardians to the young Mexican victims, some of whom were pregnant or already had young children. Their needs would have to be taken care of as they needed a place to stay, and they were too young to fend for themselves. They spoke very little, if

any, English. We found ourselves driving expensive rental cars around Las Vegas, late at night, looking for formula and other needs for some of their babies.

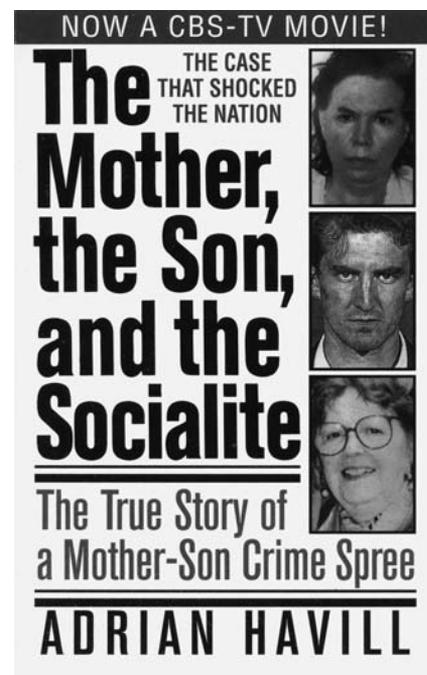
The case became a priority case in the Honolulu and Las Vegas Divisions and was generating a tremendous amount of interest by both the U.S. Attorney's offices in Honolulu and Las Vegas, as well as the Department of Justice in

Washington, D.C. At the time, the case was opened as Honolulu file number 50-6. It involved Maribel Ramirez-Cruz (our Maria) in Honolulu and another victim in Las Vegas, and, ultimately, many more. Approximately 14 to 20 years of age, the victims had been threatened, burned with an iron, beaten with belt buckles and coat hangers, worked long hours without pay, and held captive at several of Sante's homes.

Cynthia Montano, a tutor hired for Kenny, recounts that while in Mexico with the family, Mrs. Kimes told her to look for teenage girls who did not speak English and hire them as maids. She was to assure their families that they would receive good pay and would be cared for, would be given regular days off, and would be allowed to go home. The women were smuggled into the United States by the Kimes, taking one to two women at a time over the years. In reality, rather than being cared for, the girls were cruelly treated by Sante. She had brought them to the United States to be cheap laborers in her various homes. When their housekeeping abilities did not meet Sante's expectations, she dealt out severe punishments, such as beatings and burns from a hot iron. They were imprisoned in her homes and were not permitted to communicate with their families.

The case involved abduction and confinement of illegal aliens from Mexico and El Salvador and was producing community and press interest in both Hawaii and Las Vegas. It became known as "the case that shocked the nation." Bob Blitzer, supervisor, Civil Rights Division, FBIHQ, convinced Susan King that the case should be prosecuted. A special grand jury was convened and a true bill was returned indicting Sante Kimes. A warrant was issued for her arrest.

I made many attempts to locate and arrest Sante at her



Book cover

home in Portlock in Hawaii. However, the house was always empty. On August 3, 1985, FBI agents arrested Sante with her husband, Ken, at their condo in La Jolla, CA. After extradition to Las Vegas, Ken was released on bail, but Sante, was held until December 30. Not wanting to spend New Year's Eve in jail, she apparently connived with a prison guard to escape. Shortly afterward, FBI Agents rearrested Sante in the parking lot of the Elbow Room Bar with the help of a bartender known to Sante.

The trial was held in February 1986, at the United States District Court in Las Vegas. Sante Kimes was found guilty of fourteen of the sixteen counts that charged her with keeping slaves, transporting illegal aliens into the United States, escaping from prison, and conspiracy. Judge Howard McKibben, who sentenced Sante, said that she had "some fairly deep-seated psychological problems." He noted the reports from two of the psychiatrists indicated Sante needed therapy, and reported she "suffered from family emotional disturbances." But, he said, "That does not excuse you from your reprehensible acts. You engaged in the longstanding activity of bringing illegal aliens to this country. You have little concern for the laws of the United States and continued to violate the law." He gave Sante five years, the maximum term. She was sent first to the federal correctional facility in Lexington, KY, and later, a women's minimum security federal correctional center in Alameda County, California, near San Francisco. My involvement with Sante Kimes had ended.

Unfortunately, when released from jail, Sante continued her criminal escapades with the help of her son, Kenny. Always contending that she had never done anything wrong, she returned to her son and husband in Honolulu hoping to resume what she considered a "normal" lifestyle. Plans changed when her husband, Ken, who was eighteen years her senior, dropped dead unexpectedly. She was shocked to learn that while Ken's children from his first marriage were in his will, she and Kenny were not. Desperate for money (although she was far from penniless), Sante burned down their home in Las Vegas and attempted to do the same with their Hawaiian house to obtain the insurance money.

She and her now 23-year-old son, Kenny, set out to rebuild their fortune. No longer young and beautiful, Sante needed her handsome and gregarious son to manipulate those around her. The two hit the road for California, but their stay on the west coast was brief. After killing an associate who refused to listen to "reason," the mother and son team decide to head for New York City. Sante had a plan that involved a wealthy, elderly socialite, named Irene Silverman, who owned an exclusive private hotel on an incredible piece of prime real estate located on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Sante planned to gain her trust and acquire her

property by forgery of documents. Of course, that would require that she and Kenny murder the eighty-two-year-old woman to keep her silent. It was all part of the game — until they got caught.

There is a list of murder cases in which the Kimes are the prime suspects. All of the victims are in some way connected to Sante and Kenny's quest for illegal monetary gain. In September 1996, in the Bahamas, Sayed Bilah Ahmed, 53, a banker with whom the Kimes had dinner, suddenly vanished. In March 1998, Los Angeles businessman, David Kazdin, 53, was found dead in a trash bin, shot with a .22-caliber bullet. In July 1998, New York City, Irene Silverman vanishes.

Although the body was never recovered, there was enough evidence in the Silverman case to bring them to trial and convict them. Apparently, Kenny rented a \$6,000-per-month apartment in Irene Silverman's private hotel and brought his mother, Sante, in as a business associate. They connived to get the elderly woman's signature on forged documents which would give them ownership of her property. They murdered her, as Sante planned, but left a trail of evidence leading to their conviction. Murder weapons, including handcuffs, masking tape, stun gun, rope, and a carpet in which the victim had been wrapped, were found in the car which they used to dispose of the body. Also found in the apartment, which Kenny had occupied, was a paper which detailed the murder plans. At the sentencing in New York, the judge stated, "To kill an old woman in an attempt to obtain her property, and to show no remorse could only be done by a very sick, selfish individual, caring about no one but herself."

Both Sante and Kenny were sentenced to two life terms without parole. Kenney Kimes is currently incarcerated at the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in California. Kenny apparently made a deal with the prosecutors to testify against his mother and confessed to all the murders to avoid the death penalty. It is rumored that there was an incestuous relationship between mother and son. It was also rumored that Sante spent many hours in her cell in solitary, as other inmates thought she was crazy and were afraid of her. On May 19, 2014, Sante Kimes died of natural causes at the age of 79 at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women in New York.

Sante Kimes was the cruelest, most self-centered, conniving, and bizarre woman I had ever met in thirty years as an Agent. It was no surprise to me that she continued her criminal activities after serving her sentence for involuntary servitude and slavery. I only regret that we were not able to put her away for a longer period of time after the civil rights conviction, and, perhaps, saved her later victims.