

Don & Melanie: No divorce, plenty of trouble

MARCH 28, 1994 \$2.39

# People

weekly

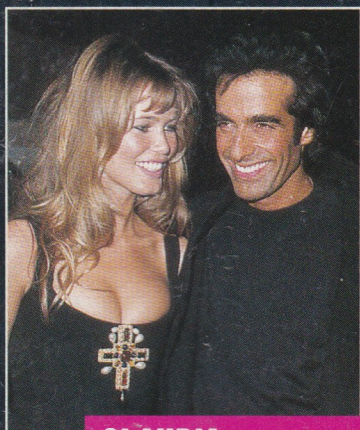


## LOOK WHO'S IN LOVE

JERRY  
SEINFELD AND  
SHOSHANNA  
LONSTEIN

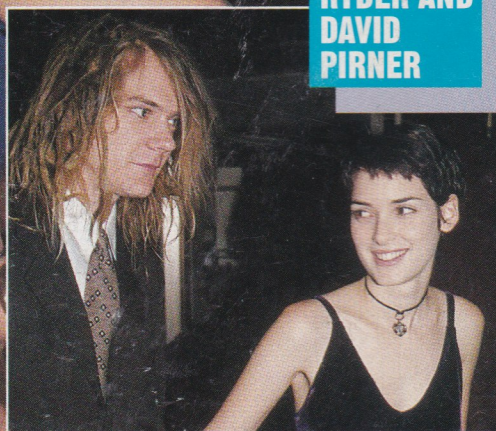
Jerry Seinfeld, 39,  
and Shoshanna  
Lonstein, 18, make  
an unlikely  
romance work.

**Plus:** Ted Danson on  
the rebound, Winona  
Ryder's new guy,  
and more...



CLAUDIA  
SCHIFFER AND  
DAVID COPPERFIELD

WINONA  
RYDER AND  
DAVID  
PIRNER



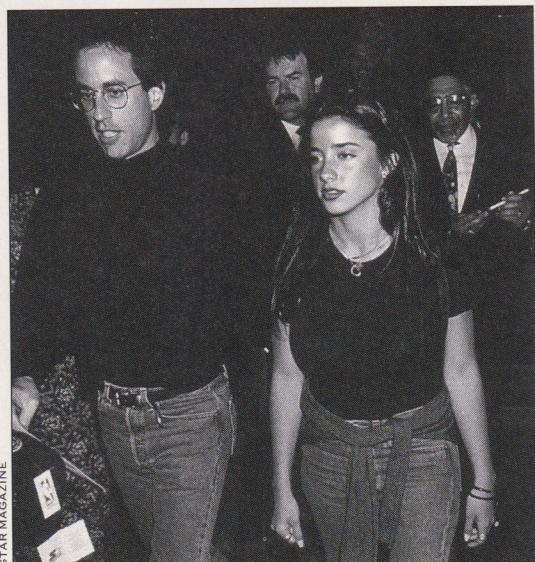
# People weekly

March 28, 1994  
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**CON  
ARTIST** ▶ With her uncannily accurate portraits of prime suspects, forensic artist Jeanne Boylan beats other sketch artists to the draw. **91**



PHIL SCHOFIELD



STAR MAGAZINE



ART SHAY/LIFE

**SUPREME  
SADNESS** ▲ After the death of her son, Mary Wilson (center) ends her estrangement from Diana Ross (left, with Florence Ballard). **53**

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▲ "Shoshanna is a person, not an age," says Jerry Seinfeld, 39, of Shoshanna Lonstein, the 18-year-old college student he is dating.

**78**

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# SINS OF THE SON

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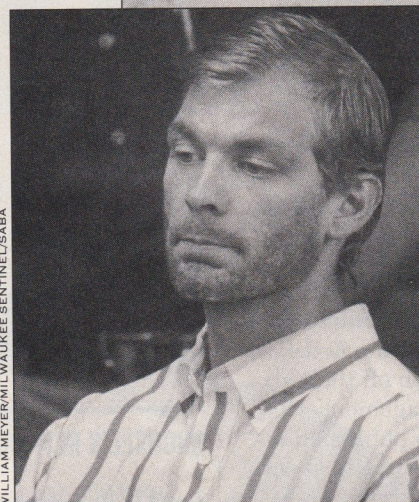
Lionel Dahmer is still haunted by the unfathomable mystery of how—and why—his baby boy became a serial killer ■ by Paula Chin



STEVE KAGAN

◀ "It's absurd for me to take responsibility for Jeff," says Lionel (at the prison in Portage, Wis.). "And yet the first feeling a parent has is guilt."

▶ "I'm glad that it's over," said Jeffrey (in 1991) of his murderous rampage—for which he blames no one but himself.



WILLIAM MEYER/MILWAUKEE SENTINEL/SABA

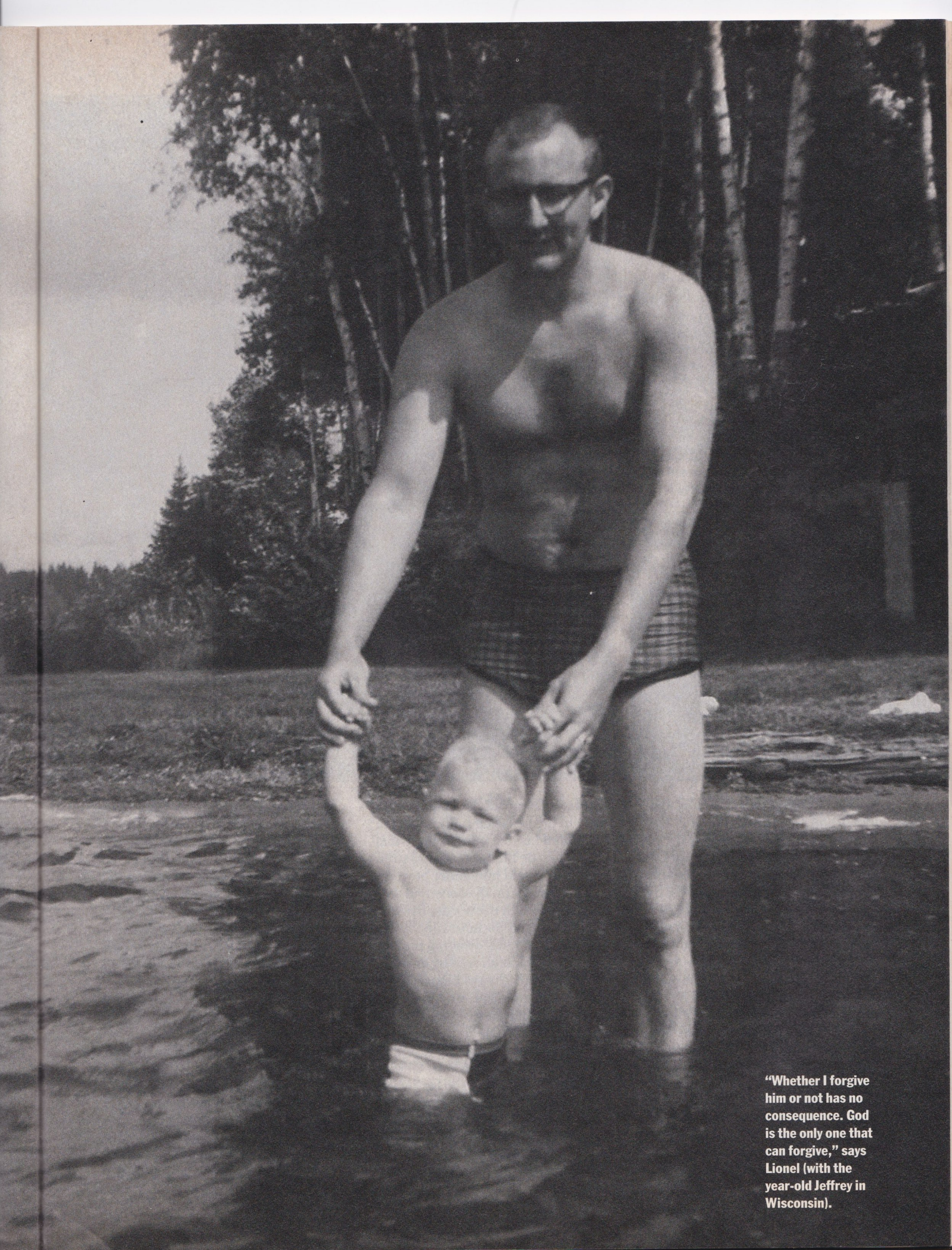
**L**IONEL DAHMER, WHO LIKES TO remember the good times with his son Jeff is telling the story of the lambs. "He was about 12 when we got involved with 4-H, raising and showing animals," says Lionel. "Every February we'd go to a farm and buy two new lambs. We had an old shack on the field near the house, and Jeff and I added sides, a front and a swinging hinged door. We put down stones and hay; it was a nice place for them. Jeff and I would go up every morning, and the lambs would come bounding down from the field. . . ." Suddenly, Lionel falls silent, tears welling in his eyes. Wife Shari reaches out and rests her hand on his. "It's okay," she says softly. "It's okay."

But Lionel Dahmer knows it never will be okay. Ever since his son was arrested in Milwaukee in 1991 and confessed to killing 17 young men—

as well as dismembering and even eating parts of his victims—Lionel has had to grapple with the incomprehensible reality that the boy he loved and raised turned into a conscienceless murderer. Where did such evil come from, and how did it take control of young Jeffrey? Was there something Lionel could have done to prevent it?

Those are the questions asked in Dahmer's thoughtful, sadly fascinating memoir, *A Father's Story* (Morrow). A portrait of what was in many ways an ordinary family—albeit one with a troubled marriage, a distant father and an unhappy child—the book is all the more haunting because that son went so terribly awry. In the end, Dahmer, a 57-year-old research chemist who lives with his second wife, Shari, outside Akron, cannot find any method to Jeffrey's madness. "I started the book as a search for answers," he says, "but it ends up just a

COURTESY LIONEL DAHMER

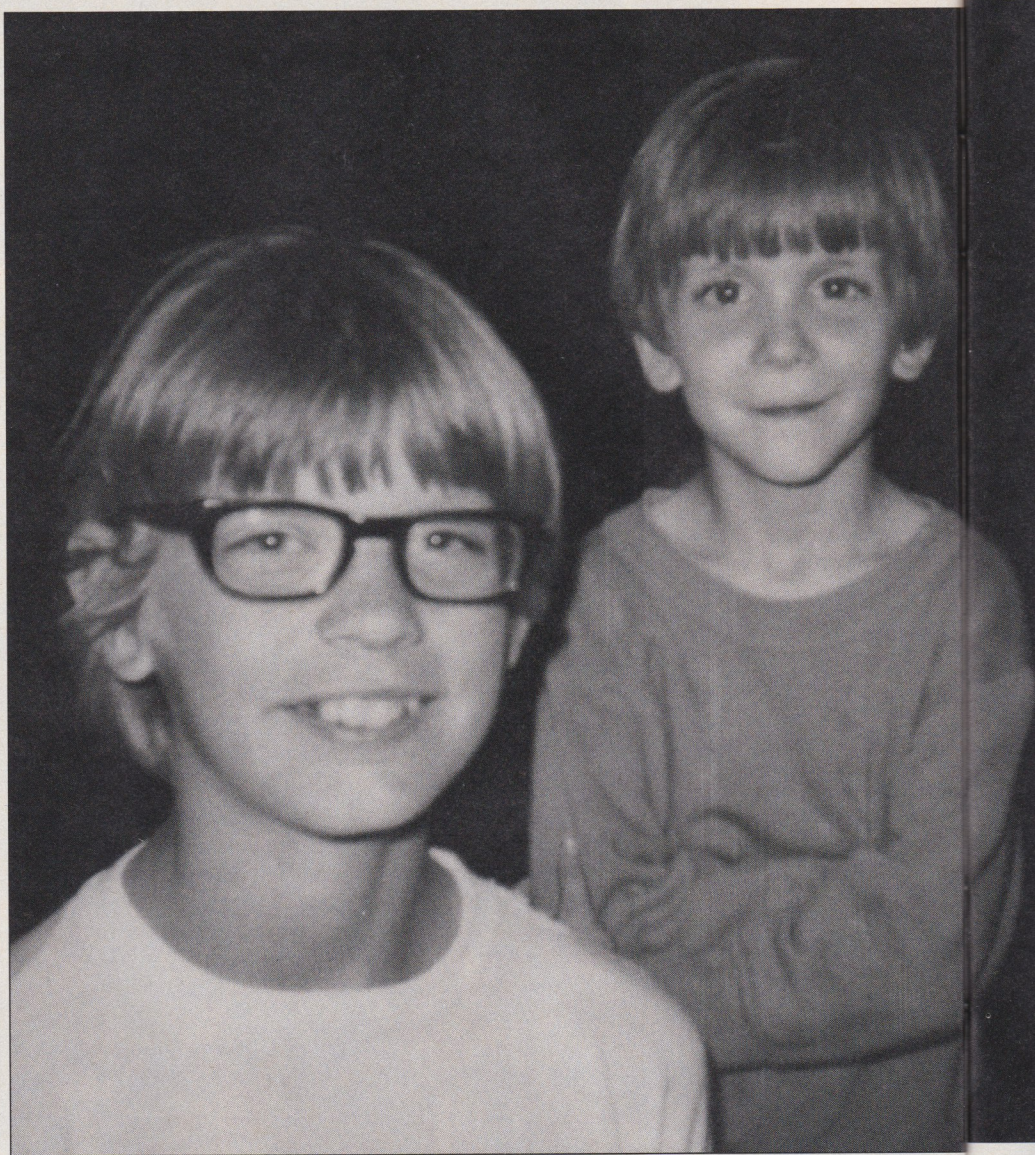
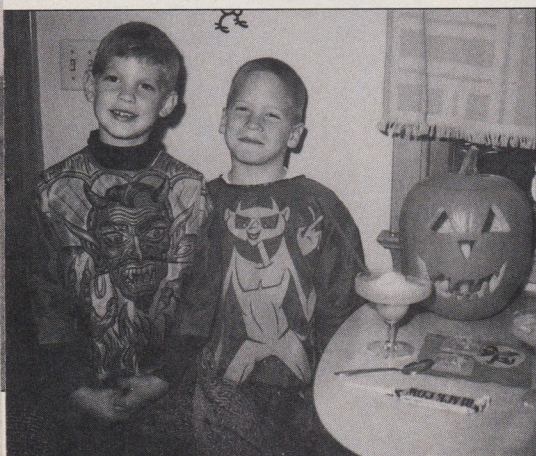


"Whether I forgive him or not has no consequence. God is the only one that can forgive," says Lionel (with the year-old Jeffrey in Wisconsin).

bunch of wonderings. No one has the answer."

Certainly the future seemed bright when Jeff was born in 1960 to Lionel, a soft-spoken graduate student at Marquette University in Milwaukee, and his wife, Joyce, a vivacious telephone-company instructor. Lionel remembers a bubbly little boy who loved his weekly treat at the soda shop and roaming the fields near home with his dog Frisky. But after the family moved close to Akron in 1966, Jeff turned suddenly silent and sullen. Lionel, who was fighting incessantly with Joyce and burying himself in his work, saw only a very shy child; Jeff, he thought, suffered the same feelings of inferiority he had had as a boy and could be taught to overcome them as

▼ At 7, Jeff (left) and a friend donned devilish costumes for a Halloween party.



he had—through bodybuilding and tennis and clarinet lessons.

But Jeff didn't respond. By the time he reached high school, in Bath, Ohio, he was a heavy drinker increasingly plagued by murderous impulses. By age 15, he said recently on NBC's *Dateline*, "I started having obsessive thoughts of violence intermingled with sex [that] just got worse and worse. I didn't know how to tell anyone about it." Lionel wishes he had. "If he told someone about going after roadkills or his interest in animals and their insides, that would have been such a big red flag," he explains. As it was, Lionel says he received no warning signals from Jeff's classmates or teachers or even his younger brother, David.

Jeff's parents separated by his senior year. After Joyce divorced Lionel in 1978, she moved back to Wisconsin

with David, then 12, leaving Jeff, 18, alone in the house on Bath Road. He committed his first murder there that June, when he bludgeoned and strangled 19-year-old hitchhiker Steven Hicks, then cut up the body and scattered the parts in the woods. By August, Lionel and his new wife, Shari, were aware of Jeff's drinking problem ("I thought it was caused by anger over the divorce," says Lionel) and tried to straighten him out by enrolling him at Ohio State University. After Jeff failed miserably and dropped out after one term, Lionel urged him to join the Army. He was posted to West Germany in 1979 but discharged for alcoholism in 1981.

Later that year Jeff moved in with his paternal grandmother, Catherine, in West Allis, Wis., outside Milwaukee, and eventually became a stock

clerk at the Ambrosia Chocolate Company. Soon she began reporting disturbing discoveries to Lionel: She had found a stolen male mannequin in Jeffrey's closet and a .357 Magnum under his bed. Sometimes horrible odors emanated from the garage, but the source could never be traced. Then there was the matter of the foot-square wood-and-metal box that Lionel found in Jeff's room in 1989. Thinking it contained pornographic magazines, he asked his son to unlock it; Jeff, suddenly angry and agitated, refused, complaining that he had no privacy. Lionel backed off when Jeff agreed to dump the contents of the box the next day. Only years later did he learn that it contained the mummified head and genitals of one of Jeff's victims.

Two years later, Jeffrey was arrested at the Milwaukee apartment he had

► Though his marriage to Joyce was rocky by 1972, Lionel turned a blind eye to his problems—and Jeff's. "My life," he writes, "had become an exercise in avoidance and denial."

▼ **Dateline NBC** filmed Lionel at Portage during a recent visit with Jeffrey, who mingles with the prison population but will never have a cell mate.



Jeff (with David in 1972) tolerated his little brother, "but they never were close," says Lionel.

COURTESY LIONEL DAHMER (3)



TIM GORIN/NBC NEWS

moved into in 1990. Only then, after authorities had cataloged a grisly array of skulls, bones and body parts, did Lionel learn the full horror of his son's crimes and glimpse the terrible obsessions that lay behind them. "Killing wasn't the objective," said Jeff on *Dateline*. "I just wanted to have the person under my complete control to do with as I wanted." Cannibalism was the final step. "Besides just the mere curiosity of what it would be like," explained Jeff, "it made [me] feel like they were a part of me."

Even in hindsight, says Shari, there was only one time when she and Lionel caught a glimpse of Jeff's inner furies. Shortly before their wedding, when she ordered Jeff to sit down and answer questions about a friend of his who had stolen their rings, "his eyes flashed with anger for one brief second," she

says. "At the time I thought, 'Okay, the kid's capable of a temper tantrum.' Well, what we saw was probably what many of his victims saw—the uncontrollable rage when he did let go."

While his son serves a 957-year term with no chance for parole at the Columbia Correctional Institution in Portage, Wis., Lionel has been sentenced to a life of doubt, guilt and shame. Angry at the loss of his family's privacy, he says his mother, Catherine, who died in December 1992, was reduced to "sitting like a frightened animal" when reporters besieged her home. Jeff's brother David, who recently graduated from the University of Cincinnati, has changed his name. Lionel and Shari, 53, who runs a private executive-placement business, refuse to do that—despite the stares, the prank calls and crass jokes.

But the Dahmers are not looking for sympathy; they say that should go to the families of Jeffrey's victims, to whom they will contribute part of the book's proceeds. Two of these families have sued Lionel for failing to get written consent before using their names in his book, and another claim is pending by the parents of Steven Hicks, who allege the Dahmers' negligence contributed to the death of their son. For his part, Lionel dismisses accusations he is trying to cash in on his son's notoriety, claiming his \$150,000 advance will barely cover the legal fees associated with Jeff's crimes.

Once a month, Lionel and Shari make the 11-hour drive from Akron to see Jeff in the sunny visiting room at Columbia. Jeff, who has gained more than 30 pounds in prison, passes the time studying art books and Audubon bird drawings and listening to tapes of Schubert, Gregorian chants and humpback whales. The Dahmers talk mostly about legal matters and ordinary things like work and Shari's four cats. "If we talk about things that are very serious and sad, it puts him in a funk," she says. Even now, Lionel would rather not explore Jeffrey's heart of darkness. "I can't love that," he says, "but I do love the other part that has so many good thoughts. Does that make any sense?" It does, in a way, to Jeffrey Dahmer. After reading *A Father's Story* last month, he asked Lionel, "Dad, why couldn't you have put in more of the good stuff?" ■