In October 1955, three Chicago boys were found murdered, their bodies naked and dumped in a ditch in Robinson Woods on the city's Northwest Side. A community and a nation were shocked. In a time when such crimes against children were rare, the public was transfixed as local television stations aired stark footage of the first hours of the investigation. Life and Newseem magazines published exclusive stories the following week. When Kenneth Hansen was convicted and sentenced for the murders, the case was considered solved — until questions were raised about Hansens presumed guilt. Shattered Sense of Innocence: The 1955 Murders of Three Chicago Children tells the gripping story of the three murdered boys — thirteen-year-old John Schuessler, his eleven-year-old brother, Anton, and thirteen-year-old Bobby Peterson — and the quest to find and bring to justice their killer. Authors Richard C. Lindberg and Gloria Jean Sykes recount the bungled police investigation, the failures of law enforcement, and the questionable conviction of Kenneth Hansen, and present new information concerning two suspects overlooked by police for five decades. The authors deftly examine all sides of this tragic story, drawing on exclusive interviews with law enforcement agents, with horse trainers affiliated with the so-called horse mafia, and with the man convicted of the murders, Kenneth Hansen. Like Truman Capotes In Cold Blood, this intensely intimate account offers a rare glimpse into one community and examines how these atrocious crimes altered public perceptions nationwide. Shattered Sense of Innocence, which is also a
story of political controversy, a determined federal agents quest for justice, and a communitys loss of innocence, includes fifty illustrations.

My Personal Review:
This book completely held my interest and that of several friends who read it at the same approximate time. We spent hours discussing it. After fifty plus years, the triple homicide described in "Shattered Sense of Innocence: the 1955 Murders of Three Chicago Children" is still chilling and disturbing. The book established a strong sense of time and place. The authors succeeded in recreating the fear and dread that gripped an entire community that will bother you long after you have finished reading. These things were not supposed to happen here, not in a quiet residential district bordering upon the suburbs.

As a person who drives through the Jefferson Park/Norwood Park area of Chicago on a regular basis, it is impossible for me to pass certain intersections now without thinking of the three victims: that was the location of the police station where their parents looked for help; that was the bowling alley the boys visited; the three youths were last seen on that corner before accepting a ride from a passing vehicle.

Portions of the immediate neighborhood are largely unchanged. The former police station on Gale Street is still standing, but it houses other city offices today as a newer and larger police headquarters has replaced it. The forest preserve opposite East River Road where the three naked bodies were discovered still draws stares from passing motorists who can remember the banner headlines and the startlingly graphic images broadcast on local television during the nightly news (the book contains these photo images). Some older adults can recall being kept inside their homes for several days by parents who were afraid to allow their children to play outside until the unknown criminals were arrested by the police.

The initial police investigation was badly botched by the political hacks competing for jurisdiction over the crime scene. The murderer and his accomplices took care to dispose of the bodies in a location where multiple agencies and officials could quarrel over who was in charge of the investigation. For decades afterwards, the murders would remain unsolved. The determined efforts of an arson investigator seeking to determine who the culprits were in a series of fires at various riding stables set in motion the revival of the murder inquiry decades later and resulted in the controversial trial of the one the surviving suspect.

The book contains some conjecture as to what transpired on that fatal night. Some facts can only be guessed at, but the authors review several theories and offer plausible interpretations of the possible chain of events. The actions of several of the now deceased accomplices can only be imagined.
Be forewarned, this is not a pleasant book to read nor will it be easily forgotten once you have finished it. Readers will be introduced to sexual predators, petty thieves and pornographers who gather in amusement parks and recreation halls where children and teenagers loiter. There is danger to be found near the merry go round and the pony rides. Some of the smiling monsters walk amongst us in the bright sunshine, dressed in casual clothing and projecting a false facade of friendliness and respectability. The unspeakable evil committed in 1955 continues to reverberate today. I cannot begin to imagine how many lives were damaged by the accomplices and the perpetrators of these three murders.

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