

Don't Return

How He Got the Story

Salt Lake City

Larry Schiller didn't actually lie. The duplicity which has become his trademark was adequate to get him past the guards and into an interview with Gary Gilmore.

Schiller, a former news photographer turned producer, arrived at the Utah State Prison with Gilmore's attorneys and identified himself as "an associate" of the two lawyers.

After an exchange of pleasantries with the guard, the fact that prison regulations adamantly barred anyone but the killer's attorneys from seeing him was no longer in the way.

Schiller's method of meeting Gilmore was emblematic of his successful campaign to buy Gilmore's only asset: His story.

"He was just smarter than the guard," Warden Sam Smith lamented later. "Sometimes that happens."

It happened repeatedly for Schiller as he won the rights to the Gilmore story, outmaneuvering David Susskind, singer Paul Anka and a flock of others looking for the opportunity to turn the saga of the killer who wanted to die into movies and books.

It was a story, Schiller admits, that probably would have been virtually worthless had the prison not clamped an absolute ban on media access to Gilmore.

When Schiller arrived on the scene, Gilmore was represented by Dennis Boaz, a San Francisco lawyer and freelance writer who was the only outsider allowed to talk to Gilmore.

Boaz arrived as a writer, and was told by the warden he could only see Gilmore if he were his



UPI Telephotos

LAWRENCE (LARRY) SCHILLER
'He was just smarter than the guard'



VERN DAMICO
Gilmore's uncle

attorney.

So Gilmore hired him.

Boaz interviewed the killer daily, taking notes and dealing with those who wanted to purchase the rights to the story. He was leaning toward a deal with Susskind, which he estimated was worth more than \$140,000.

Schiller made an offer to Boaz, but when it was received with something less than enthusiasm, he started doing his own work.

He cultivated Gilmore's uncle

and aunt, Vern and Ida Damico, and Kathryn Baker, the mother of Gilmore's fiancée.

He told them all to get lawyers before he made a cash offer. He also sent Gilmore a lengthy telegram and a letter stuck inside Schiller's latest book. The letter told Gilmore that if he trusted his uncle, he should tell Damico to report to Schiller, "Gary got the book."

He got the message a day later.

Gilmore fired Boaz after a falling out over some statements the lawyer made on a television show and replaced him with lawyers retained by his uncle.

Schiller had already laid his

groundwork with Damico and the relatives, and he suddenly had the advantage over others who had concentrated their efforts on Boaz.

"Any contest between me and Mr. Schiller," Susskind had said, "would be like the Dallas Cowboys playing the local high school."

The words came back to haunt him. Ironically, Schiller insists he paid less than Susskind had offered, sizing his deal at roughly \$100,000.

It also provided that 40 per cent of the money go to the families of the victims—a consideration Susskind had shrugged off.

Schiller said this weekend that he had turned down offers for an exclusive account of the execution, from which the press has been barred, but which he will see as one of five witnesses selected by Gilmore.

"I want to make the facts known simultaneously to all members of the press in accordance with the restrictions which may be put on by the prison," he said.

It was the acknowledgement of a sort of debt.

"The fact that the press couldn't talk with him kept him in the headlines longer than usual. I feel he would have faded some from public interest if the interviews had made him available to the public.

"If the press had had access to him, I would not be here."

United Press