

APL Volumes

Season 3, Episode 6: PERPS ON THE PAGE

This episode was transcribed by APL volunteer Martha Ladyman.

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

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Hello, fellow lit lovers, and welcome to Season Three of APL Volumes, coming to you from the very heart of downtown Austin, your Central Library. I'm your host, Genn Mehalik, avid reader and admin senior for the Customer Access Division of APL. This season we are turning the pages to explore the intriguing connections between books and the lives of their authors. Each episode will have a unique theme and guest. All of our guests are fellow staff members, brilliant, passionate folks that I am so lucky to work with. So I'm very excited to hear their hot takes. Whether you are a dedicated bibliophile or just looking to add a new chapter to your podcast playlist, you can go to bed at night knowing APL Volumes, Season Three, was made just for you.

This episode is all about true crime. My guest today is the Julie Brown, who used to work here at the Central Library, where we called her Downtown Julie Brown. But since changing locations, Uptown Julie Brown just hasn't stuck.

Julie and I are both true crime aficionados so she's the perfect guest for this episode.

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GENN: OK, Well, I'm excited to hear your story.

JULIE: Thanks for having me, Genn. My name is Julie Brown. I am the manager at Old Quarry, and I'm also one of the moderators of the true crime Book Club, so I am very excited to talk to you about true crime and to tell you a story.

GENN: I know. I remember when I started working at Central and I would ask random people, like Betsey, for instance, and I was just like, "Do you know of any good podcasts?" because I had just ended one that I really loved called *Your Own Backyard*. I think I told you about at some point. But everybody was like, "You should ask Julie. You should ask Julie." And I was, "OK, let me find this person."

And I did. And I think you recommended something and I listened to it. But at this point I've heard so many that I don't remember what it was.

JULIE: They all run together after a while.

GENN: Yeah.

JULIE: That doesn't stop us from consuming them. Endlessly.

GENN: I know. I also kind of wanted to talk about that, how they say that it's more heavily consumed by women, true crime in general, and some stuff. And I was kind of like, why do we love true crime? And not just women. It did talk about that a lot. And then I kind of have some thoughts. But we can talk about that whenever.

JULIE: Yeah, we'll get into that. The story that I'm going to tell you, I think there is a lot to discuss in terms of the context that it happened in, the way that criminals were perceived, how social expectations may play into that.

So I want to do a disclaimer at the top, which is I will share the main source that I use at the end, because I don't want to give away too much. When you hear the title, you'll understand why.

So we are going to set the scene in a 1950s New Zealand. So we are starting with what initially seems like an unlikely friendship between Juliette Hulme and Pauline Rieper.

So Juliette came from a wealthy family. She was pretty, smart, well educated. But also many people found her arrogant and moody. Her father was an academic and her mother was known for being quite glamorous. They moved from England to New Zealand for her father's job.

And Pauline was not conventionally attractive. She came from a lower middle-class family. So at first glance maybe they didn't have a lot in common. But they met when they were both being kept inside during recess. So one of the main things that they bonded over was the fact that they had childhood illnesses that kind of left them fairly isolated emotionally and socially from their family and their peers.

Their friendship became quite intense, so much so that other students and faculty were kind of noticing it. And there are aspects of their relationship that I think would sound quite familiar to a lot of people, especially folks who identify as teenaged girls. The closeness. We share crushes on people. We're taking photos of each other. Writing stories together. So all of that is fairly recognizable to a lot of folks.

GENN: Especially if you are only allowed to be around that person during free time.

JULIE: Oh, yeah. For sure. I think it is pretty typical.

These two believed they were creative geniuses. They had a pretty elaborate fantasy world that was sort of populated by people they called the saints. Some of them were popular actors of the times and singers. And so they would travel with Juliette's family fairly often. I think it was over an Easter holiday they went on vacation.

And they were not getting a lot of sleep. They were kind of wandering about the beach at night. I don't know how you do on very little sleep, but I don't do so great.

So as the sun rose one morning Pauline writes in her diary how they believe that they had discovered a fourth world.

GENN: Whoa.

JULIE: Yes.

GENN: I wonder if they were doing some recreational hallucinogens or something.

JULIE: You know, I don't think they were. I think that only they could appreciate this because they had something special going on in their brains. And it goes back to the genius thing.

So at a certain point Pauline's parents were sort of concerned about how attached they had become to each other. But Juliette's parents kind of seemed to encourage it. From everything that I've read her parents were maybe not the best. Very self-involved. I don't think they could fulfil her emotional needs.

Like Pauline would stay with them for a weekend. And when she would go back to her family, Juliette would suddenly fall ill and stay in bed for a day or two and just kind of make constant demands on her mother. And so it's a little sad, because it feels a little bit like, "This kid will..."

GENN: Yeah, you're like "Get that girl over here so we don't have to give her so much attention."

JULIE: Exactly. So at a certain point her father has to resign from his job at the university and he's planning to move back to England. Meanwhile her mother's affair has been discovered and so her parents are also getting divorced. So it's a lot of upheaval at one time. Her father's looking for a new job and her parents think, "Hey, let's send Juliette to South Africa to live with an aunt temporarily while we sort of get settled."

And Juliette really wanted Pauline to be able to come with her. And of course Pauline's parents are like, "No. Our child can't move to South Africa."

By this time their bond was so tight that even Juliette's mother was concerned. And what I would consider a wildly inappropriate turn, her mother had Pauline evaluated by a psychiatrist to see if Pauline was a lesbian. Again, not your child. Not appropriate. And the doctor, I don't think this would happen now, I hope it wouldn't happen now, the doctor just said that Pauline was strange. Which I don't believe is a medical term. She had a homosexual attachment to Juliette but he expected it to fizzle out.

GENN: So wait. Juliette's mom had the other girl evaluated but like she was encouraging their relationship the whole time. And when they were going to kind of move their daughter they thought, that's when she....?

JULIE: That's when I think it was, oh, maybe the fact that they still want to be together, this is ...

GENN: It's like too much?

JULIE: It's like a warning sign of some kind. So the possibility that Juliette and Pauline's relationship had a sexual element has been subject to tons of speculation and frankly sensationalization in the decades since this happened. To me, whatever the "truth" is about their relationship is far less interesting than the larger cultural obsession and what that says about society more generally. Certainly at the time, but even now.

At any rate, they were not happy about this imminent separation and so they devised a plan. They essentially believed that Pauline's parents were the ones standing in the way of them being together. And so the plan was they were going to go on a walk in a park with Pauline's mother. They had half a brick in a stocking. And when they were like, "What's that on the ground?" She goes to look, and bam!

They hit her several times with the stocking, and they push her body down a hill.

And then they run down to a kiosk in the park and they are, "Oh my god, my mother fell." You know.

So they call the cops and right away the cops are like, "This was not an accident." Because the mother had a lot of defensive wounds. It was clear the body had been moved.

GENN: She was dead, though?

JULIE: She was dead.

GENN: Wow. They really were like, how old were they?

JULIE: Fifteen. Yeah. And they had blood on their coats. So that's a little

Initially they were allowed to go home. And they questioned the girls separately. Juliette denied any involvement. And the police initially believed her. So by the time they start talking to Pauline, Pauline has figured out that Juliette has essentially thrown her under the bus. But she still covered for her anyway, which means that Pauline was the only one who got arrested.

But once the police read Pauline's diary, they realize that these two were in it together. And Juliette also gets arrested.

So during the trial the lawyers decide to plead not guilty by reason of insanity. So again we have another psychiatric evaluation. So the doctor interviews and evaluates both of these girls. He says neither of them are very remorseful. Both were very arrogant. He believed they were suffering from paranoia brought on by folie à deux or a shared psychosis.

GENN: Whoa. Shared psychosis. Don't think I've heard of that.

JULIE: Shared psychosis. Yeah, we actually read another graphic novel called *Maids* last December. It might have been one of the first cases where that defense was used. Where basically two people whip each other into a frenzy and they can't tell what's real anymore.

Yeah. And so he thought they could not determine right from wrong. So therefore they shouldn't be found guilty.

But they were both found guilty. They were sent to prison. They were separated from each other. They were not allowed to write each other or having any contact. After serving five and a half years they were both released. They didn't make any public announcement. They were trying to make these people be able to start their lives quietly. At this point they are about twenty, twenty-one years old.

The parole board concluded that neither girl would have committed the crime on their own. So again, kind of buying into this idea of a shared psychosis.

So after they get released from prison they both change their names and they both eventually left New Zealand. Pauline changed her name to Hillary Nathan. She had become a really devout Catholic in prison. At one point she was thinking about joining a convent. And she went to library school.

But she later moved to England and she ran a children's writing school. She never spoke to the press about it. Her older sister made a statement in 1996 saying that Pauline deeply regretted the murder.

Meanwhile Juliette moved to LA. She had a couple of different jobs. She worked as a flight attendant. She worked as an underwriter for an insurance company. And she converted to Mormonism. And eventually she became a writer under her new name, Ann Perry.

So APL has a ton of her books in the collection. She is primarily known for historical murder mysteries and detective fiction. She has written some Christmas novels.

GENN: That's hilarious.

JULIE: Yeah. So this case is very unusual to me because it has not one but two female murderers. And I think that each represents a certain archetype that we see play out again and again when it comes to women criminals. You have the beautiful femme fatale type who is sort of like smart, manipulative, sophisticated, and very dangerous in a way. And the less attractive one, who is also portrayed as less intelligent and poor and less threatening. The class element. The rich girl is originally believed to be innocent.

And then we have the rumored sexual component, which pathologizes queerness, of course, in any kind of 'aberrant behavior' for teenaged girls. And that could be having any kind of sexual impulse. It could be any rebellion, any kind of independent thinking, any failure to conform. That's such a broad category.

So, you know, the way that their behavior leading up to the crime would have been interpreted by their parents and mental health professionals is certainly not the way that we would interpret it now. And keep in mind what those expectations were in 1950s New Zealand. It's just a very different world.

I also think it's fascinating that Ann Perry gained fame and fortune writing murder mysteries.

So her identity was not discovered until 1994 when the film *Heavenly Creatures* came out, because that was a dramatization of the murder and their relationship. So she and Pauline effectively got outed by the media. But even after that she remained a popular author who published up until she died in 2023.

So for me that's a lot of interesting questions about what does it mean for a convicted murderer to later become extremely wealthy writing murder mysteries?

GENN: And did she get more attention after people found out?

JULIE: She was already quite popular. I did read an article about her that I think was in *The Guardian*, where she said she was really surprised that more people, she didn't lose any friends. It was almost like there were no consequences beyond the intense media attention.

And so, people didn't know that she was a murderer when she became a popular author. But once that came out it was like she continued to profit off that to an extent, I imagine. Who do we decide is worth forgiving? How do gender and race play into that? How does class play into that?

Yeah, there's a lot to unpack.

GENN: Yeah, I like that last question. It's really interesting to me. Like who is worth forgiving, and did Pauline, did she get to live a quiet life?

JULIE: Yeah. She lived a totally quiet life. So...

GENN: Is she still alive?

JULIE: I actually am not sure.

GENN: Because I noticed you were talking about her in the past tense and I was like, ooh.

JULIE: You know, that's a good question. I wish I could remember that. I don't.

GENN: That's OK.

JULIE: Yeah, she was completely under the radar.

GENN: And we really don't know what happened, right? At the moment? It could have been both of them. It could have been more than one.

JULIE: It sounds like, the way it was portrayed was that they both hit her. Pauline's diaries, well, here's another thing, that Juliette's diaries were burned by her mother after she was arrested. Again, it's like they were thinking about their reputation and they are thinking about all these different things. Apparently her mother was hoping that her daughter would be declared insane because she would rather be known for having a crazy daughter than a daughter who didn't listen.

Which again is problematic on a number of different levels.

GENN: Or she was probably also worried about the lesbian aspect.

JULIE: Sure. Meanwhile she's having an affair basically under her husband's nose. So there's a lot of hypocrisy, a lot of trying to save face.

GENN: Well, her mom is almost like sending the message of you can do whatever, but you have to be good at covering it up. You have to be smart.

JULIE: Exactly.

GENN: And honestly, the fact that she burned her journals that soon is probably part of the reason why they weren't so many consequences even like later. Even if everything happened the same where she went to jail for five years and all that and changed her name and later the movie came out. If there was this documentation from her mind that showed a sinister aspect, I think it would have affected.

JULIE: Oh, yeah. People would have wanted to read that for sure. The things in Pauline's diary, some of it was kind of disturbing and some of it was just the sort of stuff that teenagers say, like "I wish my mom was dead." It's like OK, well, it's not a great thing to say. But also if you are like a super moody teen...

GENN: Yeah. Having a journal is risky for anyone, really, because people, sometimes I think, I think this is part of why true crime is interesting to me. I don't know. Sometimes I feel like everyone is capable of the same things. It's like circumstance, a lot of circumstance, granted. Like a really bad hand for a really long time that can really wear people down.

JULIE: Absolutely.

GENN: And not everyone. Some people have obviously mental health issues or some other reasons. But I don't know. I am just like, you can see how that person could have lived like a very normal life had they not met this other person. And just kind of hyped each other up, apparently.

JULIE: Exactly. And like I said, they were both sick, they were both fairly isolated. And I mean with Juliette her parents sent her away when she was really young because she was born in England during World War II and they were having the blitz. There were actual bombings coming in.

So even if you don't like remember that, it's like that's a trauma. She gets sent away from her parents when she's like two years old. And her parents continue to emotionally neglect her. So she's primed to latch on to somebody who is showing any interest.

And for Pauline, for this person who is rich and beautiful and sophisticated paying attention to her when she's kind of embarrassed by her own familial circumstances, it really is kind of a perfect storm.

GENN: Something that I noticed was that they saw Pauline's parents as the problem or the block. But like really Juliette's parents were also at that point not really like going to be, they weren't into it anymore. They were getting the ones evaluated so obviously they were kind of like, "Y'all need to chill out and separate."

JULIE: Yeah. And again, I think some of it does come back to class. Because her parents were sort of absent, and they had this beautiful house, it was sort of like, "We're taking you on these trips. We're the fun ones." Kind of. "We're not the problem."

Whereas her parents were trying, setting some boundaries and so. You think when you are that age it's pretty easy to be like "Oh, you can't tell me what to do."

GENN: They were very entitled. They felt like little grownups, it seems. They wanted to do what they wanted to do. And they didn't feel like, a neglectful parent isn't really standing in your way, but a good, maybe, parent who doesn't want you to leave the country is.

JULIE: Yes. And if you believe that you are a genius, if you believe that you and this other person are the only two people who can access this other world, then how dare these people tell you what to do. How dare you stop me from what I want to do?

GENN: Yeah. I thought that was really interesting because I immediately when I hear about that kind of thing, this person is a self-proclaimed genius, I think of Kanye because he's the most open case of that. He says it publicly and all that. And he's known to be bipolar. And bipolar, there's two types but one of them has like hallucinations and psychosis. So when you talked about them being on the beach. That was another thing in the whole defense. What was it called again?

JULIE: Shared psychosis.

GENN: Yeah. Can you share a psychosis? I get what they are saying, but it is like, is it possible that both of them had bipolar type two or whatever it is, and then they just like entered this fourth dimension together.

JULIE: Well, yeah, again, and I think it is like certainly the mental health diagnosis and therapeutic process was like very primitive, compared to what we understand now.

I mean, this is a period where, here's my nonreal example. On *Mad Men* when Betty is going to a shrink and then her shrink is calling Don afterwards and reporting everything she told him in confidence. The whole thing where women are not allowed to have inner lives, not allowed to have secrets, not allowed to, especially if you are a child, again, behavior that we would consider fairly normal, being rebellious, having a really close friendship, having sexual impulses. Most of that stuff is typical and very harmless, but I think at the time it really was pathologized to a level that probably was unnecessary.

GENN: Probably drove it to continue more.

JULIE: Yeah. And then again, they did murder someone. Let me be clear about that.

GENN: I know, I know, that's what I was thinking. Like, well, none of this stuff might have been that bad if they hadn't done that.

JULIE: Yeah, if they hadn't done that, I would say, "Oh, those poor girls." And you are like, oh, guys, come on.

GENN: Wow. Very interesting.

JULIE: Yeah. So the main source that I used was a book that we read for the true crime book club a few years ago. It was originally published under the title *So Brilliantly Clever*, which is a line from Pauline's diary describing the two of them. But a later edition was published as *Ann Perry and the Murder of the Century*. Which is why I didn't want to say it at the top.

It's by Peter Graham. We have it in print, eBook, via Libby and Hoopla at the library. So if anyone wants to read it, I do recommend it. It's interesting. Especially if you've seen the movie. It's interesting to understand how the movie is the same, how it's different, what it was like when the movie came out. And this whole thing that you kept successfully under wraps for, I guess like thirty-five years? It's blown up?

GENN: Did you also see the movie?

JULIE: Actually, I have not seen the movie yet.

GENN: Because I wonder if the movie is better to see first or second? Sometimes I think the movie is better to see first.

JULIE: Yes. Because it's almost never as good as the book.

GENN: And then you think the book is so much better. But if you are like the movie is terrible, then....

JULIE: Then you're not going to read the book. Right. That's a real chicken or egg question.

GENN: One for librarians.

JULIE: True.

GENN: OK, I have a story for you too. So originally I wanted to, the only thing I knew about your story was that it was going to be a woman as the center of the story. And originally I wanted to also choose a woman because men are more often the criminals in the true crime genre. And also, I don't know, we just talk about men a lot in society. So I wanted to go for something different.

And then, you know, I did a lot of looking, and I kind of wanted to do something that was like a little bit recent. Just to juxtapose yours. I was trying to go for opposites here.

So then I found a story that was part memoir and part true crime, but not memoir of the killer. So I'll explain more. The killer is a man, but the memoir writer is a woman. So that's interesting kind of. I'm really into memoirs.

JULIE: I love memoirs.

GENN: OK, so my story is also, the setting would be 1960s. Cape Cod. Like Provincetown. The very tip of ...

JULIE: I already love it.

GENN: You do? Apparently that area during that time was very San Francisco, hippy, and that kind of has to do with why these crimes weren't really discovered so soon? Because women were like going missing, but people were kind of They ran away. Hitchhiked across the country and they'll come back, you know? So that's part of that.

But the book starts with the main character. Her name is Liza. She's the writer. She's having dreams. So this is like her current life at the time she's writing this. She's having like nightmares, basically, almost every night, and waking up sweating. They are all different, but they are all like somebody chasing her, and she's like, she knows that if this person gets her, she's done for. But she never sees the face. And it always ends right before she sees the face. She wakes up startled.

JULIE: Classic.

GENN: Yeah, it's like the beginning of a good movie.

And then one day she actually sees the face in the dream without waking up, and it's her childhood babysitter.

JULIE: OK, I know the very broad strokes of this story. But I don't know, so I'm excited to learn more about this. I remember when the book came out.

GENN: Yeah. I hadn't heard about it at all. But it's her babysitter that she had as a child. I think maybe this drew me to this, but she spent like all her summers on Cape Cod. And I also spent all my summers, not on Cape Cod, but somewhere in Florida.

And it's just like when your parent takes you somewhere for every single summer. And it's like a second life that you have. So I experienced that. And that was her experience.

And it was also a different time, sort of like you were talking about. Her mom was a single mom, and her dad was absent, and she definitely suffered feelings about that. And that was definitely ignored. Her mom never asked her about her feelings. They didn't talk about that.

Also her mom was sort of neglectful, like she was a single mom. It was kind of like rare for people, for women to get divorced back then. And she was like always dating. She was always leaving, she had two daughters, Liza and her sister, they were seven and five, and she left them with pretty much anyone. It was like a family joke that she would see, like meet somebody in the grocery aisle and be like, "What are you doing later? Can you watch my kids?"

That literally happened all the time.

JULIE: Before people understood the concept of stranger danger.

GENN: Right.

So Tony is the guy, the killer. Tony Costa is his name. The way that they met him is like during these summers her mom had a best friend who was like Liza's auntie. And she had a hotel, like an inn, called The Royal Coachman. So they would basically stay there. And her mom would work as a housekeeper in the inn. That's how they got free room and board.

But it was like the two girls and their mom, they had like one tiny room. But her mom was like largely absent because she was always on dates with different people.

I don't know. She sounds very similar to the mom in the Ann Perry story. Like she's into luxury. She doesn't have a lot of money but she gets men to pay for a lot of things. And she doesn't want to come off as a single mom with two kids so she just leaves them with people.

And it's kind of like they are not there. And during the day she's working. And so one of the people who she gets to watch her kids is Tony. And he's like a handyman at the inn. But he's also like a guy who has a million jobs around Cape Cod, all around. He lives in this town right by Provincetown, which they call Ptown. That's what the locals call it. And it's called Truro.

And that's eventually where they find a lot of the victims. There was like a cemetery there. Behind the cemetery is like a wooded area. And he like found a little road into there. He would hang out there. He was growing marijuana back there.

He basically had this whole other life. He had this secret patch in the woods and he would take girls there. For a long time, even when he got caught, I don't think anybody suspected him. Which I find so interesting because, it's like weird reading the book because you can see two sides of him. And I'm like, "Wait, you just said he was like this way, confident, arrogant, he thinks he's so cunning. He thinks he's smarter than the cops." Those are all like really common traits.

But there is like this whole other part of him where he is like ... For instance, Liza sees him as a very safe person. Which I think is really interesting. She sees her mom as like, her mom is kind of abusive to her, actually. Mostly neglectful but there is some abuse. And it's kind of like her sister gets treated, her little sister gets treated really well by her mom, but she's like the unwanted. There is like physical stuff sometimes. But it doesn't go into a lot of that. But you can see how Liza, she doesn't have her dad. She craves an adult to give her attention.

And then this guy Tony, he's actually kind of handsome. I don't know why that happens so often. Or maybe they just focus on it in the media. I don't know. I actually think in the pictures, there's not a lot of them, but he kind of looks like Geraldo Rivera but like really young.

JULIE: Does he have a moustache?

GENN: Yes, he does. That's funny. I don't know if a lot of people will know who that is. But I knew you would.

JULIE: Of course. Of course I know who Geraldo is.

GENN: Let's see. I'm not even looking at my notes. Which I probably should be because I made them for a reason.

So it starts with a dream. And after the dream, when she sees Tony's face, she goes to her mom, and she's like, just chatting with her, and she's like, "What do you remember about Tony?" And her mom says, like she makes a face, and Liza is like, "What?" Like she really has to pull it out of her.

But her mom, they still have a really complicated relationship. They always have. Her mom is very flippant and just not a person who talks about feelings. She doesn't ever talk about anything in depth, I don't think.

And then she says, "Well, I remember that he turned out to be a serial killer."

And like, this is all in the beginning of the book, and she's like, "Tony? Our Tony?" Like that's what she says. And she's like, "What? He didn't kill you, did he?" That was her mom's response. That's how she feels about it still to this day.

And so Liza, and this is part memoir, so she talks about how she told her mom, "You probably don't want to read my book because I'm very honest." And she's kind of like, "This is what's difficult about you as a mom. This is your reaction. You still can't apologize."

I don't know. There's just a lot of things that she feels like she deserves an apology for. And her mom was just like, "Well, obviously if I knew he was a killer, I wouldn't have left you with him." And that's all that matters to her.

JULIE: Which is like, yes, that is objectively true. But also it seems like, if I were in her position, I would have a lot of guilt. Because I would just think about the fact, and again that was the time, right? I mean, people weren't as concerned about rando's coming in and dealing with their kids. So it was not like it was just her, she was the only one who did that ever.

But also still it's like, that's your kid. I imagine there would be some element of, "Oh my god, I'm so glad that nothing ever happened to you."

GENN: Exactly. But she can't even feel the good part of it, the relief, because she doesn't allow herself to face the possibility that could have happened. Which is kind of where Liza's ... you know, it's funny because she didn't know. Liza never.... Of course, when he got caught it blew up in the Cape, right? But they would go back to their life. And so I think the adults did know. But she was seven. She didn't know.

And she just remembers a little bit of hysteria around the island before going back home. And then after that every time they went back he just wasn't there. But that wasn't really like that weird, I guess, because he was kind of transient in general.

Another thing about him that is common is that he had a lot of young people around, like he needed attention. He needed validation. So where do you get that? Easily, from younger people.

Yeah, a lot of, all his victims were like young women. Not as young as Liza was, but it makes you, there are parts where you are like, this is definitely grooming. Like you wouldn't think that if you didn't know. But like he takes her and her sister everywhere in his truck. And it's like one of those trucks back then where it's just a bench seat.

JULIE: Right.

GENN: And it's him, and Liza's always next to him. He's always singing songs with her. He shares his cigarettes with her. And she's like seven, you know? And she thinks like she's cool, and he's a really cool guy, giving her all this attention. Almost like an innocent crush, you know?

There are so many interesting things in the book, you know? I'm not even going into how he got caught, things like that, which is a lot of arrogance on his part. And he also, I'm comparing to your book, but he kind of like blames everyone else, which are like people he makes up. He's like, "This thing is because of this guy Cory. You should ask Cory." And they never find somebody named Cory. It's a small island, you know?

And so they are like, "You're making this up." He never admits to any wrongdoing. Even though where they found two bodies, and there's like a lot of evidence, it's like unquestionable that it was him. They found like plenty more women there in the same spot, in the same way, like the way they were, you know? So obviously he had more victims. But they just convicted him of two murders because they had like really solid evidence.

JULIE: How many do they estimate?

GENN: I think they estimate like eight. But they don't know because he did a lot of things where he drove, you know it was a hitchhiking time, so he drove a lot of girls. He would tell, he was married to, by the way, somebody who was fourteen. Which is so creepy. They got married when she was fourteen and he was like twenty or something.

But at this time I think he was like twenty-four already. So I don't know how old she was. He had three kids with her. And he would just say, "I'm going to take these girls to California." From like the east coast, you know? And she didn't have any choice in the matter. He was going to do what he wanted.

And then those girls would go disappear and would never be heard of again. But a lot of times they were just like transient people so no one was looking. You know?

And then the way he got caught was like, there were these two girls that were victims that were like, very straight laced, kind of like one of them was a teacher. She didn't show up for work on Monday. They were just going to the Cape for two days, for a weekend, and they ended up getting a room in that Royal Coachman, and he was also staying there because he was the handyman so he got a free room.

And I think through no fault of their own that something went wrong with the water in their place. And so the office woman, which was Tony's mom, had them use his room for like a shower and stuff like that.

It's so creepy when you think about it.

And then he asks them for a ride. There's like a post-it note where he is like, "Can I get a ride?" and he left it for them. They found that. And that's when they just never came back. So they found them and their car and everything.

He tried to drive their car and like keep it. He thought that he would be able to get away with that. I think that's like the craziest part.

Anyway, there are so many details. I recommend it. I liked it.

JULIE: That's interesting. I mean, I'm interested because I think that even now, today, there are people who would have a certain amount of suspicion of a man stepping into a nurturing role. Working in a daycare. Working as a babysitter.

It's interesting to me that, and a lot of it I guess is because the mother is sort of like, "Oh, I guess you'll do. I just need a body in there with my kids. I'm not leaving them alone."

But I guess it's really interesting because I can see how on the one hand a man being in that role would incite some kind of suspicion. But I can see how in another way it would almost be like, "Oh, isn't that nice?" You know what I mean?

GENN: Like I'm being unfair by thinking ...

JULIE: Yes, exactly. And being able to exploit that to a certain extent. And for her, for Liza, I imagine if her dad is completely out of the picture, that "Oh, you know, this could be a father figure, this could be something that I feel like I don't have."

GENN: And also his father died in World War II when he was like two or even younger. But he was like gone. Tony was born with his dad at war. So he never even got to know him. And so he had this like same absence and need, you know. And he had a complicated relationship with his mother. She was kind of like overbearing, which is the opposite of Liza's mom.

But both of them had complicated mother relationships and absent fathers, which is interesting. Because they were sort of like drawn to each other. Although Tony was kind of like around, and that's how he ended up being the babysitter. He was like always there. So the mom would be like going on a date and be like, "Can you watch them?"

Because he worked there and they were living there.

JULIE: And if his mother also works there ...

GENE: Exactly.

JULIE: I imagine that provides some sense of ...

GENE: Trust.

JULIE: Yeah.

GENE: That's totally true.

And then there are like parts of the book where they discuss where the mom might have known some of the stuff he was doing and covered for him. Not necessarily when the kids were, when she was like stay with them. It was later.

But there's one specific murder that they think she covered up for him. Which is definitely a complicated mother/son relationship. I think Tony was like all she had and she was very doting. "My son, Tony." She constantly talked about him to people. "He has such good manners."

He did come across like that. Even though he did all these creepy things, people liked him generally. They might have thought he was weird but they thought he was harmless. They really did. Everyone was shocked when he was caught, which is one of the reasons why true crime fascinates me. Because you always hear that in the news. Everywhere it's like, how can it be that person? From a neighbor or whatever.

And that's the part that always gets me. Like, really? There was like nothing that stood out to you?

JULIE: It's interesting. Again, it depends on the context of how they knew the person. It also depends on who that person is and what their relationships are. Have they had experiences where they just distrust people or have they had like a pretty charmed life and they are just not suspicious. Maybe they are just naïve and expect the best from people. It's like, you never did anything to me so ...

Yeah, a lot of the way that you are describing him, he sounds very typical in a lot of ways. Like kind of being a loner. A little bit weird. People think he's harmless, but he also has a level of arrogance. He thinks he's smarter than the police. Having an overbearing mother is like pretty common with serial killers.

Another book that we read for book club was called *When a Killer Calls*, which is by John Douglas, the *Mindhunter* guy. It was a similar thing where there was a guy who was abducting, first he abducts a younger girl. Progressively they get younger and younger because he needs to feel more power. But people that came out of the woodwork and acted as character witnesses for him, including some women who were like, "I felt safe around him."

And it really is fascinating as people have a completely different experience with somebody. Even with a profile with what you might think would be a victim.

GENN: Yeah, that's how Liza feels. And that's why she's like, "Our Tony?"

JULIE: Yeah. And you have to be able to sit with them, the cognitive dissonance of fond memories that you might have, and know that he's also capable of doing these terrible things. You weren't a victim.

GENN: And that is for me the interest that I have in true crime and I always had because I do see and think, you know, I see this like juxtaposition of how somebody can be so many things to so many people and honestly like how do we trust the systems that we build.

Because even in the justice system there are people who are like innocent in jail for decades before we find out. That's how *Serial*, the podcast, got so famous. I think that opened a lot of people's minds to like true crime and just so many things.

And then you know there are corrupt people who are on the good side. It's just like we make all these systems to bring justice but they are then also corrupt in so many ways. So really you can't trust anything. But you can't live your life not trusting anything. Right?

JULIE: It's a quandary. A conundrum.

GENN: Yeah. And that is why I think we are all so susceptible to anybody. I sometimes think, I don't know if you've ever thought this, but like with all these stories that I'm consuming on Netflix or books, I'm just like how many times have I been in the vicinity of somebody who is capable or done something? I don't know. Because I live my life like never thinking that. Obviously. So it blows my mind kind of.

JULIE: Yes. I could go on this forever. Thank you for having me and to tell my story.

If I can just do a quick plug for my club. It's a true crime book club. We do this the last Tuesday of the month from 6:30 to 7:30 Central time. You can either join us in person at the Menchaca Road branch or you can join us virtually. Go to the library website and you can find a link to register. We have a lot of fun. We like to talk about heavy topics but we do so with a healthy dose of humor. And we talk a lot about context. So if you like context, please join us.

GENN: Yeah. That sounds fun. So if you are virtual, how does that work? Do you have a projector with everyone's face?

JULIE: I'm on the virtual so I am unfortunately very aware that my face is on display on a large monitor in the room.

GENN: I guess you don't have to show your face either if you don't want to.

JULIE: I could just be a weird, I want to be one of those silhouettes from an *Unsolved Mysteries* interview, where I don't want my identity to be known. I could just appear as a silhouette in shadow.

GENN: That would be hilarious if everybody did that.

JULIE: Use one of those voice change things. I should do that next time.

GENN: Yeah. But other people can come virtually too.

JULIE: Yes.

GENN: And if you sign up, do you get a reminder?

JULIE: Yeah. We'll send an email with a reminder ice breaker question and a link to join virtually.

GENN: Cool. I kind of want to go.

JULIE: Please do.

GENN: I've always wanted to.

JULIE: I know. We keep talking about it.

GENN: Yeah, it's just kind of hard when you work at the library to stay for the fun parts. But I don't know why because the fun parts are the best parts, obviously.

JULIE: They are.

GENN: And every time I do one I never regret it.

JULIE: Please join us. We'd love to have you.

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GENN: Thanks for listening to this episode of APL Volumes, Season Three. An extra special thanks to my guest Julie Brown. Stop by the Old Quarry branch. Check out her true crime book club. And visit our website for our list of other book clubs. We've got mystery. We've got graphic novels. We even have book clubs for early readers.

APL Volumes is recorded and produced in the Central Library's Innovation Lab, a part of the APL Innovate Digital Maker Space. You too can use the Maker Space in all its glory, from software to hardware, all the best in AV, 3D modeling, graphic design, animation and more, is available to you. So come see us.

I want to give my many thanks to the APL innovate team for their help behind the scenes in this podcast. Thanks also to our editors and transcribers who are part of APL's fantastic volunteer team.

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And, of course, thanks to listeners like you for supporting your local public library.

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END TRANSCRIPT