

MY SUMMERS WITH A  
SERIAL KILLER



# THE BABYSITTER

LIZA RODMAN AND  
JENNIFER JORDAN

**BOOK CLUB KIT**

## INTRODUCTION

Thanks for your interest in *The Babysitter*. This book was seventeen years in the making and took two of us and all our best efforts to bring the story into the light. Jennifer and I are thrilled to be sharing it with you now as part of your book club experience. It was difficult to write. And most difficult to live. But we hope the vivid details, while often gruesome, will bring you into the story in the same way we were brought in, while writing and researching.

Don't forget, we are available for virtual book club discussions as time permits and look forward to connecting with our readers.

## SUMMARY OF *THE BABYSITTER: MY SUMMERS WITH A SERIAL KILLER*

Growing up on Cape Cod in the 1960s, Liza Rodman was a lonely little girl. During the summers, while her mother worked days in a local motel and danced most nights in the Provincetown bars, her babysitter—the kind, handsome handyman at the motel where her mother worked—took her and her sister on adventures in his truck. He bought them popsicles and together, they visited his “secret garden” in the Truro woods. To Liza, he was one of the few kind and understanding adults in her life. Everyone thought he was just a “great guy.”

But there was one thing she didn't know; their babysitter was a serial killer.

Some of his victims were buried—in pieces—right there, in his garden in the woods. Though Tony Costa's gruesome case made screaming headlines in 1969 and beyond, Liza never made the connection between her friendly babysitter and the infamous killer of numerous women, including four right there on Cape Cod, until decades later.

Haunted by nightmares and horrified by what she learned, Liza became obsessed with the case. Now, she and cowriter Jennifer Jordan reveal the chilling and unforgettable true story of a charming but brutal psychopath through the eyes of a young girl who once called him her friend.

## THE COAUTHORS' FRIENDSHIP

Jennifer and Liza met when Liza was lured across their dorm's hallway by the smell of Jennifer's strong coffee percolating in her room and have been friends ever since. Like a long marriage, they've had their ups, downs (mostly ups), right turns, left turns, together and apart. *The Babysitter* is definitely one of their most satisfying ups.

# CAST OF CHARACTERS

## ANTONE CHARLES COSTA (TONY)

Born August 2, 1944, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
Died May 12, 1974, Walpole, Massachusetts

Born and raised in Massachusetts, Tony married a fourteen-year-old girl in 1963 in Provincetown with whom he fathered three children. They divorced in 1968. In 1969, he was arrested and convicted for two of the most gruesome, depraved murders in Massachusetts history.

## AVIS L. JOHNSON (COSTA)

Born October 15, 1948

Born and raised in the tiny, seaside community of Provincetown, Massachusetts, to a mostly single mother, Avis married Tony Costa, a man four years older than her when she was just fourteen and against her mother's wishes. She remains a beloved member of the Provincetown community.

## CECELIA BENT (COSTA) BONAVIRI

Born June 30, 1908  
Died December 21, 1969

Born and raised in Provincetown, Cecelia Bent married her first husband, Antone Costa in 1928 and had one son, "Tony" after sixteen childless years of marriage. Mr. Costa died serving in the Navy during the Second World War. Mrs. Costa then remarried Joseph Bonaviri of Somerville, Massachusetts, later divorcing, and had another son, Vincent. She died on December 21, 1969, of a cerebral hemorrhage.

## ELIZABETH RODMAN (LIZA)

Born March 19, 1959

Liza was born in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts, and moved to Newton, Massachusetts, when her mother remarried. Liza is married, has raised three children, and still lives in Newton. She hasn't yet quit her day job.

## GRANDPA GEORGIE (NOONAN)

Born May 23, 1908  
Died January 14, 1994

George Edward Noonan was born and raised in Brockton, Massachusetts, as part of a large Irish Catholic clan. He married Christine Elizabeth Newquist on Halloween Day, 1931, and had two children, Betty and Ed. After years of heavy drinking, he turned his life around and became a long-standing member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

## BETTY (NOONAN)

Born November 22, 1935  
Died December 1, 2020

Betty was born in Brockton, Massachusetts. For years, she worked in a local high school as a Home Economics teacher. Her first marriage was to her high school sweetheart, Rod, Liza and Louisa's father, and her second, in 1970, was to Ron Sloan (not his real name). She died in December of 2020 of chronic lung disease.

# TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. On pp. 300, Liza states “Since beginning this project, I have been asked one question above all others: Why didn’t he kill you? Why wasn’t a little girl for whom he bought Popsicles and drove countless times to the clearing in the Truro woods among those he killed, violated, dismembered, and buried?”

*After reading intimate details about both Liza’s and Tony’s stories, why do you think her life was spared?*

2. Do you think Liza’s life was ever in danger while she was in Tony’s care?
3. “That’s not just a serial killer,” Dr. James Fallon, author of *The Psychopath Inside*, said of Tony Costa and his butchery. “That’s a whole different animal.” (pp. 303) Do you think Tony Costa was mentally ill? Or do you believe he was simply evil? Discuss both angles with your reading group.
4. Tony tried desperately to convince his attorneys and the police that others were involved in, possibly responsible for, the murders. What do you think? Did he have an accomplice who did the dirty work of the killings?
5. Why do you think Tony took Liza and her sister into the woods, his burial grounds for at least four of his victims? Why wasn’t he concerned that they’d tell other adults?
6. Given the early and ongoing emotional and physical abuse she inflicted on Liza, do you think Liza’s mother was mentally ill?
7. Do you think Cecelia, Tony’s mother, knew of his crimes? And if so, why didn’t she tell the police?
8. Many of his friends later admitted that they suspected Tony was at the very least involved in the various disappearances of women in Provincetown. Why do you think no one came forward and shared their suspicions with the police?
9. Keeping in mind that he was a pathological liar who maintained his innocence until the day he died, what would you ask Tony if you could?
10. Given all that you read about Tony and his pathological narcissism, do you think he committed suicide or was he killed in prison? Why?
11. What significance do you think the music mentioned in this story plays in the overall narrative?
12. What do you think might have helped someone like Tony Costa before he committed the murders? Do you think society can help people like this? Why or why not?



# TRURO WOODS MAP & KEY



Map illustrated by Carol Robey, MD

- A.** Abandoned Volkswagen with Rhode Island license plates seen by Carl Benson on February 2, 1969.
- B.** Cover of Volkswagen owner's manual and other scattered papers bearing the name of Patricia Walsh found on February 2.
- C.** Body of Susan Perry discovered on February 8.
- D.** Hunting knife and .22 caliber revolver uncovered by Tom Gunnery on March 31.
- E.** The "parking area" in the woods where Costa was accustomed to leaving his car.
- F.** Costa's landmark, a large pine tree.
- G.** Mary Anne Wysocki's pocketbook found buried.
- H.** Large clearing, Tony Costa's marijuana garden.
- I.** Pat Walsh's handbag found on March 4.
- J.** Hole near a large pine tree where Wysocki's head and torso were uncovered on March 5.
- K.** Large hole where Walsh and rest of Wysocki were found along with the body of Sydney Monzon.
- L.** Small hole near pine tree where a canister had been buried.
- M.** Area where a leg bone was uncovered.



# OFFICIAL *BABYSITTER* PLAYLIST ON

## “EVERY SONG HAS A MEMORY.” —ANDY WARHOL

Did you know that one way to enter memory is through music? For this book, Liza looked back to the songs and lyrics she'd heard and memorized during her childhood in Provincetown as she rode around in the backseat of her mother's Chevy and the front seat of Tony's truck. Then, she listened to them over and over again as she researched and wrote this book, playing “California Dreamin'” by The Mamas and the Papas so many times the upstairs neighbors stomped on the floor. Each song on this playlist is either mentioned in the book as part of a specific memory or a personal favorite of Liza's, Louisa's or Betty's from the 1960's. Liza still knows all the words.

What are your favorite songs and why? What memories do your favorites evoke?

- ▶ “California Dreamin'”, The Mamas & The Papas, 1966
- ▶ “White Rabbit”, Jefferson Airplane, 1967
- ▶ “Hanky Panky”, Tommy James and the Shondells, 1966
- ▶ “Surfer Girl”, The Beach Boys, 1963
- ▶ “A Whiter Shade of Pale”, Procol Harum, 1967
- ▶ “Downtown”, Petula Clark, 1964
- ▶ “These Boots Are Made for Walkin'”, Nancy Sinatra, 1966
- ▶ “These Eyes”, Guess Who, 1968
- ▶ “The Poor Side of Town”, Johnny Rivers, 1967
- ▶ “Love Me Do”, The Beatles, 1964
- ▶ “Monday, Monday”, The Mamas and the Papas, 1966
- ▶ “The Name Game”, Shirley Ellis, 1965
- ▶ “Walk Away Renee”, The Left Banke, 1967
- ▶ “I Say a Little Prayer”, Dionne Warwick, 1967
- ▶ “Alfie”, Dionne Warwick, 1967
- ▶ “Elenore”, The Turtles, 1968
- ▶ “Do You Know the Way to San Jose”, Dionne Warwick, 1968
- ▶ “The Candy Man”, Sammy Davis Jr., 1972
- ▶ “Aquarius/Let the Sunshine”, The 5th Dimension, 1969
- ▶ “To Sir with Love”, Lulu, 1967
- ▶ “I'm Into Something Good”, Herman's Hermits, 1966
- ▶ “Ode to Billie Joe”, Bobbie Gentry, 1967
- ▶ “Ruby Don't Take Your Love to Town”, Kenny Rogers, 1977
- ▶ “The Girl From Ipanema”, Stan Getz and João Gilberto, 1962
- ▶ “Reach Out of the Darkness”, Friend and Lover, 1968
- ▶ “Like to Get to Know You”, Spanky and Our Gang, 1967
- ▶ “Crystal Blue Persuasion”, Tommy James and the Shondells, 1969
- ▶ “Groovin'", The Young Rascals, 1967
- ▶ “You Showed Me”, The Turtles, 1968
- ▶ “Grazing in the Grass”, The Friends of Distinction, 1969
- ▶ “Twist and Shout”, The Beatles, 1963
- ▶ “Harper Valley P.T.A.”, Jeannie C. Riley, 1968
- ▶ “Build Me Up Buttercup”, The Foundations, 1968
- ▶ “California Nights”, Lesley Gore, 1967
- ▶ “Turn Down Day”, The Cyrkle, 1966
- ▶ “Crimson and Clover”, Tommy James and the Shondells, 1969
- ▶ “Everyday People”, Sly and the Family Stone, 1968
- ▶ “Worst That Could Happen”, Brooklyn Bridge, 1968
- ▶ “Touch Me”, The Doors, 1969

**LISTEN NOW ON SPOTIFY** 

# INSPIRED COCKTAILS

## BETTY'S BACARDI & COKE, 1958 (AKA THE CUBA LIBRE)

In 1900, the world's first Cuba Libre cocktail was created in Havana, Cuba, when American soldiers mixed Bacardi rum with Coca-Cola and lime to celebrate the end of the Spanish-American War. This delicious drink and other Bacardi rum cocktails helped spark the golden age of cocktails, as people fell in love with mixing their own drinks. By the time Betty and Rod are drinking Bacardi and Coke, they've dropped the lime.

### RECIPE

- 1 ounce rum
- 3 ounces Coca-Cola
- ½ lime
- Ice

Pour rum into a glass with ice. Add Coca-Cola. Squeeze the lime and drop into the glass as a garnish.

## CAPTAIN'S TABLE GIN GIMLET, 1968



The gimlet is a classic cocktail known for having the perfect balance of sharp, tangy sweetness with an ice-cold slap of dry gin. According to legend, the gimlet gets its name from a 19th-century Surgeon Admiral of the Royal Navy, Sir Thomas Gimlette KCB, who, when faced with an outbreak of scurvy on his ships, added lime cordial to the stores of gin on board in hopes of boosting his sailors' intake of vitamin C. So it's healthy, right?

### RECIPE

- 2 ounces gin or vodka
- 1 ounce fresh lime juice
- ¼–½ ounce simple syrup, to preference
- Thinly sliced lime wheel or lime wedge, for garnish

Combine ingredients in a cocktail shaker, shake well. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass, garnish with a lime wheel.



# WHAT TO BINGE AFTER YOU'VE READ *THE BABYSITTER*

## BOOKS

- *In His Garden* by Leo Damore
- *A Crime in the Neighborhood* by Suzanne Berne
- *The Psychopath Inside: A Neuroscientist's Personal Journey Into the Dark Side of the Brain* by James Fallon
- *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* by Michelle McNamara
- *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel Van Der Kolk
- *Up the Down Staircase* by Bel Kaufman
- *Valley of the Dolls* by Jacqueline Susann

Don't forget to check out the *The Babysitter* Bibliography, page 325–328, hardcover.

## ARTICLES

- "A Novelist Probes the Tale of Four Horrible Murders on Cape Cod," *LIFE* Magazine, Kurt Vonnegut, July 25, 1969
- "A Grave in the Dunes," *TIME*, March 1969

## PODCAST

- *Morbid: A True Crime Podcast*, Episode 194

## MOVIES

- *Valley of the Dolls*, a 1967 Film by Mark Robson and starring Sharon Tate
- *Wait Until Dark*, a 1967 Film by Terrence Young and starring Audrey Hepburn
- *They Shoot Horses Don't They?*, a 1969 Film by Sidney Pollack and starring Jane Fonda

## TELEVISION

- *Crazy, Not Insane*, a 2020 Documentary by Alex Gibney
- *The Assassination of Gianni Versace*, a 2018 Limited Series, Netflix
- *Mindhunter*, a 2018 Limited series by David Fincher, Netflix

## LINKS TO OTHER RESOURCES

- [LizaRodman.com/About](https://LizaRodman.com/About) (About the authors)
- [LizaRodman.com/The-Babysitter](https://LizaRodman.com/The-Babysitter) (About the book & research photo gallery)
- [LizaRodman.com/Press](https://LizaRodman.com/Press) (Press)
- [LizaRodman.com/Events](https://LizaRodman.com/Events) (Events)
- [JenniferJordan.net](https://JenniferJordan.net)
- "Born to Kill?" Tony Costa (TV Episode 2014) - [IMDb](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1010101/)
- [Tony Costa | Criminal Minds Wiki | Fandom](https://www.criminalminds.com/wiki/Tony_Costa)