

## Well-known Squirrel Hill Resident Remembers Western PA's "Trial of the Century"

By  
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How often do you hear about one of your Squirrel Hill neighbors who is featured in a true crime story that details what many local history buffs call Western Pennsylvania's Trial of the Century?

You probably recognize Edgar Snyder as a prominent Pittsburgh injury lawyer. But few know that early in his career, Mr. Snyder served as an Allegheny County public defender. It was then he was randomly assigned to defend the notorious murderer, Stanley Hoss, whose odyssey of violence spanned from 1969 to 1973.

Mr. Snyder figures prominently in the recently released book titled, **Born to Lose: Stanley B. Hoss and the Crime Spree That Gripped a Nation**, which is currently featured in the John Heinz History Center's Museum Shop. Hoss was a thief and local thug whose crimes escalated to killing two local law enforcement officers: Verona Police Officer Joseph Zanella and Western Pennsylvania Corrections Officer Lieutenant Walter Peterson-- one of the first African Americans hired by the Pennsylvania prison system. Hoss was also accused of kidnapping and murdering a young mother and her 2-year-old daughter, but their bodies were never found.

North Side Author James G. Hollock gives readers an authentic and disturbing look at the evil Stanley Hoss, who ended up on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List. Hollock, who worked for 30 years with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, writes in the first person perspective to create an in-depth look at the devastation and chaos Hoss caused.

Authors who reviewed the book compared it to Truman Capote's **In Cold Blood**. The author consulted state and federal archives and interviewed nearly 100 people who witnessed or knew about Hoss' felonies. Their accounts, including Mr. Snyder's, are chronicled throughout the book.

When Mr. Snyder started the case, it was a time of great change. As a result of a landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, the Pennsylvania General Assembly enacted the Public Defender Act in 1968, which created the Public Defender's office.

"You have to understand this time period. The law back then established the right for defendants in all criminal cases to have a lawyer at the state's expense," says Mr. Snyder. "People didn't understand why anyone would represent someone like Hoss."

Mr. Snyder was understandably apprehensive about representing Hoss. "When I met him in jail for the first time, I would not stay in the interviewing room alone," he recalls. "I was concerned that he could attack me or hold me hostage. After all, he didn't personally choose me as his attorney."

At one point in the book, Mr. Snyder tells of a time driving on the Parkway East, when a bullet hit his car. No one was ever charged for it, and it's possible the shot was coincidental – but it instilled fear in the young public defender whose wife at the time was expecting their second child.

“People tell me they remember when Hoss escaped from prison and was on the loose,” says Mr. Snyder. “We’re talking about a ‘Leave it to Beaver’ era and all of a sudden, parents are keeping their kids home behind locked doors and watching police helicopters hovering over their neighborhood.”

Hoss was convicted in the murder of Officer Zanella and was sentenced to death. Mr. Snyder took an appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and had Hoss’ sentence reversed to life in prison. Supposedly Hoss hanged himself in prison in 1978, but many – including Mr. Snyder – speculate that he didn't commit suicide. “Stanley Hoss wasn’t the type to take his own life,” he said.

The case became an important – albeit horrific – piece of Western Pennsylvania history. Mr. Snyder credits the case for teaching him how to handle pressure and the media spotlight. “I remember the case just like it was yesterday.”

**Born to Lose** can also be purchased through [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).