

Puzzling Stabbing Murder of a Pioneer

Man Knifes His Aged Friend

By Tom Johnston

Carl Casperson, 28, couldn't tell Pacifica police during a long interview Monday why he stabbed to death Mrs. Laura Dunnigan, 87, his longtime friend and an early day settler in Rockaway Beach.

"He was very specific on all topics," said Detective Sergeant Bob Robinson about the interview, "very plain with me about everything except the motive . . . everytime we got around to why he killed her, he'd sort of stammer and stutter around and not answer . . . sometimes he'd put his hand over his eyes."

THE SLAYING IS exceptionally shocking because the aged but exuberant and outgoing woman was known for befriending, aiding and encouraging others; it was her delight.

Casperson who had "... lived in Pacifica all his life, attended Terra Nova high school . . ." had been one of those she'd sheltered and supported and had, apparently, encouraged and assisted while he attended a technical school.

He had, it is thought, known Mrs. Dunnigan since about the time he graduated from Terra Nova — about 10 years ago — possibly from mutual attendance at Christian Science services. Al-

so, apparently, he had lived in one of the Dunnigan cottages for several years, doing maintenance chores for Mrs. Dunnigan in exchange for a place to live while he attended school.

Mrs. Dunnigan and her husband, Captain Lawrence Dunnigan, had built the cottages in the 1920s as a seaside resort enterprise at the corner of Rockaway Beach and Donaldson avenues, naming the complex "Snug Harbor."

The cottages have been occupied by more-or-less permanent renters since the death of Captain Dunnigan in the mid-1950s.

MRS. DUNNIGAN, who has said that she retired at the age of 74, remained active, cheerful and vitally interested and was, last December, a delightful source for the first of a Tribune series on the Coastside's history.

Casperson had been working on the Alaskan Pipeline project, an employee of Green Associates at Old Man Camp near Fairbanks, Alaska.

He had returned to Pacifica last Christmas Eve, on leave from his job and had expected to return. He had been living with his mother, Mrs. Caroline Dawson of 712 Corona drive, and how he'd been occupying his time is not reported.

MONDAY MORNING he told police officers that he'd not been able to sleep for the past three or four days and he'd decided to go over to Mrs. Dunnigan's in the small hours of Monday.

He said Mrs. Dunnigan left her door unlocked and he'd let himself in to her living room and had stayed there, he thought, for a couple of hours. He said that most of the time had been spent in prayer.

He told Robinson that the thought of murder had not crossed his mind during those hours.

Casperson then, he said, had gone into Mrs. Dunnigan's bedroom, had awakened her and had talked with her for a while.

FINALLY, he told Robinson, he went into the kitchen and got a butcher knife, returned to the bedroom and stabbed her in or near the heart. Police found the bloodstained knife returned to the kitchen and some bloodstained tissues in a trash bag in the bedroom.

The slaying apparently occurred about 5:30 a.m. Monday. Casperson was, apparently, fairly quick about phoning his mother and telling her he'd killed Mrs. Dunnigan; Mrs. Dawson, in turn, called Pacifica police.

As patrol cars rushed to Donaldson avenue, Po-



Laura Dunnigan, 87... murder victim

lice Dispatcher Cathy Bannon telephoned Casperson at Mrs. Dunnigan's home and talked with him until officers arrived at the door. He followed her instructions about putting down the telephone and walking to meet them.

Any robbery motive was almost immediately dismissed; Casperson had about \$235 in cash in his pockets and another \$350 in travelers'

checks on his person. The police also found \$16 lying in the gutter near his parked car and they assume he dropped the money as he got out.

Neighbors told police officers they'd heard no loud voices nor any scream — they'd not known anything had happened until they saw patrol cars roll up.

The preliminary investigation also turned up (Continued on Page 3A)