



Seduced by Madness: The True Story of the Susan Polk Murder Case

Carol Pogash

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She was fifteen when she visited the therapist; still a teen when they had sex. She was twenty-five when she married him and forty-four when she killed him.

In October 2002, the quiet northern California town of Orinda was rocked by murder when Susan Polk, the mother of three teenage boys, was arrested for stabbing her husband and former therapist, Dr. Felix Polk, to death. The arrest and subsequent trial quickly became one of the most talked about murder cases in the country, as spectators and reporters learned the strange history behind this shocking killing.

Now in *Seduced by Madness*, Carol Pogash—the leading journalist working the case—has written the definitive account of the Polk family saga, offering a rich and textured re-creation of this disturbing and tragic American tale. Examining the decadent culture of California in the 1970s, Pogash looks at how, in this period of drugs and sexual exploration, a fifteen-year-old Susan found herself caught in the grasp of Felix, her therapist—who, like others in the mental health profession, fell for every passing trend in mental health therapy. Culled from years of careful research, Pogash reconstructs the vague beginnings of the couple's sexual relationship in the therapist's office, exploring how Felix's relaxed attitude toward therapy blinded him to the complex nature of Susan's mental state, and how their mutual obsession with each other sealed their fate.

With lyrical prose, Pogash skillfully traces the Polks' story—from their early yearnings for one another through their flawed marriage, which produced three highly intelligent but emotionally divided sons. Weaving a complex narrative of a family who lived in multimillion dollar homes but lingered in the shadow of dysfunction, Pogash reassembles their life in the years and months before Felix's death, intimately describing what led this soft-spoken wife to murder.

Three years after Felix's death, Susan Polk was tried for first degree murder, and here Pogash provides a first-hand account of the wild, media-circus trial in which Susan defended herself and cross-examined two of her sons. Illustrating how the prosecution and the court responded to Susan's volatile behavior, Pogash takes you inside the deliberation room and uncovers how jurors reached their surprising verdict.

Filled with the most complete case facts and interviews available, *Seduced by Madness* offers an unparalleled look at one of the most captivating murder cases in recent years.

Seduced by Madness: The True Story of the Susan Polk Murder Case Details

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Author : Carol Pogash

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CHRISTINE M says

Beyond Madness

Very well written and inclusive of the stunning facts of this woman's "devoid of reality" life, starting at a very young age. It begs one to ask why not plead insanity yet Ms. Pogash makes it clear in her writing why this was an impossibility. An extremely interesting read.

Susan Baker says

I enjoyed this book pretty much, but it did get tedious in places. Think it could have been cut by several thousand words. I felt like I'd sat through the trial and the perpetrator's diatribe by the time I reached the end.

Jean says

More than a true crime book, Seduced by Madness is a study of a decent into mental illness. I was fascinated by this. I'm also very sorry for all of those impacted by the murder. Hearty appreciation is due the jury, judge, DA, and author for enduring the trial.

Erika Nerdypants says

Interesting read. While I have to admit I didn't find Susan Polk to be a very likeable woman, I must also point out that she was victimized in many ways. The man she was convicted of stabbing 27 times was her husband whom she met and began a sexual relationship with as a 15 year old, when he was her therapist. He was a psychologist, and failed to notice that she was actively delusional throughout their entire marriage, and at times even encouraged her paranoia. When she did finally seek help, he would not allow her to tell how they had met, for fear of having his licence revoked. In which universe is it okay for a 40 year old therapist to enter into a sexual relationship with his 15 year old client? Why did the psychiatric community, many of whom knew, stand by? And what of her mother? Excuse me, if my daughter's therapist did this, I would be outraged! I'm not saying that Felix Polk was evil and deserved to die, but I do not find it surprising that their lives ended in such tragedy. One of the witnesses called during the trial said, "You live by the sword, you die by the sword", and that rang quite true for me here. Sadly, Susan Polk continued to deny her illness (very common for patients who suffer from paranoid delusions), and spends her time in prison, instead of getting the help she so desperately needs.

Lady ♥ Belleza says

This book had great promise but it just didn't grab me, it was way to detailed. I wanted to quit it but it was a train wreck happening and I just had to finish it. So I muddle through, but I didn't really love it.

notRahimeanymore says

This is an unusual true crime book (don't judge it by the cover or title!) in that it seems to have been written by a writer who was drawn into a case because it happened in her hometown, and not someone who bangs out melodramatic/sensational crime books one after the other. It is extremely well-researched and balanced, and well-written. The author does a great job of pulling you in to the case - it's lurid and voyeuristic... all true crime is, but in this case you start to feel bad for your interest in it because the impossible situation the children are in (also, grew up in) is depicted in such clear detail. It's a trainwreck, but it's so interesting.

Melanie Kutzen says

Interesting read... truth more interesting than fiction!

You can't make up the truth, although sometimes its very hard to believe. The account of the murder and trial of Felix Pope was fascinating.

Karen Cervantes says

Tragic Tale

Very well written story. Was happy Susan got what she deserved. Obviously, Felix was a messed up mind himself . Hope the boys do better with their lives than what they learned at home. Hoping she will never be released.

Jeanette Clark says

Physician heal thyself

I sympathize greatly with the child who was ripped away from his nanny during the terrible years of running from Hitler and his minions. He was a remarkable person. It seems he fell in love with someone who was toxic to him, and could not let go....and he worked hard on his career. As a therapist, he was popular, and had personal relationships with his patients- a no-no - but was done by some at that time. One thing I was struck by....his participation in the "Satan worship" accusations, which focused attention on his work. This book shows that he was a leader in getting the testimony of children, including their own son, traveling and working to prosecute these people who worked with children, daycare etc. I wonder, did he believe his wife's fantasies? Did he believe stories like (according to this book) children in daycare were being whisked about on planes to meet with devil worshippers? Once interest in "satanic " crimes waned, he, according to

the book, dropped that effort and moved on. If there was any apology for the horrific pain and destruction these ridiculous charges brought to innocent people and their families, this book didn't mention it. This is a well-written story about real people who struggled to get through the pitfalls of life, as we all do.

Natalie says

This book contains far too much tedious detail. It's basically a court transcript with very little insightful commentary. The author also spends several chapters condemning Felix and Susan for getting caught up in the cultural hysteria over satanic cults and then she does the EXACT same thing by assuring readers that a teenage boy is a murderer because he "knows the difference between mass murderers and serial killers."

Laura says

Look, this is a good book, but I wish the authors of these books and their editors would stop with the lurid, faux-*Ripley's Believe it or Not*, Piranhas-ripped-my-flesh sorts of titles. A Descent into Hell! Seduced by Madness! I mean, honestly. If this stuff continues, they should just cut to the chase and name them "Sex Sex Sex, and Then Someone Gets Killed."

Erin says

This is the first book I've read by Carol Pogash, and while she clearly conducted very thorough interviews of her subjects, there was far too much of the "didn't need to know" and not enough of the "want to know". As someone who is not familiar with the case of Susan Polk, I read a whole lot about Dr. Polk's reputation as a therapist (didn't need to know) and just a little on Mrs. Polk's mental instability (wanted to know). All-in-all this book eventually turned into a snoozefest and drove me to YouTube to find an old Dateline episode on the case.

Carla says

True Crime

This was one of THE BEST true crime books written, on a par with "Fatal Vision". From background, to the murder itself to the courtroom events of the trial to the follow-up, all involved were well written. Very few true crime stories have been so intricately laid out for the reader. It was fascinating from a law enforcement, legal, psychological and personal level. The portrait of Susan Polk was thoughtful and sympathetic, but the same is true of Felix Polk, who was the victim. The sons who were so profoundly affected were presented in heartbreakingly detail. Remarkable book for this genre.

Ronnie Cramer says

A delusional (and ultimately homicidal) young woman marries her much older therapist, who just happens to be an enabling weirdo. An interesting story, but reading about these people for almost 400 pages was exhausting. This came out a couple months after FINAL ANALYSIS, Catherine Crier's book about the same case.

John says

Just as much a great re-visit of the 'anything goes' ethos of the Bay Area in the 70's as it is an amazing true crime report. The murderer (Susan Polk) is a rather complex person - the quotes and actions from the courtroom are unbelievable - and the author lets Polk's own words, and those of her remaining family, stitch together a fascinating quilt of personality. A great read, recommended.
