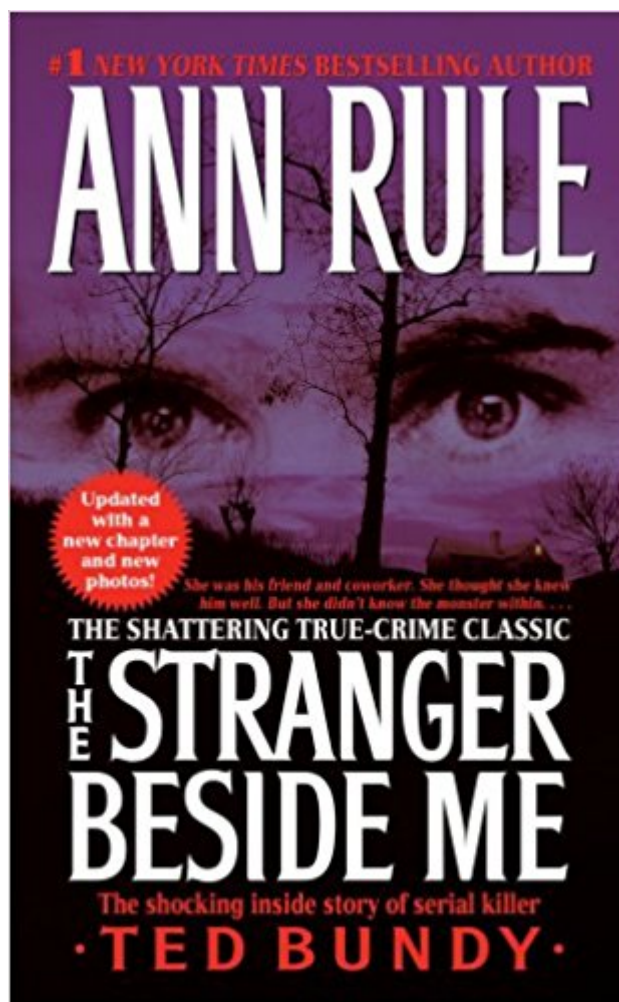


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The Stranger Beside Me



Synopsis

THE DEFINITIVE WORK OF AMERICAN TRUE CRIME FROM "AMERICA'S BEST TRUE-CRIME WRITER" (Kirkus Reviews) Utterly unique in its astonishing intimacy, as jarringly frightening as when it first appeared, Ann Rule's *The Stranger Beside Me* defies our expectation that we would surely know if a monster lived among us, worked alongside of us, appeared as one of us. With a slow chill that intensifies with each heart-pounding page, Rule describes her dawning awareness that Ted Bundy, her sensitive coworker on a crisis hotline, was one of the most prolific serial killers in America. He would confess to killing at least thirty-six young women from coast to coast, and was eventually executed for three of those cases. Drawing from their correspondence that endured until shortly before Bundy's death, and striking a seamless balance between her deeply personal perspective and her role as a crime reporter on the hunt for a savage serial killer -- the brilliant and charismatic Bundy, the man she thought she knew -- Rule changed the course of true-crime literature with this unforgettable chronicle.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I had heard of this book, of course; had wanted to read it for years, so when this 20th anniversary edition came out, I decided to give it a go. I had a pre-conceived notion: OK, this is going to be a really interesting biography of Ted Bundy, with the added attraction of having been written by a former dear friend. Fast, easy crime reading, I thought. I was wrong. This story is so chilling, so frightening, it grips you in the gut. Ann Rule has simply stated the facts. No sensationalism, no gratuitous gore, no psychobabble. Just the facts. As they happen. And even though the reader

might think of Ted Bundy as "old news," and even though he was executed in 1989, this book makes one check to see that the doors and windows are locked. There are actually two stories here: one describes the gradual disintegration of a seemingly normal, affable, brilliant man into a sexual psychopath so evil, so methodical in his vicious killings, that one wonders if he was at all human. The other story is that of Ann Rule herself, a decent, hard-working, middle-aged mother of four who meets and befriends a nice young man working beside her in a crisis clinic. A man she regards as a younger brother; a man she views as a close and trusted friend. The slow but inexorable realization on Rule's part that this man is in fact an unspeakably violent serial killer is as painful to read as it was for her to experience. Each victim is described in terms of such respect and such anguish that even a family member, I think, can feel that his or her daughter has been given a chance to shine, a chance to be more than a victim, more than a nameless number (8th girl killed, and so forth).

This is an excellent true crime book. It has an unusual twist in that the author and the subject of the book, serial killer Ted Bundy, had a platonic relationship that arose from the time they were co-workers for a Seattle, Washington crisis center. Quite frankly, the author initially had no idea that Ted Bundy was anything other than what he appeared to be: a handsome, intelligent, charismatic, and articulate young man, who was, at the time, involved in local politics and later became a law student. When he became the suspect in the disappearance and murders of a number of very young, pretty women, the author was in total disbelief. As the evidence mounted against her friend, the author, who is a former police officer, could not shut her eyes to the reality that Ted Bundy was actually a very disturbed individual who was guilty of all of which he was accused and probably guilty of other such crimes for which he was not accused for evidentiary reasons. Consequently, the author would suffer some angst for many years, as she struggled to reconcile the Ted Bundy that she thought she knew with the fiend who was compelled to commit so many vicious abductions, assaults, and murders. It is believed that at least thirty-five young women, and probably a good number more, died at the hands of Ted Bundy. The author details the abductions, assaults, and murders of his victims from coast to coast, which crimes were ultimately to make Ted Bundy a nationwide household name, and an entity to be feared. The investigative efforts of law enforcement officers in the states of Washington, Utah, Colorado, and Florida are revealed, as are Ted Bundy's arrests and his trials.

Without a doubt, the coincidence that found Ann Rule already acquainted with the prime suspect in a series of brutal murders is one that would be hard to believe if this were fiction. But it's not -- Rule,

contracted to write the story of the elusive "Ted," discovers that her former colleague, Ted Bundy, curiously resembles the profile of the killer. Rule's later career as one of the most spectacularly successful true crime writers was significantly enhanced by the publication of this book. She writes with a surprising candor of the intimacy between herself and the Republican Party aspirant and law student who was eventually put to death after committing an unknown number of killings in an unknown number of states. Bundy's episodic rampages through the states of Utah, Washington and Florida are well known, and he is, in many ways, the most "famous" of modern serial killers. On the constitution of the serial killer as a modern identity, there's probably nothing better than Mark Selzer's book *Serial Killers*, a fascinating study of this modern pathology which traces the identity assumed by Bundy and other back to Jack the Ripper. The Ripper, as the first elusive, anonymous, random killer to gain notoriety in popular culture, offered an "identikit" profile for the serial killer which Bundy, as "Ted," fits perfectly. Rule's book reads like a curious amalgam of true crime and romance fiction, and, in many ways, this is a love story of sorts. Rule's fascination with Bundy reminds us of the charismatic powers of the sociopathic personality, and its plaint, adaptable face in this competitive culture we find ourselves in.

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