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Pointing From the Grave: A True Story of Murder and DNA

Samantha Weinberg

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Samantha Weinberg : Pointing From the Grave: A True Story of Murder and DNA before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Pointing From the Grave: A True Story of Murder and DNA:

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Everything you ever wanted to know about DNABy L. WallsThis was a good story but the main topic was DNA. I skimmed through parts of the book to get to the story I wanted to read about.11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Truth Can Be Stranger Than FictionBy R PRIUSoI walked into this one knowing the outcome and essential facts. This case had been covered on either Unsolved Mysteries or one of the many forensic shows available through cable tv and I was immediately familiar with it.The pleasant surprise was the book's essential structure and Ms. Weinberg's writing style. This was a true story that in many ways was written like a great crime novel. Her cast of characters had well developed personalities. Her research was meticulous. She was able to build a level of suspense when her reader already knew where she was going. Weinberg managed to maintain a level of objectivity and even a level of sympathy for the perpetrator while managing to be mindful that this person wasn't innocent.As for my own reaction to this story, I became almost immediately hooked. There was almost a creepy aspect here as I had stayed at a hotel no more than 2 blocks from the scene of the crime last October. Her descriptions were so intensely visual that I almost felt like I was in Del Mar witnessing the crime scene first hand. I kept thinking that this all seemed so surreal. On a certain level I kept thinking the title could have been Murder In Paradise.This book was researched very thoroughly and many people who were involved closely to the victim,

perpetrator, or the investigations conducted were interviewed at length. Of course, as the title implies, the victim was indirectly responsible for nailing her murderer 15 years after the fact. While there is a certain irony in that, by no means is that the whole story. I read this book in slightly over 3 hours. Usually I don't speed read when I'm reading for pleasure, but it was so compelling I just couldn't wait to move forward. Be forewarned that I only review books that I really like or really detest. I absolutely loved this one. 13 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

A Murder Mystery and a History of DNA Research By Rob Hardy
Helena Greenwood was the head of marketing at a biotech company in southern California. She was present at the dawn of DNA testing in her industry, and when she heard about the newly patented method of DNA fingerprinting, she told the directors of her firm, "This DNA fingerprinting is going to be big. I think we should get into it." She was just the person to influence the firm in that direction, but in 1985 she was murdered in the front garden of her home. There was a suspect, but no witnesses, no fibers, no fingerprints, and the homicide department put the murder in the archive for more than a decade. Then a resourceful investigator found physical evidence in the file, and, ironically, used the same DNA testing on it that Greenwood had been promoting. The history of this case, and the results, are told in a fascinating detective story, *Pointing from the Grave: A True Story of Murder and DNA* (Miramax) by Samantha Weinberg. The book does not simply relate the facts of the case and profile the personalities involved, but it also gives a satisfying and useful history of DNA research and the effect of that research on forensic investigations. Weinberg intercuts her murder story with visits to labs and descriptions of the history of DNA going back to before Watson and Crick. One of Weinberg's digressions is to the Innocence Project, which has used DNA evidence to free wrongly convicted prisoners. The Project's efforts have shown that courts and juries are more badly flawed than anyone had previously suspected, and have increased the importance of DNA for fair legal investigation. But the useful digressions in *Pointing from the Grave* all hang on the story of Greenwood's murder, and that story is very well told indeed. In 1998, an investigator found Greenwood's fingernail clippings taken at the autopsy, and thought that perhaps under the fingernails would be skin samples for investigation. When Greenwood had been murdered, such evidence was useless; fifteen years later, it provided the basis for the arrest of a charming sociopath who at the time of the murder had had been out on bail for sexually assaulting her. His lawyer attempted to use the defense that the science was untested, to "persuade the jury it was voodoo," but in 2001, juries had heard enough about DNA successes, and prosecutors had had enough experience with demonstrating the reliability of such evidence, to make a difference. Weinberg has interviewed many of the scientists whose work she mentions, and has had jailhouse interviews with the accused. She has become friends with his family, who are sad figures ("they were the essence of the American suburban family") trying to understand how a nurturing and non-abusive upbringing could have turned out so. There are vital portraits of all the players at the trial here, and a summary of the proceedings that is exciting. Unforgettable is Greenwood's father; he was proud of his science-inclined only child, and devastated by her death. "There's enough sadness in the world," he said, "without people killing each other." He compared it to stones thrown in a pond, "... the ripples as they grow outward bring misery to everyone." When he said this, prostate cancer was painfully killing him in England, but he had hung on to life for years hoping to have his daughter's death resolved. He heard the verdict relayed to him by telephone, and died only hours later.

This is the remarkable and gripping true story of a murderer and his victim, and the tiny molecule that linked their fates. It is both the history of a science overlaid with human drama, and a human tragedy inextricably entwined with science. It is about two lives made and destroyed by DNA and by each other. In 1984, Helena Greenwood, a young British DNA scientist, was sexually assaulted in her San Francisco cottage. A year later and 500 miles south, she was strangled to death. The alleged rapist, Paul Frediani, was the prime suspect, but police and forensic experts failed to link him to the murder. The crime was consigned to the cold case file. Over the next fifteen years, Frediani continued his life with a job, children, and apparently nothing to tie him to Greenwood's death. Scientists, meanwhile, were beginning to use DNA to unravel the riddle of human identity. Their discoveries beat a path from the laboratory to the courtroom. In 1999, this prompted a determined San Diego detective, Laura Heilig, to reopen the Greenwood file, where she discovered a vital clue. Like a classic thriller, this is a tale of twists and turns. From crime scene to courtroom, laboratory bench to prison cell, *Pointing from the Grave* is the unforgettable story of how a dead woman's groundbreaking work pointed the finger at her own murderer.