

the Angeles National Forest in 1960; and Karen Tompkins and Dorothy Brown, both 11 and from Torrance, in 1961 and 1962.

They were especially skeptical of Edwards' claim to have stopped killing during the 12-year span between 1956 and 1968.

"I know there are times when they know what they're doing is wrong, and they don't want to do it, but they have this compulsion to," Harris said. "He could have been not killing people during that time frame, but I doubt it."

Making the case

Police say they know Mack Ray Edwards, born in Arkansas in 1918, sexually molested at least one girl before marrying a young wife in 1946 and moving to California a year later.

A heavy-equipment operator, Edwards worked on several of the freeways now criss-crossing Southern California. Between 1950 and 1957, he resided in Pico Rivera, El Monte and Azusa.

"It's the perfect place for a man who's a serial murderer to bury the kids he's killing," Harris said. "He knows where the holes are, he knows where the concrete is being poured."

Edwards made no mention of Tommy Bowman in his original confession, but later bragged in prison that his murders numbered 18, DeWalt said.

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He made the first tenuous connection between the two when he came across stories about the murderer.

He had a feeling of déjà vu when he saw a photograph of Edwards, and recalled an amateur sketch made by Claudine Clarke, a resident of the 700 block of Altadena Drive.

"I studied the sketch; I studied the photographs," DeWalt said. "I went from one to the other, warning myself against what appeared to be too easy a reach."

His suspicion was strong enough to begin looking into Edwards' history. But police said they needed more than a sketch with an uncanny resemblance.

A coded confession

While Eldon Bowman and his family retraced their steps looking for Tommy, the boy had continued south until, adjacent to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, he ascended a trail to the west end of Altadena Drive.

As Altadenans sat down to dinner, two witnesses saw a boy believed to be Tommy near the trailhead on Altadena Drive.

Further east, another woman in the 700 block saw a boy matching Tommy's description crying as he walked eastbound along the street.

Moments later, she saw a "very tan, unkempt man" matching Edwards' description casting furtive glances side to side and moving "at a good clip" behind Tommy, DeWalt said.

Across the street, Claudine Clarke reported some moments later seeing the same man — but with one discrepancy. Clarke described a man in a white T-shirt; her neighbor said he was wearing a plaid shirt.

In old photographs of Edwards taken before his surrender, DeWalt said he can be seen wearing a plaid shirt buttoned over a white T-shirt. He theorized that as Tommy drew closer to Lincoln Avenue and busier streets, he removed his overshirt to free his movements and make the abduction.

DeWalt has been unable to locate Clarke to make a positive identification.

The investigation's shocker came from a letter seized in a search last October of the residence of Edwards' widow.

In a strange "anti-confession" smuggled out of San Quentin prior to his suicide, Edwards recanted much of his confession and said he was taking the heat for a man he only identifies as "Billy the cripple."

Police investigators unanimously dismiss the anti-confession as an invention born of Edwards' psychosis.

But later in that same letter, Edwards drops a bombshell.

"I was going to add one more to the first statement," DeWalt recounted Edwards writing of his original confession. "And that was the Tommy Bowman boy that disappeared in Pasadena, but I felt I would really make a mess of that one, so I left him out of it."

Police believe that is Edwards' coded confession to killing Tommy.

"That right there puts me over the top," Flores said. "If he didn't know about Tommy Bowman, he wouldn't have mentioned it."

An uneasy truth

Eldon Bowman never stopped wondering what happened to Tommy, and laments that Tommy's mother, Mary Bowman, died several years ago, still wondering.

After 50 years of unextinguished hope, the 85-year-old isn't ready to embrace entirely what DeWalt and police now believe happened to his son.

"It makes the most sense, as much as I don't like to think about it," said Bowman, who now lives in Simi Valley. "It isn't finalized, but it probably is the best explanation anyone has come up with so far."

The case still belongs to the Pasadena Police Department and it will be up to that agency to declare it closed. Investigators met recently with Pasadena police officials to update them.