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Surrender in a 1963 Coast Killing Came After a Year of Planning

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ALBANY, Calif., Dec. 10—There were probably no outward signs anyone would have noticed, but about a year ago Joseph Otto Egenberger, a handsome \$25,000-a-year systems analyst, began to make plans to turn himself in to the authorities to be charged for a notorious and unsolved 14-year-old murder.

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He began to save his salary, in case he would need it for bail or lawyers' fees, and started to read whatever he could about prison life. Finally, in October he quit his job with the United States Steel Corporation in Chicago, packed up his belongings and drove home to the San Francisco Bay area, where his mother and family still live.

This is where he grew up—14 years ago his late father was the Mayor—and near here, in Berkeley, in October 1963 a 20-year-old student named Judy Williamson was killed. She had been Mr. Egenberger's friend and neighbor and classmate since childhood.

The case was so old that when the 33-year-old man surrendered here last week it took astonished officials several days to find the musty and yellowed files in police headquarters.

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This week friends and relatives of Mr. Egenberger discussed in interviews how and why he decided to turn himself in for murder after 14 years.

“He had to totally close off his life,” said David Dimmick, his close friend and confidant in the last two months. Some of his friends tried to dissuade him from surrendering, he added, but Mr. Egenberger said, “I can't do that. I've got to follow through on this.”

“One tends to create one's own prison and one's own punishment,” Mr. Dimmick said. “Joe decided that the way to freedom, psychological freedom —if he was to have the ability to go on an he productive person—was to turn himself in.”

“He had come to terms with himself about his responsibility and his involvement. He had gotten it straight in his head.”

The case began on Oct. 29, 1963, when Judy Williamson, a bright, attractive sophomore at the University of California at Berkeley, disappeared on the way to classes. In the ensuing months police determined, from pools of blood found in an underground parking lot and from belongings picked up in trash cans, that she had been killed.

Two years later her body was discovered high in the Santa Cruz Mountains, 100 miles south of here.

Despite an extensive investigation, no one was ever charged with her death, although police now say that Mr. Egenberger was a suspect from the start. Then a sophomore at Berkeley, he was, by all accounts, an exceptionally bright mathematics student.

The years passed and Mr. Egenberger moved to Chicago. According to an official at U.S. Steel, where Mr. Egenberger worked for eight years, “he was just like any other perfectly normal, young La Salle Street executive.”

He was regarded as quiet and serious. He wore good suits, had girlfriends, lived in an expensive apartment two blocks from Lake Michigan and voted as a Democrat. There is some indication that he may have seen a psychiatrist.

He returned often to California on vacations and kept in close touch with his family and a number of friends here. They went camping in the mountains, jogging, rode 10-speed bikes and saw movies.

Last year he saved the life of one friend when, hiking together on some rocky

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said, climbed down the cliffs and held his body above water until, with the help of other rescuers, he was pulled out.

In late October Mr. Egenberger, having quit his job, unexpectedly returned home with all his belongings. He began to take all his close friends and family into his confidence. He took his three younger sisters aside individually, for example, and told each about what he had done and what he planned to do. Apparently no one knew anything about his involvement in the killing.

“He said he didn't want me finding out on the evening news,” said his mother, a widow. “It's really rough, you know. I was shocked, but no matter what your son does, it doesn't change your love for him.”

About two weeks ago Mr. Egenberger hired Lincoln Mintz, a well-known criminal lawyer here, and several days later turned himself in to local police. Released on \$10,000 bail, he pled not guilty.

Admitting he killed the woman is, Mr. Mintz said, “a long way” from being guilty of first-degree murder.

“The surrender,” Mr. Mintz added, “is obviously a relief” to his client.

Mr. Dimmick said that his friend had talked at length about the forthcoming legal process. “He knows there's the possibility of life imprisonment,” he said, but “he's willing to take the chance in order to clean this thing up.”

Asked whether Mr. Egenberger was religious, Mr. Dimmick said, “Not in the Sunday School sense.” But, he noted, he has “a feeling of awe about the universe. That something is going on. That there is more than just cold, hard life there.”

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