By most accounts, 1977 was a relatively good year. Apple Computer incorporated, Star Wars captivated the imaginations of moviegoers, and Reggie Jackson—hitting three home runs in a single game—led the Yankees to a thrilling World Series victory against the rival Dodgers.

For residents of New York City and its surrounding towns, however, the start of ’77 was marred by an unshakable sense of fear. A serial killer, identifying himself as the Son of Sam, was on the loose. His targets were young, attractive women in their 20s, often with long, brown hair. He was shooting his victims in the early hours of the morning, mostly in Brooklyn and Queens, as they sat in parked cars with friends or lovers—usually firing four to six shots to the head in rapid succession so as to ensure certain and immediate death. His weapon of choice, a .44 caliber Bulldog revolver, was used in every killing (along with “Son of Sam,” the press also dubbed the murderer “the .44 Caliber Killer”). By the end of that July, he had murdered six people—five women and a man—and wounded seven more.

As the murders persisted, an increased sense of panic spread throughout the region. Fathers were placing strict curfews on their daughters; the previously mundane American pastime of sitting in parked cars had suddenly become a poten-
tually life-threatening activity (the police commissioner at the time, Michael Codd, even went so far as to issue a statement directing officers to insist that couples sitting in parked cars be ordered to move indoors); brunettes, scared to become a target of the killer, were donning blonde wigs in an attempt to avoid unwanted attention. According to one regular New York club fan, “It became a fear that if you were coming out of a club you were going to get shot.” The murders and the palpable fear were making headlines around the world. A day after the sixth and final murder, a reporter from the Ottawa Citizen wrote, “Son of Sam has joined the ranks of magniloquent mass murderers by claiming his sixth victim in 13 separate incidents with the same .44 caliber Bulldog revolver and with the same braggadocio that afflicted Jack the Ripper.”

And, to add to the hysteria, the killer taunted police with a series of deranged handwritten letters mailed to both law enforcement and major media outlets. In a letter to New York City Police Captain Joseph Borrelli, the elusive killer wrote, “Police: let me haunt you with these words: I’ll be back! I’ll be back! To be interpreted as Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang – UGH!! Yours in Murder, Mr. Monster.” In this and further letters, he would refer to himself by his now infamous moniker: Son of Sam. (Police would later learn that the killer had been referring to his neighbor, Sam Carr, who he believed was commanding him to kill through his dog’s barking.)

A handwriting expert analyzing a letter sent by the killer to famous Daily News columnist Jimmy Breslin told New York magazine, “This specimen is terrifying. In all my years of work, I have never encountered so dangerous a character. Before I go further, I must have your assurance that I will not be identified as the person who analyzed this writing as I will certainly become a target.”

All the handwriting analyses, the many psychological profiling by “experts,” the hundreds of calls to police did not help law enforcement to nab the Son of Sam. Ironically, a parking ticket issued near the scene of the final murder in Brooklyn on July 31, 1977, did: It eventually led police to identify 24-year-old postal worker David Berkowitz as the Son of Sam. On August 10, 1977, a year after he started his killing spree, Berkowitz was apprehended outside of his apartment at 35 Pine Street in Yonkers. In his 1969 Ford Galaxy,
History
(Continued from previous page)

1. 174 Coligni Avenue, Berkowitz’s New Rochelle residence
2. Notice of the change of address from Pine Hill Towers, where Berkowitz was living when he was caught
3. The apartment building today, now called Horizon Hill

4. 174 Coligni Avenue, Berkowitz’s New Rochelle residence
5. Notice of the change of address from Pine Hill Towers, where Berkowitz was living when he was caught
6. The apartment building today, now called Horizon Hill

PINE HILL ASSOCIATES
380 Westchester Avenue • White Plains, New York 10603 • 914-428-9700

NOTICE OF CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Dear Tenant:

Due to the unfavorable publicity which the building has received in the recent past, we have decided to change the street number of the building to 41 Pine Street. The Post Office is aware of the change and will deliver all mail with the above street number to this building.

February 3, 2012

Dear Nathan:

I hope this letter reaches you and finds you doing well. I apologize for not getting back to you sooner. Somehow I misplaced your letter and came across it again. I’d like to make sure this reaches you before I write again.

Meanwhile I am enclosing some material for you to read. I hope you will find it to be both encouraging and inspirational. God knows how sorry I am for what had happened in the past. He has, for reasons only He knows, showed mercy to me, a man most undeserving of it. I am no very thankful for what Jesus Christ did for me. I’m not sure you understand all this, but if God did not somehow reach out to me when He did, I’d not be alive today. I’d have most likely taken by own life by now. But where Christ is, there is hope.

My best to you.

Sincerely,
David Berkowitz #736757
Sullivan Correctional Facility
F.D.O. Box 116
Fallsburg, NY 12733-0116

www.klisoundshine.org
email
cc/db

The parking ticket that led to the Son of Sam’s capture
A Carvel cake made for Detective John Falotico after the arrest
Berkowitz’s mug shot, dated 2003
Berkowitz’s letter to the Nathan Laliberte, the writer of this article
police found a Commando Mark III assault rifle, a loaded .44 caliber Bulldog revolver, and a note indicating his intent to commit further murders.

The arresting officer, Detective John Falotico of the NYPD, and the entire law enforcement community were desperate to capture Berkowitz. “Berkowitz came out of his apartment building and my father and other detectives were not going to let him get away,” says Jean Falotico, who was 21 and living in Brooklyn at the time. “They were on their way to get a search warrant for his car when he walked out. They all jumped out of the car. My father wanted to make the collar real bad.” After making the arrest, “my dad was dead tired,” she says. “But we got him a Carvel ice cream cake that said, ‘Detective Dad Snags Sam.’”

With his capture, Berkowitz’s reign of terror had come to a dramatic halt; the fear that had enveloped an entire community had finally subsided and life slowly began to return to normal. But the story of David Berkowitz had just begun.

In the ensuing months, the residents of Westchester, especially Yonkers—shocked to learn that a serial killer had been living among them for more than a year—were made aware of the gritty and startling details of Berkowitz’s troubled life. Born Richard David Falco, he had been adopted at birth by Nathan and Pearl Berkowitz—a middle class couple who lived in the Bronx. After a troubled childhood, which included his poisoning Pearl’s parakeet, which he believed was a rival for her attention, Berkowitz, at 18, joined the army, where he became an excellent marksman. He eventually served in South Korea.

Upon his return, Berkowitz moved to Westchester, first to New Rochelle (he lived at 174 Coligni Avenue), and found work as a part-time mail sorter at a US Postal Service hub in the Bronx. While living in Westchester, Berkowitz, who apparently suffers from paranoid schizophrenia, became interested in satanic cults and regularly began attending secret meetings held in the middle of the night at local parks. Shortly after his move from New Rochelle to Yonkers in early 1976, and amidst a growing fantasy that he was subject to orders from a 6,000-year-old demon possessing Sam Carr, who lived across the street, he began his killing spree, shooting Donna Lauria (who was pronounced dead on the scene) and Jody Valenti (who survived), as they sat in a parked car in the Pelham Bay section of the Bronx.

Following his capture, the working-class Yonkers community where Berkowitz had resided did its best
to wash away the painful and lasting memories of a serial killer. In a missive from 1977, obtained exclusively by *Westchester Magazine*, the management company for 35 Pine Street, Pine Hill Associates, notified residents of an immediate address change: “Due to the unfavorable publicity which the building has received in the recent past, we have decided to change the street number of the building to 42 Pine Street. The post office is aware of the change and will deliver all mail with the above street number to this building.” The letter went on to state, “We regret the inconvenience that this unfortunate incident has caused you and we hope that everyone realizes that incidents of this nature are a million-to-one shot and should not be considered as a reflection on the building.” The name of the building itself, which had been Pine Hill Towers, was changed to Horizon Hill.

Thirty-five years later, Horizon Hill, which sits on a picturesque hilltop overlooking the Hudson River and features striking views of New York City, looks very much like it did on the day of the arrest. The building is well known among Yonkers residents as the former home of the Son of Sam, and regularly attracts throngs of camera crews on major anniversaries and whenever Berkowitz is featured in the news.

Apartment 7E on the seventh floor is at the end of a long, dark hallway. Dubbed by the media as “Satan’s Lair,” 7E was immediately gutted and renovated following the conclusion of a lengthy police investigation. According to property records, the small studio apartment is currently owned by real estate agent Louis Pena. In a 2007 interview with the *New York Times*, Pena said that he wished “people wouldn’t keep harping on it. It’s a tragedy, but it’s past history.”

Not surprisingly, the public seemed to have an insatiable appetite for information about Berkowitz’s life and for the gruesome details of the heinous crimes he had committed. And, to no one’s surprise, there were a slew of “insiders”—everyone from police detectives to neighbors in the building—willing to supply that information in an attempt to cash in on their newfound fame.

Craig Glassman, a volunteer deputy sheriff who lived directly below Berkowitz in apartment 6E, began a yearlong media tour directly following the arrest. Because Glassman would come and go from his apartment wearing a law-enforcement uniform, Berkowitz developed an intense hatred for him and eventually authored a series of life-threatening letters delivered anonymously to Glassman.

In a police report following the arrest,
Glassman stated that he had filed a harassment report against Berkowitz days before the capture. The report said that "he [Berkowitz] was also a suspect in an open harassment case against myself [Special Deputy Sheriff Craig R. Glassman]. I was notified by Officer Thomas Chamberlain, a uniformed officer of the City of Yonkers Police Department, that David Berkowitz was also a suspect in the 'Son of Sam' case. This was on Aug. 6th after a fire which had been started outside of my apartment door in which 22 cal bullets were put."

The fire, says Glassman’s daughter, Shayna Craig, had been designed to kill her father. "The bullets were thrown in the fire and were supposed to hit my dad as he opened the door to see what was going on," she says.

On the day of the capture, Glassman, according to a written statement, had noticed "a rifle butt in the backseat of the suspect's car" and had been called to help with the arrest, partly so he could help identify Berkowitz. In the hectic days that followed the capture, Glassman would be thrust into the public eye and eventually recognized as one of the many officials responsible for cracking the case. Glassman apparently loved his fame.

“My dad wanted Sylvester Stallone to play him in a movie, but the movie studios didn’t even want to look at it,” Craig says. “He was doing a publicity tour from the day the capture happened. He was writing letters to movie studios; he was all over the place doing radio and newspaper interviews.”

After learning of Glassman’s intention to publish a book, New York City Police Detective Ed Zigo (who, along with Glassman and Detective Falotico, is credited with playing a major role in the Berkowitz arrest), dropped a snarky letter: “Hi Craig—remember me? I hear you’re writing a BUCK, I mean a book, about me and David. Be fair, Craig—I love you, too! (I’m famous also now—David sure did you and me a favor, didn’t he?)—Ed.” According to Shayna Craig, Detective Zigo—even decades later—refused to acknowledge the role Glassman had played in the Berkowitz arrest.

The book about Glassman—who died in a car accident in 1991—is titled Off the Wall and, due to a very limited print run, has become a collector’s item, currently selling for around $300 on Amazon. (One copy is priced at $750 because it is inscribed by Glassman.)

For others, fame and fortune were less welcome. Detective Falotico, for example, didn’t enjoy his fame. His daughter, today a New Jersey resident,
reports that Falotico—whose picture had been featured on the front page of nearly every major newspaper—eventually grew tired of the long interviews that netted only seconds of airtime. “TV stations would call and he would give them interviews. They would talk for an hour but only show a few minutes. He really became very disheartened. Eventually, he got disgusted.” Detective Falotico died in 2006 at 81.

Today, Berkowitz, 58, sits in cell D-North #148 at the Sullivan Correctional facility in Fallsburg, New York, a small town about 100 miles north of New York City. Balding and portly, he walks with a slight limp and carries a long scar that extends from the base of his left ear to the middle of his neck—the result of being slashed with a razor blade by a fellow inmate in 1979. He is well liked among prison staff and, somewhat ironically, is allowed to counsel inmates suffering from mental illness.

Since his incarceration, Berkowitz has developed a slavish devotion to religion (known in prison-speak as “jailhouse religion”) and hesitates to discuss the details of his life in Westchester and the crimes that garnered him such infamy. “It is just too painful,” he claims. In response to a request for an interview, Berkowitz—who uses an old Swintec typewriter to communicate with the outside world—mailed this letter:

Dear Nathan, I hope this letter reaches you well and finds you doing well. I apologize for not getting back to you sooner. Somehow I misplaced your letter and came across it again. I’d like to make sure this reaches you before I write again.

Meanwhile I am enclosing some material for you to read [six pages in total]. I hope you will find it to be both encouraging and inspirational. God only knows how sorry I am for what had happened in the past. He has, for reasons only He knows, showed mercy to me, a man most undeserving of it. I am so very thankful for what Jesus Christ did for me. I’m not sure you understand all this, but if God did not somehow reach out to me when He did, I’d not be alive today. I’d have most likely taken my own life by now. But where Christ is, there is hope. My best to you. Sincerely, David.

Oddly enough, Berkowitz, who was sentenced to 365 years in prison, is eligible for parole this month. However, Berkowitz announced last summer that he will not seek parole. Nevertheless, should he seek it, the possibility of his release is incredibly slim.

Nathan Laliberte is a writer and former resident of Hastings-on-Hudson. He currently resides in New York City with his faithful dog, Meatball.