

Cutting Edge

Linda Spalding's *Who Named The Knife* a candid and captivating memoir

On her way to the last day of Maryann Acker's murder trial in Hawaii, author Linda Spalding took her sick pup to the vet. The detour caused her to be five minutes late—and to be dismissed as a juror in what was one of the most shocking and high-profile double-murder cases of the late 1970s. Eighteen years later, Spalding was still convinced that her tardiness was the cause of Acker's imprisonment. This belief, though childish in its overwhelming egoism, sparked the creation of Spalding's latest novel, *Who Named The Knife*. It is a beautiful story that attempts to connect two distinct and separate lives, and bring a greater meaning to both.

Knife is the true story of the young Acker's trial (as remembered by Spalding) and her turbulent relationship with her husband and co-accused, William Acker. It is also a memoir of Spalding's own upbringing, a reflection on her life, a brief history of Hawaii's judicial system, a glimpse into California's women's penile system, a record of the two women's correspondence, and so on and so forth. Mostly though, it is Spalding's attempt to come to terms with the trial, and her involvement with Acker's fate.

At first, this full and slightly muddled premise feels like Spalding is trying to force her way into a story that isn't about her. If this is Acker's tale, why is Spalding trying to steal the spotlight? But Spalding's candid style and captivating language quickly pulls you deep into the story and you forget the bigger picture. Instead, you are lost in a poetic narrative that drifts from memory to fact to reflection and back again. She'll have you laughing along with the characters as if you were in her yard sharing a bottling of wine, and then turn around and hit you over the head with a comment that is so stark and honest it leaves you reeling. (I'll admit to being totally biased; Spalding could write a story about napkins and I wouldn't be able to put it down.)

And if her feelings towards Acker and the outcome of her trial are a little self indulgent, who can blame her? It's natural to try to find meaning in our pasts, to try to identify a pivotal moment to hang all of our mistakes or failures on. Re-examining the trial allowed Spalding to come to terms with other areas of her life that may have otherwise gone un-explored: her own upbringing, her relationship with her ailing mother, her struggle with depression, the early

death of her brother. Spalding's early involvement and later obsession with Acker gave the writer a path into her own life, and a safe method to explore her own triumphs and tragedies.

Who Named The Knife is really a personal memoir hiding behind Acker's story. Usually this sort of personal examination is a private journey. Spalding lays everything out with a naiveté and vulnerability that is both heartbreaking and inspiring.

—Sarah Gignac



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by Linda Spalding
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