

# MY FATHER WAS A SERIAL KILLER ...AND I TURNED HIM IN

April Balascio always knew her father was hiding something, but nothing prepared her for the evil she uncovered when she started asking questions about his past

By **GILLIAN TELLING**  
Photographs by **ERIC OGDEN**



April Balascio was just 11 years old, fast asleep at home in Watertown, Wis., when her father, Edward W. Edwards, frantically woke her and her four younger siblings and told them to get packing. “He had a moving truck outside, and we literally grabbed what we could and left town immediately,” she says. She was devastated. She had loved living in that house and liked her school and friends. But the scene wasn’t abnormal. For as long as she could remember, her dad, a handyman and occasional truck driver, had been making the family uproot without warning, often in the middle of the night, every six months to a year. If anyone asked why, he’d explain it was for work. But she had begun to feel uneasy about her life. Her father had an unusual fascination with crime, collecting newspaper clippings about local murders, and often contacted the police to offer help with investigations. “Kids aren’t stupid,” says Balascio. “There were dead bodies. Someone was always murdered wherever we lived.”

More than three decades later, Balascio, who married and had three children of her own, knew she had to act on her nagging suspicions. Her online sleuthing uncovered an unimaginable truth: that the man who had raised her was also a cold-blooded, sadistic serial killer who had murdered at least five victims in Ohio—and maybe more around the U.S. “I’d been living with this hope that I

**Nagging Questions**  
The oldest of Edwards’s five children with Kay Hedderley, April Balascio (with her father ca. 1970, inset, and near her Ohio home) says she felt a responsibility to uncover her father’s secrets. “I kept thinking of these victims’ families,” she says.

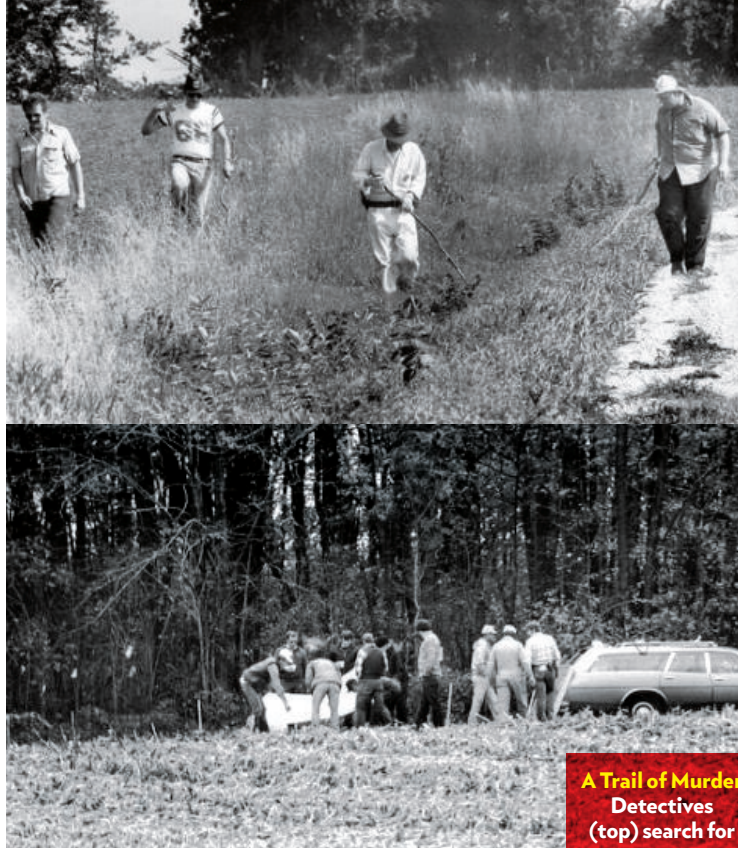
‘DURING THE PROCESS, I HELD OUT HOPE THAT HE WASN’T THE MONSTER I THOUGHT HE WAS’  
—APRIL BALASCIO



**People**  
MAGAZINE  
INVESTIGATES

Watch the premiere of *People Magazine Investigates: My Father, the Serial Killer* on Monday, Jan. 15, at 8 p.m. ET on Investigation Discovery.





**A Trail of Murder**  
Detectives (top) search for missing teens Timothy Hack and Kelly Drew near Watertown, Wis., in 1980. Police (above) found their bodies two months later.

was wrong,” says Balascio, now 48 and a personal trainer, who lives in Kingsville, Ohio, with husband Michael, a chemical-plant employee. “But suddenly all hope was gone. My dad was the horrible, horrible person I’d always suspected.”



It was late on a spring night in 2009 when Balascio, finally driven by her love for her own children to look more closely at her family’s dark past, first sat in front of her computer. “As a mother, I couldn’t imagine if anything bad happened to my children,” she says. Convinced that her family’s moves could have masked something sinister and because she had often caught her father lying, “I started Googling places we had lived and ‘cold-case murders.’ I was coming up blank,” she says. “Then all of a sudden it hit me. What about Watertown?” She typed in “cold case” and “Watertown” and was



**William Lovaco & Judith Straub**  
Billy Lovaco, 21, and his girlfriend Judy Straub, 18, were killed in Norton, Ohio, in August 1977.



**Timothy Hack & Kelly Drew**  
Tim Hack and Kelly Drew, both 19, were murdered after attending a 1980 wedding reception in Watertown, Wis.



**“Dannie Boy” Edwards**  
The Army private was shot by his adoptive father in 1996.

## THE KNOWN VICTIMS

flooded with stories about the notorious “Sweet-heart Murders,” an unsolved crime involving two local 19-year-olds, Timothy Hack and Kelly Drew, who had disappeared from a venue called the Concord House after a wedding reception in 1980. Two months after they went missing, their decomposed bodies were found in the woods—Hack had been stabbed in the back and chest, Kelly strangled and sexually assaulted. The case would haunt the town and local law enforcement for almost three decades. “I was literally shaking,” April says of reading the articles. “I suddenly remembered everything.”

She recalled that her dad had worked as a handyman at the Concord House. And Hack and Drew had gone missing the same week her family had moved out of Watertown. Shaking, she picked up the phone and called authorities, eventually connecting with Det. Chad Garcia of the Jefferson County Sheriff’s office, who had been on the original case. Though Edwards had been interviewed at the time of the murders because he worked at the Concord House, Garcia says in the *People Magazine Investigates* episode airing Jan. 15, “looking through the file, we discovered Edwards left Wisconsin within a day of being interviewed. Everything April told me was starting to add up.” Weeks later Edwards was arrested, and Garcia confirmed to Balascio that her father’s DNA had been a 100 percent match with the DNA found on the murdered victims. “I started hyperventilating,” Balascio says. “That was the moment it really hit me.”



Growing up, Balascio always knew her father had had a troubled past. He’d grown up in an orphanage where he claimed he’d been abused, been dishonorably discharged from the Army and eventually turned to a life of crime, often spending time in prison for arson and robbing gas stations and even appearing on the FBI’s 10 Most Wanted list for a robbery charge in 1961. But by the time Edwards met Balascio’s mother, Kay, he claimed to be completely reformed. Charming and intelligent, he



## THE SECRET LIFE OF A SERIAL KILLER

Edward Edwards masqueraded as a reformed thief and a loving family man. But behind his charming facade lurked one of the nation’s most ruthless killers

**1955**

Edwards does odd jobs, including working as a handyman, before turning to petty crime. By age 22, Edwards escapes from an Ohio jail after a burglary arrest. He is caught in Montana and spends five years in and out of jails before escaping a Portland prison.



**November 1961**

Arrested for turning in a false fire alarm, Edwards skips town to avoid jail and is added to the FBI’s 10 Most Wanted list.

**Jan. 20, 1962**

Captured in Atlanta, he spends five years in federal prison before being granted parole in 1967.



**July 20, 1968**

Edwards marries schoolteacher Kay Hedderley in Akron, and they have five children, including oldest daughter April.



**1972**

Seeming to turn his life around, Edwards writes and self-publishes his memoir, *Metamorphosis of a Criminal: The True Life Story of Ed Edwards*. He later tells his story on the game show *To Tell the Truth*.



**1977 to 1996**

Edwards kills at least five victims: Billy Lovaco and Judy Straub in 1977; Tim Hack and Kelly Drew in 1980; and “Dannie Boy” Edwards in 1996.



**2009**

April calls police in Wisconsin and suggests her father might have been involved in the 1980 “Sweetheart Murders” of Hack and Drew. DNA evidence links Edwards, then living in Louisville, to the crime, and he confesses.

**2011**

Edwards receives two life sentences after confessing to the murders of Lovaco and Straub and the death penalty for the murder of Dannie Boy. A month later he dies in prison.



used his past to gain fame and notoriety, writing a bestselling book, *Metamorphosis of a Criminal*, and touring colleges and churches, speaking to crowds about how he had turned his life around. He appeared on an episode of the game show *To Tell the Truth*, where a celebrity panel had to guess which of three contestants had once been a convicted felon. He and Kay had five kids together, and Edwards gave every appearance of being a happy family man, supporting his family by buying and fixing up houses and then selling them. Edwards was gracious to neighbors and friends

**‘THERE ARE OTHER COLD CASES OUT THERE... OTHER MURDERS I BELIEVE MY DAD COMMITTED’**  
—APRIL BALASCIO

and ingratiated himself to local law enforcement. But behind closed doors, Balascio says, her father’s dark side came out. “He was abusive, verbally and physically,” she says. “Multiple times he put my mom in the hospital.” He was also obsessed with murder, subscribing to detective magazines and clipping newspaper articles about all of the local crimes. He often made the kids watch videos about the infamous Zodiac Killer, who terrorized Northern California from the 1960s through 1970 by murdering at least five known victims while claiming to have killed 37. Balascio remembers

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LEFT: BENNY SERNIL/WAUKES JOURNAL SENTINEL; (LAWACO, STRAUB) ARKON BEACON JOURNAL; (DANNY BOY EDWARDS) COURTESY APRIL BALASCIO

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LEFT: COURTESY APRIL BALASCIO; (EDWARDS) COURTESY APRIL BALASCIO; (LOVACO, STRAUB) ARKON BEACON JOURNAL; (DANNY BOY EDWARDS) COURTESY APRIL BALASCIO



her father screaming at the screen, “That’s not how it happened!” Whether it was because he felt he was an expert on the murders or because he had personal knowledge of them, she didn’t know. “I always had my suspicions,” she says. “You grow up, and you realize this is not normal.”



**On July 30, 2009, after his daughter’s call to police,** Edward Wayne Edwards was arrested and charged with the murders of Timothy Hack and Kelly Drew. Once in custody, he confessed to killing the teens—and kept confessing. He told police he had also murdered Billy Lovaco, 21, and Judy Straub, 18, in a Norton, Ohio, park in 1977, killing them with shotgun blasts to the neck. And in shockingly cold, calm detail, Edwards further told police he was the killer of his own son, known as “Dannie Boy” Edwards. The 25-year-old orphan had been adopted by Edwards as an adult, when he was in his early 20s. Edwards described to authorities how he took Dannie Boy into the woods in 1996 in Troy, Ohio, and shot him twice point-blank in the face in order to collect on a \$250,000 life-insurance payout. Dannie Boy’s body was found months later in a shallow grave, just a mile from the Edwards family home.

Each confession sickened Balascio, who was flooded with memories of her childhood that were connected to her father’s crimes. She was just 8 years old, in third grade, when Lovaco and Straub were killed—and the image of the park where the murders occurred came back to her clearly. “My dad took us kids and my mom for a walk through that very park,” she says. “He took us through the weeds, and I remember he was shouting something to my mother. The next thing I knew, there were ambulances and sirens everywhere.... He’d taken us to where their dead bodies were.”

After her father’s arrest and confessions, Balascio never spoke to him again. Sentenced to life in prison for two of the murders and having received the death penalty for Dannie Boy’s killing, Edwards, 77, died in jail in Columbus, Ohio, on April 7, 2011, from complications of diabetes. Some investigators think Edwards could be responsible for other unsolved murders across the country, something Balascio also believes. “He absolutely was capable of more murders, there’s no doubt in my mind,” says Brian Johnston, the lead detective on the Dannie Boy Edwards murder case, who is now retired. “Dannie Boy’s murder could have been unsolved forever. I’ll always respect April for coming forward.” Reconciling the memories she has of her father—a man who made up fun games for her and her friends, taught her how to be resilient and walked her down the aisle when she

**‘I LIVE WITH  
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—APRIL BALASCIO



Watch *People Crime: April Balascio—A Daughter’s Decision*, available now on PeopleTV. Go to [peopletv.com](http://peopletv.com), or download the PeopleTV app on your favorite mobile or connected TV device.

married her husband—with the remorseless serial killer who murdered innocent young victims is still a daily struggle. Though she has a comfortable, happy life, she continues to feel crippling shame—and lingering guilt. “I live with two kinds of guilt,” she admits. “Not reporting him sooner and possibly saving lives, and the guilt of turning in my own father. They’re both strong.” She has a “complicated relationship” with her mother, who remained married to Edwards even after his confessions, and she sometimes wishes she had asked her father the question that repeats over and over in her own head. “I want to know, ‘Why?’” she says. “But I think I know.... It was a cat-and-mouse game with him. It was always a thrill for him to one-up the police.” It’s a trait she knows she doesn’t share with her father. “I’ve always been the opposite of him,” she says. “I never wanted to be like him. I have empathy, and somehow I still trust people. It’s a conscious choice I have to make every day, but I still believe there is more good out there than bad.” ●