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He added: "It would be inaccurate to say that all six suffered equally or were caused to suffer equally."

Says he was mentally ill

Berdella contends he was mentally ill when he committed the murders, for which he is serving two life terms in prison without parole and four additional life terms.

There was not enough time during Friday's interview, he said, to explain some of the personal experiences that he believes contributed to his state of mind at the time of the killings.

But he said: "Obviously, some of the ways that I dealt with short- or long-term problems were not the best way of handling it. That ain't the way you handle problems, and it ain't the way you handle people."

Berdella also said he has confounded psychiatrists because he does not exhibit some of the characteristics normally associated with a serial killer — a term he uses to describe himself.

Asked if he has been cured of his illness, he said, "Hell, no."

"If you want to get involved in the murder mystery," he said, "it's why this person who came to Kansas City without a violent nature resorted to what started happening in '84. And that's not an easy answer."

Berdella was raised in the northern Ohio community of Cuyahoga Falls, not far from Cleveland.

After graduation from high school, he moved to Kansas City in 1967, settled down in the Westport area and attended the Kansas City Art Institute for 2½ years.

One reason he decided to stay in Kansas City, he says, was that he found Westport "a lot more relaxed, enjoyable and friendly" than Ohio.

Arrested by undercover narcotics agents in 1969 for selling amphetamines, Berdella was placed on probation for five years. He had planned to stop selling drugs anyway, he says, because customers were waking him at all hours of the night and because he "didn't like what it was doing to people."

After art school, Berdella worked for about 10 years in the restaurant business, including a brief stint in the mid-1970s as a chef at a Blue Springs eatery known as Calia's

Restaurant and Lounge.

He recalls that the restaurant, which was on South Outer Road, did poorly and closed within a year.

Other than working at the restaurant, Berdella says he did not spend much time in Blue Springs. The city lacked the culture and integration he enjoyed in Westport, he said.

"I found Blue Springs to be a little uptight," he said, laughing. "That's the kind of community I ran out of Ohio to get away from."

The only time Berdella appeared to become emotional during the interview was when he discussed what he thought would be an appropriate use for his house near Westport.

Police spent weeks last spring scouring the contents of the house and digging up the back yard, where they found remains of some of the murder victims.

The house has since been purchased by well-known area entrepreneur Del Dunmire.

Berdella said he would like to see the building converted into a hospice for AIDS patients or persons with other incurable afflictions.

"I have observed that people who were suggesting things like tear it down do not have to be concerned about where they were sleeping that night," he said. "They didn't have to be concerned about whether they have anything to eat."

His eyes welling up and his voice cracking, he said the house should be a place where the terminally ill could "go and die with a little dignity."

"It might help redeem the house," he added.

In solitary confinement

Throughout the interview, Berdella was handcuffed behind his back. An armed guard stood outside the tiny meeting room.

At the state prison, which houses approximately 2,000 inmates, Berdella is kept in solitary confinement in a super-maximum security area.

He says he gets no recreation and spends much of his time working on the civil actions that have been filed against him in connection with his crimes.

He also does quite a bit of reading, he says, having recently finished "The Stranger Beside Me," a book about serial killer Ted

Bundy, and "In Cold Blood," the Truman Capote account of the murders of a Kansas farm family.

He compared the Bundy book to a sensationalistic police detective magazine. But he said Capote's was "an excellent book — more in line with what I would want to do."

Also a subscriber of several newspapers and magazines, Berdella said he has endeared himself to other inmates by sharing his reading materials without asking anything in return.

"For most people in here, that's enough," he said. "I haven't had any problems with any of the inmates."

He also recounted a conversation he said he had, shortly after arriving at the state prison, with a young inmate who did not recognize him.

"In the course of the conversation, he said, 'You know, you just don't look or act like a killer,'" Berdella recalled. "And I said, 'Yeah, and if you were out on the street, that's exactly what you would have thought.'"

One day last month, Berdella said, he had his first experience in the state prison's psychiatric ward, known as Hospital 5.

He said he had become agitated while discussing with a prison official some of his complaints about the way he is treated at the prison.

"You see, I have this voice that I use when I want to make a point," Berdella shouted, punctuating each word. This particular prison official, he added, had never before seen "that aspect of my nature."

Berdella said he was taken to the psychiatric ward and left for two days in a multi-colored "sensory deprivation, mood modification room."

Although he said he had not expected to be put in Hospital 5, he described the experience as surprisingly therapeutic and said it caused him to have hallucinations.

"After all the work and pressure I've been going through as far as fighting these cases, I at least relaxed," he said. "And I started tripping — having, you might say, apparitions."

He said he spent much of the time in Hospital 5 pondering the implications of a piece of legislation recently introduced in the Missouri General Assembly.

The bill would allow the state to apply set-

tlements that prison inmates receive for suing the state toward the expense of housing those inmates.

Berdella called the legislation constitutionally suspect.

"And I'm getting into it," he said. "When I argue constitutional law with myself, I bring Ben Franklin, George Washington and everybody else into the room with me. And that's where my head was at when they took me over to the hospital."

So enlightening was the experience, Berdella said, that he immediately asked to be returned to the psychiatric ward.

"I went in in a positive mood, I came out in a positive mood. That is the actions of a sane person," he said.

"I wanted to go back over there and find out why I was feeling so good," he added. "I wanted to look behind the curtain and find out that the Wizard of Oz isn't this short, little, funny-looking man."

Back at Hospital 5, though, there was a mix-up, he said. Officials thought he had been ordered back rather than returned at his own request as a walk-in.

Not in control

Berdella said the one thing he misses most about having his freedom is being in control of his day-to-day regiment.

Confronting an official in the psychiatric ward, he said he "called on the voice" and feigned the following threat:

"You put me back in that room, and I will bring the wrath of God down on you! I will call forth my most hideous and my most obnoxious demon to do battle with you!"

"I will have Geraldo Rivera himself walking up and down these halls, looking for me!"

Laughing loudly and gesturing to show that he was mocking himself, Berdella then paused, lowered his voice and announced proudly, "I was released an hour later."

For the most part, Berdella says his first four months at the penitentiary have been marred by almost constant abuse and harassment.

For example, he said, he has not received any medication since his release from Hospital 5 for his arthritis, high blood pressure or sleeping difficulties.

Also, he said, he has repeatedly been denied the materials he needs to answer the civil actions recently brought against him.

He said he has filed several grievances with prison officials, and he planned another one because he was handcuffed throughout Friday's interview.

"My first observation when I came in here was 'How can the state afford the liability insurance on this place?'" he said. "They don't even try to go by their own rules. I think every inmate in here has at least one suit in front of the courts at this time. It's the only way to get their attention."

Working on transfer

Berdella said he has heard that he might be transferred to the Potosi Correctional Center, another maximum-security facility southwest of St. Louis. He expressed hopes that his treatment there would be an improvement.

But he also said he already has requested the necessary paperwork to petition for a transfer out of state, perhaps to Minnesota.

"Right now, I am at a complete loggerheads with the prison. And it's because of their making — not mine," he said. "Send me to a state that does not have this prejudicial attitude toward me."

Wherever he ends up, Berdella realizes that he will spend the rest of his life behind bars — another 20 to 30 years, he estimated.

Asked how he envisions himself dying, he said, "I'm still trying to decide how I'm going to live."

Berdella becomes exuberant at the thought of someday returning to cooking and taking charge of a prison kitchen.

"I literally could have every inmate eating out of my hands if I did that," he said with a laugh. "This would make passing around the newspaper child's play."

Also, he hopes somehow to make the public aware of the prison system, because, he said, "I see the waste of humanity that's going on in here."

Asked about those in the Kansas City area who would prefer that he waste away in prison, Berdella appeared to become indignant.

"Tough. Who are these people and why are they putting their noses in my business?" he snapped. "These are the same ignorant, prejudicial assholes who allow places like 10th and McGee to exist. And they should be ashamed of themselves."