



A Serial Killer's Daughter: My Story of Faith, Love, and Overcoming

Kerri Rawson

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What is it like to learn that your ordinary, loving father is a serial killer?

In 2005, Kerri Rawson heard a knock on the door of her apartment. When she opened it, an FBI agent informed her that her father had been arrested for murdering ten people, including two children. It was then that she learned her father was the notorious serial killer known as BTK, a name he'd given himself that described the horrific way he committed his crimes: bind, torture, kill. As news of his capture spread, Wichita celebrated the end of a thirty-one-year nightmare.

For Kerri Rawson, another was just beginning. She was plunged into a black hole of horror and disbelief. The same man who had been a loving father, a devoted husband, church president, Boy Scout leader, and a public servant had been using their family as a cover for his heinous crimes since before she was born. Everything she had believed about her life had been a lie.

Written with candor and extraordinary courage, *A Serial Killer's Daughter* is an unflinching exploration of life with one of America's most infamous killers and an astonishing tale of personal and spiritual transformation. For all who suffer from unhealed wounds or the crippling effects of violence, betrayal, and anger, Kerri Rawson's story offers the hope of reclaiming sanity in the midst of madness, rebuilding a life in the shadow of death, and learning to forgive the unforgivable.

"No easy answers here. No platitudes. Only raw honesty, written with the gracious authority of one who has glimpsed hell. Kerri Rawson shares her earned wisdom and a hope that has been bought with tears and nightmares. This book is a gritty must-read in the library of hope."

—Paul J. Pastor, author of *The Face of the Deep* and *The Listening Day*

A Serial Killer's Daughter: My Story of Faith, Love, and Overcoming Details

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From Reader Review A Serial Killer's Daughter: My Story of Faith, Love, and Overcoming for online ebook

Heather says

While Barnes and Noble had this book under "True Crime" I feel it would be more aptly shelved in Christian Living or Christian Memoir. While Kerri does recount the traumatic events of discovering her father is BTK, she beautifully weaves her faith journey throughout - from walking away, to coming back, and ultimately God working through her to forgiveness.

Lisa Elizabeth says

This was really boring. I kept losing interest. I didn't need to know the minute details of a summer camping trip in the early 90s to understand that BTK masqueraded as a good father for decades. I wanted to hear about the process of reconciling the father and the serial killer. That's why I wanted to read this book. However, I don't need the author's entire life story to get there.

I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. I was not paid for this review.

Jay says

Ok...as you probly noticed I didn't finish reading it. I made it a few chapters in and it's literally the girl's life story..."my uncle was great because he was always quick with a joke.....Grampa pulled me close and told me how proud he was of my graduation.....Dad killed the Otero family one morning when my Mom was pregnant with me...Grandma's house was always my favorite place to visit, especially on the holidays, she always had the classic Christmas music playing while we all sat around and told stories....." it's just a run-of-the-mill telling of a normal, boring, sprinkled with affection for her family biography with a quick mention every 10 pages or so of one of her dad's crimes. I was expecting a whole lot more. Maybe some stories of the family wondering where he was late one night.?! Or her and her brother stumbling upon a strange article of clothing in the garage. Or even a mention of how he seems just a little TOO into the murder investigation as it was ongoing. Nada. Zip. Zilch. I gave up.

She seems like a nice girl, well-written, and it's terrible what she's had to endure, but I can't help but think what the victims families must think as they read this account as she tries to come across as "another victim." It's definitely written with that tone! Idk...I guess she IS technically a "victim" in all this but...c'mon.

Bottom-line for me with this one is I didn't crack this book to hear all about her ups and downs, highs and lows, and every other memory along the way. I would've turned to the Lifetime Network for that. Which is EXACTLY where this story is headed! STAT!

Valerity (Val) says

A Serial Killer's Daughter: My Story of Faith, Love, and Overcoming

I approached this book with my mind and feelings completely open and was really surprised how much I came away with from it. Kerri Rawson is fresh and likable as she tells her story of growing up in her family in Kansas. She describes it as just a totally normal, semi-dysfunctional family who works, goes to school, has vacations. Pretty typical family, it seems. She comes across very real as she shares her story and I find it like reading something a friend could be relating about what a really awful period in their life was like. The situation is just so unimaginable, and I just felt horrible for Kerri and her family, and all of the families.

It gets a little bit repetitive on a few things, the spiritual theme, and other items that come up repeatedly perhaps after a while, but if that helped her get through all of what she describes well, more power to her. What I didn't expect were some of the stories of situations she ended up in growing up with her dad that turned harrowing that she shares. In hindsight, she, of course, sees them differently after she learns of his killing past. I found this book better than I expected and well laid out. I'm glad I purchased this very heartfelt book, as it told so much more than just the BTK aspect of the family. They became real people to me by the midst of the book, not just headlines, due to her writing.

Also on my BookZone blog:

<https://wordpress.com/post/bookblog20...>

melinda says

should've been filed as some religious memoir

Niklas Pivic says

This is the introduction to the book:

On February 25, 2005, my father, Dennis Lynn Rader, was arrested for murder. In the weeks that followed, I learned he was the serial killer known as BTK (Bind, Torture, Kill), who had terrorized my hometown of Wichita, Kansas, for three decades. As he confessed on national television to the brutal killings of eight adults and two children, I struggled to comprehend the fact that the first twenty-six years of my life had been a lie. My father was not the man I'd known him to be. Since his arrest, I've fought hard to come to terms with the truth about my dad. I've wrestled with shame, guilt, anger, and hatred. I've accepted the fact that I am a crime victim, dating back to the days my mom carried me in her womb. I no longer fight the past nor try to hide it. It just is. It happened and it's terrible. Terrible to dream about, terrible to think about, terrible to talk about. Incalculable loss, trauma, emotional abuse, depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress—these things leave scars. I've struggled with forgiveness, fought for understanding, tried to put the ruptured pieces of my life and my family's life back together.

It's an ongoing battle. But hope, truth, and love—the things that are good and right in this world—continue to fight through the darkness and overcome the nightmares. I am a survivor who has found resilience and resistance in faith, courage, and my sure stubbornness to never give up.

That quite sums the book up in a quite full-rounded way. It's obvious to me that the author has suffered—and suffers—immensely at the hands of her normal father, who is also the serial-killer Dennis Rader, known as BTK.

One of the absolutely best things about this book, is the author's ordinariness, or rather, her being who she is; this book does not suffer from the sensationalism (in spite of the book's title) that usually marring autobiographies that have been spruced up to gallant or even evade the truth, in service of tabloid fodder. She writes about her usual days before knowing her father's BTK, as in this paragraph:

In January 1974, Dad murdered Joseph and Julie Otero and their two youngest children, Josie, age eleven, and Joey, age nine. The three older Otero children found their family's bodies after walking home from school.

Another powerful stylistic trait throughout the book, is the author's jumps through time, even in the same paragraph at times, giving way to a kind of stream-of-consciousness feel. Still, most of the book is very coherently written:

Mom found comfort in the chime that went off in the hospital right after Grandpa died. It meant a baby had been born at almost the exact moment my grandpa passed. Mom told me later that Dad had wept over his father's body. Wrecked with grief, he had walked hunched over down the hospital hallway. She said, "I don't think your dad had ever sat beside someone who died before." When I heard these words, I was filled with sorrow, picturing Dad next to Grandpa's frail body. Dad was grieved over the loss of his father—he had loved him, very much. It's impossible for me to reckon that with Dad taking the lives of ten innocent people.

There are a lot of Bible references throughout the book, and still, it's obvious to see that the author has accepted help from other sources, e.g. therapy and family members.

There are several mind-boggling episodes in this book, unlike most serial-killer books that I've read (and I have read quite a few), especially when the author reveals herself as human in all kinds of facets, as here:

Mom said, "Did you know I was teasing him this fall that he spelled like that guy—BTK?" I grinned a bit at this, trying to stifle a laugh, as I checked Mom's face.

She was trying to hide a smirk, too, and when our eyes met, we both started giggling. It felt good to laugh.

People died. I'm not supposed to be laughing ever again.

"I asked your dad once why would BTK use a cereal box to communicate with the police—like it was reported in the news. He said, 'Cereal—like a serial killer.'"

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry at that one.

"Where did he get those boxes? We don't eat that type of cereal." And that's what my poor mom is wondering.

Mom continued: "When I got interviewed, they asked what was behind our hidden door. I asked, 'What door?' They said the one in the kitchen behind the table. I said, 'You mean the door the dryer is behind?'" I snorted, tried to contain it, and gave up, laughing out loud.

Mom and Grandma followed. "The police asked me about safety-deposit boxes—I don't know why."

Later, we learned that Dad used secret ones to store BTK items. Mom's face turned serious, her voice lower.

"Early last year, there was a special about the thirtieth anniversary of the first murders, what happened to the Oteros. It was on TV. Your dad watched it." Oh. I didn't know he had watched it.

The letters from and to Dennis Rader are also quite mind-boggling. This one from the author to her father:

We weren't very thrilled to see your written interview with the local TV station. We also didn't like seeing your poems and letters on TV. We know you can and will do what you want to do, but we would really appreciate it if you could control that stuff better. Any publicity is bad for the family, especially for the ones that live in Kansas.

Brian and I have the grace of living in areas where we're not known; and that's been a blessing these last three months. Mom and everyone else doesn't have that grace. We're asking you to stop this type of communication on behalf of us. I have shared this view with your lawyers, and they were going to talk to you about it.

Mom is having the hardest time with everything that has happened. Brian and I share a different kind of bond with you than she does. It is easier for children to love their parents unconditionally (and vice versa) than it is for spouses. For her own sake, she might need to start distancing herself from you, and you're going to have to try to understand that. She's stronger than we all thought and she's going to get through this, just as the rest of us are. We refuse to let the bad stuff win. Mom shared 34 good years with you, Brian 29 years, and me 26 years. We're trying to hold on to that—not let the other things define you or us. You should not let that define you either. You're stronger and better than that.

I love you and I know you're trying to do the right things. I'm truly sorry your life has turned out this way. I want you to know you're loved and cared for. You're loved by your children, family, and most importantly God, whose love and forgiveness is much more powerful and greater than any on earth could be. I'll write again soon.

Their correspondence changes over time, as the author comes to terms with what's happening while being severely affected with PTSD due to her father's legal crimes.

All in all, I feel the book should have been shortened, but on the other hand, its length does serve a purpose. All in all, this is a very human feel of how it can be to be closely related to a person who's committed crimes that were highly publicised for a while and most likely, due to sensationalistic "true-crime tv series", always be current to serial-killer boffins.

♥ Marlene♥ says

Not sure if I can finish this because I am so bored by it it makes me fall asleep. She talks about her father a bit but she talks about her faith so much more. I should have known looking at the title. That being said her life is not anything special except for the disgusting cruel things her cowardly father did. This book would never have been published and certainly not purchased if not for her infamous father.

Rachel Smalter Hall says

I've grown to love what memoirs can reveal about our shared humanity when the author is willing to dig deep. True crime, on the other hand, has always given me nightmares. Enter the true crime memoir. It turns out I love true crime memoirs! When super creepy, criminal acts are filtered through the very personal, introspective lens of a memoir, I can handle it. I can stop covering my eyes. I can peer a little more closely into the depths of humanity.

Kerri Rawson's astonishingly candid book about learning her beloved father had been leading a double life as a serial killer her entire life is the mother of all True Crime Memoirs. It touched me to my core. I'm all for the "complicated father-daughter-relationship" memoir, and it doesn't get any more complicated than "my dad is a serial killer." What I love about this book is how she fully explores the heart's confusion around knowing someone's a monster yet loving them anyway. She's so honest and pure in these moments, and her voice truly moved me.

I also really appreciated the thread of dark humor that she weaves into her story. Being able to laugh at your pain is such a hallmark of surviving crime, trauma, and abuse, and Kerri Rawson has all that in spades. Even in the darkest moments of her story, she tosses out unexpected one liners that endeared me to her even more. She's funny, and it turns out she's also a very talented writer and storyteller.

The first half of the book moves a bit slowly as she describes her family's life "pre-BTK," as in before anyone knew about her dad's double life. But this part of the story still has lots of payoff as it establishes the close relationship she had with her dad, as well as lays the foundations for her religious beliefs that would ultimately see her through her darkest hours. When she finally gets to "after-BTK" about halfway through

the book, the story accelerates to lightning speeds, and I had to give myself a few little breaks only because it had gotten so intense.

Even though the cover screams "true crime," I hope this memoir will find a wider readership, as I truly loved it and found it to be a deft and moving account of a life that most of us can hardly even begin to imagine.

Luann Mailman says

I've always wondered what families of serial killers go through. This was a well written, easy to read and fascinating trip through the author's life. I started reading on Monday night, and finished in less than 24 hours. Living in Wichita, and having read over the years about the murders made it even more interesting to me.

Sally Lackey says

Read in a day

For all we have been confronted with in the BTK story, this book was a glimpse into the personal devastation to Dennis Rader's own family. Kerri weaves a story giving the reader the background of her growing up years with her father which allows us to truly understand the shock and trauma she has been through since the day of his arrest. I couldn't lay this down.

Bridget says

I really wanted to LOVE this book, because I love memoirs and true crime most of nearly any genre... but I just didn't love this book. There was too much born again Christian ideology in this book that felt just as alienating on the page as it does in life. However in Rawson's defense, if there is ever a time to look to forms of fundamentalist faith for meaning I suppose it is when your dad is a serial killer and you've been traumatized to the point where you really need a close personal connection to anything good whatsoever.

Kimberly Lund says

As someone who has lived in Park City, KS for the last twenty years, I couldn't not read this book. I've been a true crime reader for 30 years, long before I moved to the area, and having BTK arrested in a place that was home to me was jarring. Reading this book -- one of dozens of true crime books I've read over the years -- and knowing the places she mentions and having lived much of the same life made me think and evaluate. However, I would not actually classify this as true crime, but more of a memoir of a person who is unfortunately thrust into a true crime world. I'm not a devout Christian and much of the faith based parts of the book were not my thing, but the author writes from the heart and gives you her authentic experience. It's great that she was able to finally find peace through her beliefs. This is a story of a childhood, a betrayal, and how she came to be able to find a life with the knowledge of that betrayal. Not necessarily a must read if you're looking for true crime details, but it's an interesting journey to take.

Caleb Hoyer says

I had no idea this book existed until I came across it in the bookstore. I've been interested in this case for a long time, particularly the family aspect of it, and I'm really impressed that Kerri Rawson had the courage to write this book and share this story. The book itself is a mixed bag. I always appreciate when people who aren't writers by trade still write their books themselves. But the risk of that is that the writing is not of the highest quality, and that is the case here. There's also an entire section of the book devoted to a hiking trip that feels like it serves almost no purpose (although I believe it is where the author's faith in God was renewed, which seems like a bit of a stretch to me, but who am I to deny her experience?). Those caveats aside, though, the story itself is so fascinating that I raced through the book, and her writing, in its modesty, is extremely honest. There is more talk of God than I would like, but if that's what led her to a state of relative stability and forgiveness then more power to her. It's a staggering situation to try to wrap your mind around, and she does put you in her shoes. I'm not sure how interesting this book would be to someone who wasn't already interested in this case, but for someone like me it was very gripping.

FabulousRaye says

It's okay. Kerri doesn't go into explicit details about her father's murders. It's not explosive or sensational.

It is as advertised. Life with a serial killer for a father and the fallout when finding out what he is.

I wasn't into the hour long section about a family camping trip, nor did I much care for all the God and religious parts.

Michelle says

It is a serious and terrible sorrow when others must carry the burden and fall-out of someone else's criminal acts. "The Serial Killer's Daughter: My Story of Faith, Love, and Overcoming" (2019) fortunately is a rare and highly articulate memoir written by Kerri Rawson. Rawson's father, Dennis Radner, the self-identified BTK, ruthlessly murdered 10 people, (2 victims were children) in Wichita, KS. (1974-1991). Radner is serving 10 consecutive life sentences for these crimes in the Kansas El Dorado Correctional Facility.

In February 2005, Rawson called her husband Darian to let him know that a man was outside their Michigan apartment building clearly looking at their window, she was frightened, until the man identified himself at her door as an FBI agent. Unable to call her mother, or other family members, she learned the horrific truth that her father was apprehended for the notorious BTK crimes that for decades had terrorized residents of her Kansas home town. Her seemingly loving devoted father was a married family man, a military veteran, a dedicated church official and Boy Scout leader-- the BTK monster committed multiple heinous murders, he was believed to live in the community undetected for decades, leaving clues and taunting the authorities. Rawson's life would never be the same after she learned her father's vile and sickening truth: that he confessed to the BTK murders. The shock and terror of her father's crimes would haunt Rawson, her family, friends, associates, and community for years afterward. Rawson experienced symptoms of severe anxiety from trauma, depression, and PTSD.

Although Rawson suffered from occasional night terrors as a child, her life had been normal and ordinary. Enjoying a close relationship with her parents; she did well in school, and went camping and hiking with her father and brother. In her teens, she turned to her Christian faith and spirituality to sustain her in grief after the death of her beloved cousin, Michelle (1996). Many parts of the book read like a novel, slowing the storyline down somewhat, yet there is no correct way to tell a story like this.

Rawson was especially careful to tell only her story, there is little written about her mother Paula, who was granted a quick divorce from her husband (m.1971- 2005) without the customary waiting period. Unable to sell the family home, an unidentified buyer bought the property and the house was torn down. Several years would pass without Rawson writing to her father as she engaged the necessary services of a specialized trauma therapist. Rawson also wrote about avoiding the shadows of silence and shame, of further spirituality, forgiveness and mercy, as her courageous journey of healing moved forward. Rawson graduated from Kansas State University, she and her husband Darian live in Michigan with their two young children. **
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