



The Kill Jar: Obsession, Descent, and a Hunt for Detroit's Most Notorious Serial Killer

J. Reuben Appelman

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An enthralling and haunting look into the investigation for the Oakland County Child Killer who murdered four children and terrified suburban Detroit forty years ago. With a foreword by Catherine Broad, the sister of victim Timothy King.

During 1976 and 1977 the people of suburban Detroit were distraught over a killer on the loose. Four children were abducted and murdered by a perpetrator still unknown to this day. At the time, the case was one of the largest murder investigations in the history of the United States.

Part family saga and part thriller, this is the culminating effort of J. Reuben Appelman's ten-year investigation on the Oakland County Child Killer. Overlaid with Appelman's own, decades-old history with violence, *37 Winters* tells the gripping story of the police cover-ups, con-men, child pornography rings, and high-level corruption that went on throughout the investigation, and that is still going on today.

The Kill Jar: Obsession, Descent, and a Hunt for Detroit's Most Notorious Serial Killer Details

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From Reader Review The Kill Jar: Obsession, Descent, and a Hunt for Detroit's Most Notorious Serial Killer for online ebook

Absolom J. Hagg says

This book melds true crime with memoir and does so with surprising deftness. The author grew up in Detroit and was about the age of the children kidnapped and killed by the OCCK. Going back to Detroit to research the book brings out a lot of conflicted feelings about the violence in his past and in his life and delving into how that, along with the rigors of his research, affects him makes for a true crime book unlike any other I've read. If you go in expecting a straight journalistic take, you may be disappointed (but make no mistake, the journalism is good too), but if you want an exploration of how those crimes insinuated themselves into the lives of so many for so long, you'll be treated with a book of depth and care.

Tricia Bentley says

Although a fast read, this was a hard read. The subject matter is tough and the enormity of what the writer uncovers is a lot to digest. I think it is an important read..
One that will stay with me for a long time.

Amelia says

My head is still spinning trying to grasp that this is a true story. But you can't make this stuff up. I am absolutely floored at the seemingly endless number of depraved and perverted perps and accomplices that keep emerging as Appelman carefully peels back the layers of this astounding cover up.

Have noticed that some are critical of the format that weaves J.R. Appelman's own feelings and connections to the story throughout. I found this distracting at first, but then realized it was only his own pain and empathy that drove him to conduct such phenomenally thorough research.

Julie says

The Kill Jar: Obsession, Descent, and the Hunt for Detroit's most Notorious Serial Killer by J. Reuben Appelman is a 2018 Gallery Books publication.

“There was a serial killer out there, swiping kids from their footing like sweeping a few bugs into the kill jar in his garden, and there was nothing anybody could do but keep their doors locked and ride out the storm.”

The OCCK- or The Oakland County Child Killer- refers to a series of child murders in the late seventies in Detroit. To this day the killer has yet to be officially identified.

Serial killers were quite prolific in the seventies. I remember the huge headliners, like ‘Son of Sam’, the

‘Zodiac’, and Manson- to name a few. But, this case was not on my radar at all. Four children- two boys and two girls were murdered, which is horrible enough. But, it also appears that the investigators may have botched the investigation and then needed to cover their tracks.

For the author of this book, the case is intensely personal. He was nearly a kidnapping victim himself at one time. Under those conditions, it is easy to see how a case like this could worm its way under someone’s skin. An ordinary curiosity, or interest in a case could easily morph into a full- on obsession.

I’ve followed crime cases for years, reading every book penned on the subject, watching every documentary or crime show about it, reading any newspaper reports or articles on the case and so forth. But, I don’t think about these cases every waking moment of my life or attempt to solve the crime myself. I don’t contact the victim’s families, or blog about true crime, or contemplate writing a book on the subject. Maybe there is something about experiencing crime on a periphery that affects a person so deeply they feel compelled to prevent more crimes from taking place or feel a need to find closure or justice for those who didn’t survive, as a penance for their own.

Appelman is not the first person to become so obsessed with a cold case they upended their entire lives, lost perspective, and struggled to find normalcy. The obvious comparison would be to Michelle McNamara, whose obsession with the ‘Golden Gate Killer’ may have contributed to her untimely death.

While this ‘descent’, which is an incredibly apt word for it, by Appelman, and McNamara are hauntingly similar, and will draw inevitable parallels, I would caution you not to make comparisons.

I hate to dissect this book in a truly negative way, but at the end of the day, for all of Appelman’s immense sacrifices, only a small amount of new information was unearthed. The police did seem to withhold evidence from the victim’s family, and there were avenues they didn’t explore fully, evidence was ‘lost’, and in one instance a report with sensitive information, possibly naming a viable suspect was whited out. But, at the end of the day, much of what I read here was hearsay. There are some pretty far-flung conspiracy theories that would rival Oliver Stone’s JFK movie, but no proof that would stand up in a court of law. Sure, there were some moments when the effect was quite chilling and could make the hair stand up on the back of your neck.

But, it was all too vague and doing a little side digging of my own, I’m pretty sure we can figure out who the killer probably was, despite there being several other very viable candidates.

What really stands out about this book is the author’s memoir. Appelman is a very troubled soul. His depression is marked. It’s serious enough that I’d strongly suggest seeking professional help. The book leaned heavily on the author’s personal life, his struggles with his marriage, his moral temptations and weaknesses, and felt more like airing dirty laundry than an exposé on how this case took over his life.

Occasionally, Appelman unnerved me and had me squirming in my seat. He’s a very tense person, dark, brooding and moody. I was concerned for him, but also for those close to him as he did seem to struggle with dark and violent thoughts and tendencies. I’m not sure if the case is the cause of his instability or if his obsession or ‘descent’ is actually a symptom of something far more serious.

I’m not being judgmental here, nor am I an expert on this type psychological compulsion. I felt bad for the guy, but he also made me feel very uncomfortable at times. I do hope he can find peace and balance so that he can be the father he wants so desperately to be.

But, if nothing else, this book shines a light on a forgotten cold case. I will definitely take a closer look at

this case and seek out documentaries or further reading materials on the subject.

Karen Nelson says

The Kill Jar: Obsession, Descent, and a Hunt for Detroit's Most Notorious Serial Killer was an enthralling book. I hate to admit it, but I enjoy a true crime story and this totally fit the bill. Well-written as part memoir, part true crime investigation, and part love story to a long lost Detroit, the book is a culmination of the author's ten year obsession with one heck of a story.

During the late 1970s, when child abductions seemed to be epidemic, Detroit had four child abduction-murders that were never solved. The author has spent ten years researching and obsessing over this set of murders, partly because of his proximity in age growing up in Detroit.

The author sets his gritty story against his own violent childhood, a once vibrant Detroit, and quite possibly, his own narrow escape as a victim of abduction. He describes the dead end leads, dirty cops, pedophilia clubs, autopsy coverups, lots of "suicides," families of privilege who covered up for their children who needed help, as well as incorrect information dispersed to the public. It's a sad, gritty tale, that leads us to some incomplete conclusions that the killings stopped when a couple of suspects were incarcerated or died. There is never a true conclusion, but we have an idea after the author puts many pieces of a puzzle together for us. Most, importantly, the author seems to heal from his own past and becomes a better father and man by addressing some of his own demons from his childhood during his researching this book.

I loved this book and devoured it in two days camping in a beautiful lakeside site. It's a solid five star book and highly recommend it to those who love true crime stories.

Thank you to the publisher and #NetGalley for a pre-publication ebook in exchange for an honest review.

Paul says

I think many will align this book with the recent popular true crime shows Serial, S Town, and Making of a Murderer. I don't think they are wrong, but Appelman takes a much more personal and raw path in telling his story. His motivations whether altruistic or demon-driven are always on display as his own professed unbalance is juxtaposed with the corruption of the case. The Kill Jar is an addicting read, one that will have you Googling the case late at night to see the eyes of the suspects and to test your own theories.

Thank you to NetGalley, Gallery Books, Simon and Schuster, and J. Reuben Appelman for the advance copy for review.

Full review can be found here: <https://paulspicks.blog/2018/04/12/th...>

Please check out all my reviews: <https://paulspicks.blog>

Melissa says

I received a copy of this from Netgalley in exchange for a review.

CW: Child rape. Appelman weaves together a lot of threads in his quest to discover the identity of the Oakland County Child Killer, a lot of grotesque tentacles that curl out and then back in on themselves tangled with digressions into his abusive childhood, his adult relationship with his father, and his faltering marriage and relationship with his own children. Although he never solves the case conclusively, he builds a credible tale of a pedophile ring relying on kidnapped children for victims and corrupt cops willing to "lose" evidence to protect rich pedophiles. I didn't enjoy this book very much, not only because of the subject matter - Appelman veers all over his own narrative and chapters are arranged in a disjointed, almost dreamy fashion, seeming to almost mimic what I'd assume is the haphazard uncovering of clues in a police investigation. He's a great writer and this book is filled with rich, chewy phrasing that I'd be quoting if I could, but this was so muddled that I found it was a struggle to read & I was glad to be finished with it.

Conni says

This is a true crime novel. The author writes this book in first person. The book is a comprehensive look into the Oakland County Child Killer (OCCK) Case back in 1976-1977. The Book was written in 2010, thirty six years after the crimes. The author was there during the original murders. He lived there in the same city, 15 minutes away from one of the sites as a young lad. He also had a run in with a man posing as a security guard who, as he looks back, could have been the killer posing to snatch him, the author. Eerie, huh? When I first started reading I assumed the author is an investigative journalist who drives to the scene of each crime and visits the neighborhood to get his story. As I read, though, I realized that these crimes had a deeper effect on the author and his childhood or because of his childhood. As the author writes about this case, he inserts the effects it had on his personal psyche. Appelman explains his connection to the victims because of his own upbringing during the time of the crimes. It's a round about story to inform the reader about past and current prejudices he reads in thousands of pages of evidence, the interviews, and his own interpretation of the various testimonies. As the author adds more and more details from the past and present, the reader gets the broad picture of why this case cannot be totally solved.

J. Reuben Appelman writes with a very descriptive pen. He describes scenes in such detail, it reads like your looking at a photo or video. The book starts out with a letter from the publisher, a forward written by a sister of one of the victims, an introduction from the author, followed by a prologue, all before the story begins. It's been 34 years since the murders. The case has never been solved. The sister of one of the victims believes that law enforcement stonewalled any attempt to solve it. There is also a deep look into church and government corruption, which seems to have had a great impact on the outcome of solving or not solving this case. The book delves into multiple pedophile groups operating at and around the time of the OCCK murders.

Thank you to NetGalley, Gallery Books, Simon and Schuster, and J. Reuben Appelman for the advance copy for review.

Kimberly says

One can only hope that the attention this book will bring to the Oakland County Child Killings will help to bring some sort of resolution to the four open cases and help to bring peace to the families of the victims.

I found The Kill Jar very disturbing, not only in the stories that it tells (Appelman's as well) but in the way that they are told: roaming around, rough-edged and strings hanging. It's like wandering in a maze, or inside of the mind of someone not-quite well, which is clearly the intention.

I grew up in Detroit and was a teenager when these murders were happening -- in fact, I went to high school two blocks away from the Masonic Temple Appelman luridly describes. While my memories aren't quite as dark as Appelman describes -- there is a park in front of the Temple that we high school kids would hang out in, that in fact had playground equipment for children much younger than us, and I had friends that were emancipated teens that had apartments in the Corridor that we would hang out in -- I understand that he is trying to create a mood. Unfortunately, it is the same sort of description white residents of the Detroit metro area north of 8 Mile generally gave to an area they were otherwise ignorant of, and remain so to this day.

As someone who spent time living and breathing the streets and buildings Appelman paints so darkly, I caution the reader to take a grain of salt, and remind them that while he casts Detroit city in the shadow of all of the dirt and crime, it was in Oakland County, where the rich, white people live, that these horrific crimes took place.

Carol Custer says

I usually find true crime stories fascinating and though much of this was also interesting, I found it distracting that the author talked so much about himself, being 'almost abducted', his sketchy life and girlfriend, etc. I think the book would have been better served to keep more to the facts of the cases. When the focus was on the cases themselves, the research and facts showed.

Stacy Kingsley says

I really, really wanted to like this book, but I just could not. The topic was interesting, but I am not sure if, besides police corruption, it gave any new information about the case at hand. I looked up the case on google as I read, and the information in the book about the case was all the same information I could find on google. The hard part of this book was that the chapters didn't transition well. One chapter could be about the case and the next about a pedophile ring that may have had something about the case then the next would be about the authors relationship with his father and then there was a lot about girlfriends, his family, and self-harm. This book was very disjointed, although I understand how the families of the victims might have found some relief in this book as someone was once again talking about their deceased loved ones.

I didn't think the author wrote as well as he could have either. From one chapter to another there were so many open ended ideas and questions, and in the end nothing was resolved. For example, the author met up with an old girlfriend, Ellie, and at the end of the book, in his last meeting with her he sees that she looks tired and different, but he doesn't question her about her appearance, so why did he bring it up? He talks a lot about his infidelities and self harm, but it all seems to be about him, not the story he is telling about the

victims of the killer. He leads the reader into a circular thought pattern, and nothing is resolved, or changed by his telling of this story.

I wish this had been more cohesive, and contained more information about the victims, as it seemed to focus on the pedophilia of the suspects and others who might have been involved in the coverup of the pedophile ring.

This was not a great, or even a good book, it was too hard to read and left the author with nothing to look into or wonder about as it is a case which will most likely never be solved. So what was the purpose of writing this book?

Videoclimber(AKA)MTsLilSis says

This is really hard for me to review. There are a lot of suggestions for who the killer or killers was or were, but no definitive answer. I found some of the book confusing with the repetitive forays into the author's childhood and more unanswered questions. I am still confused even after finishing. Not one of my favorite true crime reads.

*Thank you to NetGalley, the author, and the publisher for allowing me to read an advanced copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Beth says

This was such a tough book to read. One of the victims, Tim King, was a friend and classmate, and his kidnapping and ultimate murder has haunted me for all of these years. I have followed this case since the internet made info accessible. This book, however, revealed a lot I did not know...all of it just horrifying. The author's story interspersed is also tough to read...The whole thing was intense! It's well-written though, and I recommend it...just be prepared.

Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says

4 chilling stars to The Kill Jar! ?? ?? ?? ??

A serial killer in the Detroit, Michigan area abducted and murdered four children in 1976 and 1977. The author was six-years-old when the murders occurred, and someone dressed as a security guard attempted to abduct him during that same timeframe. After, J. Reuben Appleman says he became obsessed with the Oakland County Murders.

The narrative reviews the available evidence in true crime fashion, and these sections were well-written and engaging, though of course, extremely difficult to read due to the content.

The abductions stopped without rhyme or reason, and the task force shut down without an arrest.

The author has a history with violence, and he details his past and how he was shaped by the early events in

his life, including the attempted abduction by a possible serial killer. The author connects the crime to his own thoughts as he grew up and relays his own opinions. I found this an interesting added layer of honesty, but I also could see how it might be distracting, especially if you are looking for a straight-up true crime book.

My favorite aspects of *The Kill Jar* were the investigations into the murders. The details were laid out in an easy-to-follow format, and the author clearly had performed extensive research. Appelman covers the corruption and possible scandal and illustrates why these murders have proven difficult to solve.

While I am not sure the true crime genre is one I will visit regularly, *The Kill Jar* held me captive. I wished for an outcome (i.e., some kind of answers) for these families throughout reading, and I will continue to wish that for them now knowing the cases are still unsolved.

Thank you to Gallery Books for the complimentary ARC. All opinions are my own. *The Kill Jar* will be released on August 14, 2018.

My reviews can also be found on my blog: www.jennifertarheelreader.com

Valerity (Val) says

Having grown up in Oakland County, Michigan I first became interested in these murders after reading about them in other books. I was very eager to read this book which promised the results of the author's ten-year investigation of buried leads and police cover-ups of evidence, con-men, child porn rings, and high-level corruption. It certainly delivered on that and on being also part memoir, as the author J. Reuben Appelman also grew up in Michigan, in the Detroit area and was intimately familiar with the areas he discusses in the book. He still has family there and made efforts to reconnect with them as he did his work on the case.

This book has a ton of great information about the cases, about the suspects, and about new suspects never heard of and what's happened in the intervening years. Appelman connects the dots and lets you decide based on some rather shocking details. This is a must-read for anyone with an interest in the Oakland County Child Murders case of 1976 and 1977 or true crime fans. An advance digital copy was provided by NetGalley and author J. Reuben Appelman for my unbiased review.

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My Bookzone blog on Wordpress: <https://wordpress.com/post/bookblog20...>
