



Richie

Thomas Thompson

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George Diener was an ordinary man with old-fashioned values and simple dreams for his family. Richie Diener was an ordinary teenager until he became involved with drugs. What went wrong? What led to the final confrontation that ended in murder? A story of the American dream turned into a nightmare.

Richie Details

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From Reader Review Richie for online ebook

Jill Meyer says

One of the benefits of the e-book publishing boom is the reissuing of old, out-of-print books. Several books by the late author Thomas Thompson have been published in e-form and I just reread two of his classics, "Richie", and "Blood and Money". I had read both books when they were originally published in the 1970's and I found they have both stood the test of time. I'm going to review them together; both are true crime books but they differ in scope. One, "Richie", is a very personal story of one family, which is torn apart by one son's use of drugs and his death at the hand of his father in a final horrific scene. The other, "Blood and Money", is a sprawling tale, set in Houston, and is the story of many people who are touched by a woman's death and the murder of her husband a couple of years later.

"Richie: A Father, His Son, and the Ultimate American Tragedy", is the story of a suburban Long Island family, caught up in the horrors of drug addiction and ends with the murder of the son by his father. Thompson examines the lives of the Diener family - George and Carol and their sons Richie and Russell - and the society in which they lived. George and Carol Diener had met and married after WW2 and took their places in the post-war boom. They moved from crowded New York City to the more pastoral area on Long Island, where George bonded with his older son, Richie, in shared interests. That closeness was torn apart when Richie moved into adolescence and discovered drugs. His use of all sorts of drugs - but mostly "downers" - made the life in the Diener family close to unbearable. George and Carol looked for help in the schools and the court system of Nassau Country. This was in the late 1960's and early 1970's, when the drug epidemic was beginning and they received no guidance.

What do parents do when their children become strangers? When the purchase and consumption of drugs become the kid's primary activity? When their child hangs around other drug users? George and Carol Diener responded by ratcheting up measures meant to curtail Richie's drug use. Richie was caught up in his spiraling drug use and committing crimes while on drugs. The parents bemoaned the society where they saw drug using all around them and little help offered. But did George mean to kill his son when he was threatened by Richie that evening on the basement stairs? He shot to kill, and kill he did. He was later taken before a grand jury which declined to charge him with any crime.

Thomas Thompson's look at the Diener family is intensely personal. He doesn't make excuses for either father or son, but rather let's the reader try to draw his own conclusion. It's a masterfully written book.

Ro says

One of the best books I've ever read. Kept me on the straight and narrow.

Jean says

Truly an American Tragedy

Richie is another outstanding, classic true crime book from Thomas Thompson. This one breaks my heart.

George, Richie's father, was born a few years after my parents. I was in college when Richie entered high school. Maybe "there, but for the grace of God," contributes to my reaction to this book. Thompson did an excellent job. It reads like a novel. The parents became like someone in my neighborhood. Their tragedy is very real, without any melodrama.

Joanne Cinquemani says

This is one of the most difficult book reviews I've written as a librarian. I grew up in the same town has Richard (Richie) Diener. I first met him in our 3rd grade class. I was one of his classmates who called him "carrot top" due to his bright red hair. It wasn't taunting or teasing from me, back then he was just a nice, quiet boy in my class with red hair. I seemed to have lost track of him once we all entered Woodland Jr. H.S. Forty-two years after our graduation from EMHS '72, I finally read the book. I feel there were many broad generalizations made about life in East Meadow, the families, and students who attended the high school with Richie. I'm thankful that I grew up unaware of the underlying drug culture that was occurring during that time, at least according to the author. Clearly the dynamics leading up to that eventful day in February of 1972 were sent in motion many years before. It's unfortunate that Richie, like so many others, fell through the cracks. There's a strong message here, that sadly, should still be heeded today.

Jason Barrantes Arce says

I read this book when I was a teenager (15 years old). So, this had a huge impact in my life and decisions that I took. I felt very close to Ritchie and his behavior, his insecurity and fears to explore the world and relate to others made me realize who I am and what path I want to follow. It's a interesting book to share our friends and try to help people in similar situations.

Wanda Keith says

Heartbreaking story of a middle class family living a simple life until their oldest son becomes addicted to drugs. The story was written in 1972 but could easily be written today. Unfortunately, this is a true story being lived out in millions of homes. It is interesting to see what the drugs of choice were during that era and how schools and law enforcement dealt with them.

Colin Grieve says

I loved this book when I was in my early teens, maybe for the wrong reasons.

Geoffrey says

Thomas Thompson absolutely crushes it as an author. I wish this guy wrote 50 books. This story is tragic but a must read if you are a fan of true crime.

Ruth Ann says

The ultimate tragedy is Richie's drug abuse/addiction of barbiturates during the 1970's coupled with the inability of his family to find the help they needed to get Richie into treatment earlier into his addiction. Richie's story involves the breakdown of the family as he became more dangerous to himself and others. Thomas Thompson presents an accurate picture of street drug availability during this period, the crossroads common with many loved ones in these situations, and the frustration of having insidious drug use within our communities coupled with the inability to effectively help the addict.

Barbies have fallen out of favor as either treatment or abuse drugs. But, there was a huge shift to pain prescriptions that helped to create the current drug addiction epidemic. We have also learned more about what happens to the brain when a person takes drugs and the long term effects in other brain chemicals and circuits. This still does not make it easy to understand why some people become addicted to drugs while others do not.

True story with a tragic ending.

Kelly says

This author is known for writing stories based on true-to-life incidents. I was surprised to learn that he also wrote "Serpentine" which I read years ago and truly enjoyed (the tale of an international criminal ~ very interesting). But I digress.

As noted in the title, this is the sad saga of Richie and his father, and the drugs that came between them. I am afraid this is redundant in our society. The communication breakdown between the son and the parents comes to a regrettable and unacceptable conclusion.

As in "We Need to Talk About Kevin", the parents are completely helpless against whatever demons are in this boy's head. There is no blame here, but there is the life-long burden of guilt and shame that can never be erased.

♥ Marlene♥ says

How good. How well written. Thomas Thompson is one of my favourite authors. He was a nonfiction writer who managed to write non fiction as if it were novels. He was so good at making the reader connect with the characters in his books and make them want to know what happened. Make them relate.

My first book I read written by him which was in 2007 and it was Blood and Money. My review alas of that book is not very detailed plus very short. The only interesting thing I wrote is that quote" his writing is so good. The author really lures you into the story"end of quote.

What I think I should do is re read that first book. I now wonder why I gave it 4 stars. Perhaps it was long.

Then I read Serpentine in the end of 2013 and that was when I fell in love with the author's writing. How I loved that book. Definitely a 5 star book!

So then I began searching for other books he had written. I discovered the author passed away in the eighties but there were more books so I added them to my wish list.

Then a few months ago I bought 2 of his books. This one and Celebrity which the latter I still have to read. (yay)

Okay I am going to add spoiler tags but before I do. Try to get your hands on a copy but also try not to know what this book is about!

Better only read this spoiler if you have already read this book

(view spoiler)

Koren says

This is an oldie but a goodie. It's the story of a family that is torn apart by the drug addiction of the son. It was written in the 70's when times were different and there wasn't as much knowledge and resources as there are today. I was sad that the story ended the way it did but I won't give the ending away.

Fishface says

Impossible to put down. The author draws you right into the lives of this utterly ordinary family and shows you what drugs did to their household. This brought back grim memories of my own teen years which were right behind Richie's chronologically, but it seems especially unfair that this family did absolutely nothing to bring disaster on themselves -- the household was solid, kids weren't neglected, the school system was good and they didn't even live in a scary neighborhood. It shows what can happen.

Jessy Tallent says

Kinda sad this is just the 1973 book republished with out any updates or epilogues. I thought it was more to the story.

Laurie says

I read this in the mid-70's when I was around 14 or 15 years old. I recall it had a devastating effect on me at the time and that's why I have given this a 5 star rating. I think recalling something I read 36 years ago is reason enough for 5 stars!

I just found the list I made of books I read in 1974 and I had already read this one twice at that time.
