

The Fine Print

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Ex-ADA shows true grit as prosecutor and author

By Peter Elikann

A young woman sits outside a restaurant at the edge of Boston's North End on a sweltering summer day. A large, sweaty, seemingly friendly neighborhood guy whom she has seen before offers to take her for a ride on his boat docked nearby in Boston Harbor. He seems safe.

As they cruise the languid waters, there is suddenly a dark jumpiness to his voice as he offers his views on women in general: "Women are evil. They just use you and ..." Too late, she realizes her judgment had failed her that day and she was in way over her head.

The man takes off his clothes, points a silver handgun at her and leads her below deck where he rapes her. The woman survives but tells no one. The boat's name, in big letters across the stern, is so blatantly Freudian in what it reveals about the perpetrator that it seems like something a bad writer of fiction would make up. It is the Mala Femmena, Italian for "evil woman."

In a riveting real-life tale that feels like a journey through Dante's nine circles of hell, Needham attorney and former Suffolk County homicide prosecutor Timothy M. Burke pieces together several such incidents, some alleged and some proven, ascribed to Leonard "The Quahog" Paradiso.

In "The Paradiso Files: Boston's Unknown Serial Killer," first-time author Burke makes the argument that East Boston fish peddler Paradiso may have been a sadistic repeat murderer and rapist in the 1970s and 1980s.

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Burke prosecutes The Quahog in 1982 for just one case — the murder of 20-year-old Marie Ianuzzi, whose strangled body was found in a Saugus marsh. But as he and his friend, State Trooper Andrew Palombo, begin to zealously investigate, it is like opening the floodgates.

Almost every incident they uncover reveals a similar modus operandi. Paradiso usually lures a female into his car just before the facade drops, spews forth his psychopathic hatred of women, pulls out a gun and beats his victim gratuitously as he rapes her at gunpoint.

A complex criminal

Paradiso almost always gets away with it. He picks up a teenage streetwalker in Boston's old Combat Zone, takes her to his place where he beats and rapes her, and then later seeks out her pimp to threaten her if she testifies against him.

A 19-year-old art student hitchhikes a ride with him from Boston to her parent's home in Andover when Paradiso veers off onto a deserted country road. His massive fist hits her face again and again as he attempts to rape her just before the police fortuitously come upon them.

There is a depth and complexity to Lenny Paradiso, who was alleged to have curiously confessed his murders to at least two people and left clues at the scenes. For a person of apparently low intelligence, Paradiso frequently escaped the consequences of his actions, often because his girlfriend purportedly would back him with alibis to support his version of the various stories.

This wiliness on Paradiso's part is one of the real strengths of the book. It demonstrates a series of barriers a prosecutor must get around in trying to prosecute a case. Again and again,

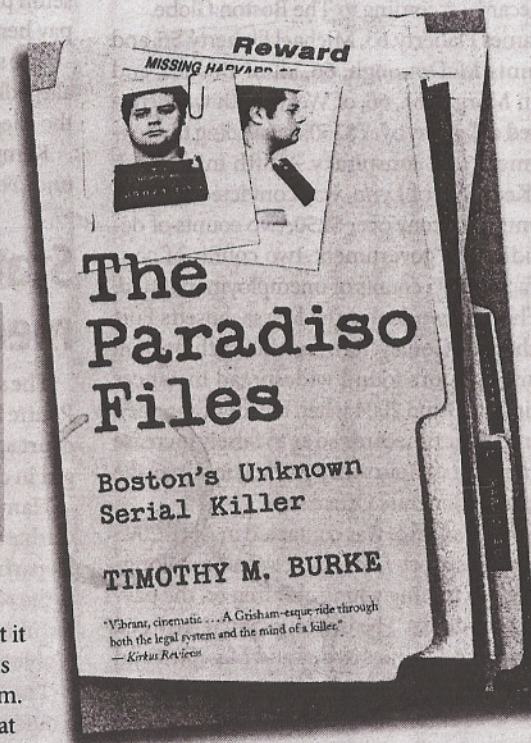
Burke has to find a way to soldier on as witnesses and victims are reluctant to testify; police forensic work may be imperfect; the exercise of legal rights presents roadblocks; hostile, lying witnesses confuse the story; and evidence on some aspects of the case seems hidden forever.

Dedication and passion seem to drive Burke to navigate these dangerous rapids. His ability to combine perseverance with a clever creative streak would cause any fellow attorney who reads this book to nod in approval.

For example, when the sister of Ianuzzi asks Burke to help in this two-year-old unsolved murder, the fact that it occurred in another county, outside his jurisdiction, does not seem to deter him. He cites an old, little-known statute that says, if the murder took place within 100 rods (1,650 feet) of the county border, it can be prosecuted in either place. The Pines River in Saugus in Essex County where her body was discovered turned out to be that close to Suffolk County.

'Wish I could have done more'

There is a fairness to Burke's narration; he explains so well the arguments put forth by Paradiso's defense that, by the end of the



"The Paradiso Files:
Boston's Unknown
Serial Killer"
By Timothy M. Burke
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book, one might not be convinced who killed Marie Ianuzzi.

Her boyfriend, David Doyle, who had a history of physical confrontations with her, had an angry, drunken shouting match with her at a wedding on the night she was killed. He had to be pulled away. He showed up with scratches on his hands at her wake, admitted

Continued on page 6

EX-ADA shows true grit as prosecutor and author

Continued from page 4

to heavy drug use at that time and missed her funeral because, on impulse, he had flown to New Jersey where he was arrested under an alias for behavior fueled by alcohol and drugs.

There was testimony he admitted to a friend that he had committed the murder. Her blood was found near his apartment.

Burke, haunted by self-doubt, suffers through every weakness in his case, occasionally loses confidence, yet continues on.

He has an unyielding belief that one of Par-

adiso's victims was Joan Webster, a Harvard graduate student whose inexplicable disappearance in 1981 was covered by the media for years. Although her body was discovered years later, the murder remains unsolved, and it provides an obsessive subtext for the entire book.

Despite the dearth of sufficient evidence with which Paradiso could have been charged for the Webster murder, Burke's heart rules over the legalities here as his gut instinct tells him it just seems like Paradiso must be responsible.

Burke won't let it go and is still in touch

with Webster's parents to whom he dedicates the book with the words, "I wish there was more I could have done to ease your pain."

Perhaps the greatest compliment any author could receive is a recent acknowledgement that Burke's search for the truth recently spurred the Essex County District Attorney's Office to reopen the investigation into three other unsolved killings that took place in the 1970s where Burke suspects Paradiso might possibly be implicated. The DA's Office confirmed that "The Paradiso Files" served as the catalyst to plumb the past for justice. 