



The Pied Piper Of Tucson

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It was Life and Time magazines that turned a local story from Tucson, Arizona, into a national abomination. Reporters came from all over, to be sure, but on March 4, 1966, Life printed an ominous photo of the desert landscape where three girls had disappeared and the story of Charles Howard Schmid, Jr., or "Smitty," became international news. He had been arrested four months earlier on November 11, just after marrying a fifteen-year-old girl whom he'd met on a blind date. The article was published even before the juries in two separate trials had decided his fate. Dubbed "The Pied Piper of Tucson," for his ability to get girls to fall for him, he stood five feet, four inches tall, but added three more inches by padding his stack-heeled cowboy boots with rags and tin cans. He also dyed his reddish-brown hair black, used pancake make-up, whitened his lips, and applied a fake mole to his left cheek-a "beauty" mark. Arrogant and narcissistic, he came from a wealthy family, so he used the niceties he could buy to impress young high school girls. He adopted the droopy-eyed look associated with Elvis, his idol, and acquired a rock musician's mystique. His tiny house on his parents' property was the scene of many parties. Tucson society was not merely shaken by the murders of three of their young women but by what the details of those murders revealed about its adolescent population-sex clubs, drinking parties, blackmail, cover-ups for murder, and even connections with the crime underworld. Parents suddenly became more strict, more aware now that their kids weren't safe and maybe weren't even behaving properly. When kids looked to someone like Charles Schmid for answers, there was something terribly wrong.

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