



Nutcracker: Money, Madness, Murder: A Family Album

Shana Alexander

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Nutcracker begins at the ballet but tells the story of a seemingly wholesome all-American family, whose tranquil life's surface erupted in shocking acts of avarice, theft and murder. The victim was Franklin Bradshaw, Mormon self-made millionaire, workaholic. The killer was Bradshaw's grandson, prep school student. The architect of the crime was said to be Frances Schreuder, Bradshaw's daughter, devoted patron of the ballet, who used her father's money to buy a prestigious place in New York's cultural elite and who came to view George Balanchine as her true "father."

Making extensive use of her exclusive access to certain materials and sources, Shana Alexander traces the intricate history of this crime from its genesis among the luxury high-rises of Manhattan to a bloody culmination in a dusty Salt Lake City warehouse. She follows the winding four-year police hunt, which began in procedural confusion and was carried out ultimately by smart, devoted - and lucky - detective work. She takes us behind the scenes of trials, their startling defenses and verdicts, and into the minds of a few people who carried family games too far.

Nutcracker: Money, Madness, Murder: A Family Album Details

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From Reader Review Nutcracker: Money, Madness, Murder: A Family Album for online ebook

Trudy says

This book was the second one on the list of books my mother read in 1986. It was quite a tome that would have benefitted greatly from stringent editing. I can appreciate the amount of research Alexander did, and the Herculean task of putting it all in order. The style is very much crime reportage. There are no fanciful images or philosophical musings. I frequently feel the same about meticulously researched nonfiction. That is, that it's way more information than I need or want. I Persevered with this one in part because it's a connection to my mother, and because it truly is a remarkable story.

Zeb Kantrowitz says

This is the true story of excessive entitlement, abusive parenting and murder for money. As a child Frances Bradshaw was a terror to her parents and siblings. They would have sing to her for hours to keep her from crying. She became a very demanding child, she wanted dancing and piano lessons and always had to be the center of attention. Her father, a Mormon, and an auto parts store owner, left her upbringing to her mother who would do anything for her youngest child.

But Salt Lake City was too small for this woman with big dreams. She moves to New York City where she marries and Italian and has two sons (Marc and Larry). She sues for divorce after accusing her husband of abuse. She marries a second time and the boys take the name of their step-father (Schreuder). She mostly ignores the boys then has a daughter whom she grooms to be a prima ballerina. Everyone loves the little girl, Audrey.

To assure her daughter will do well, she pours large amounts of money into the New York City Ballet. The money is given to her by her mother Berenice who secretly takes the money from the family business. She becomes a doyen of the cultural elite and refers to George Balanchine as her “true father”, subsidizing the creation of some of his best known ballets. But for Frances, there is never enough money.

Meanwhile her sons have been sent off to prep school where both have behavioral problems, and both are expelled and end up in jail. Larry ended up serving time in prison for trying to kill his college roommate. Marc suffered all the symptoms of schizophrenia and was in and out of institutions. At the age of 17 he went to SLC and shot his 76 year old grandfather in the back of the head.

From here the story really gets strange! Three years after the murder Marc is convicted and turns States evidence on his mother. They both end up serving thirteen years. But, Berenice Bradshaw made sure that Frances received her ‘fair’ share of her father’s legacy, reported to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. After getting out of jail, Frances was known to be seen walking down Madison Avenue wearing her mother’s mink coat and jewels.

Susan says

Some years ago, I recall reading another true crime book by Shane Alexander, “Very Much a Lady.” It was one of the few books that survived the purge of my bookshelves a few years ago, when I decided that I would only keep those not on kindle and which I would want to re-read at some time. So, I was delighted to have the opportunity to read, and review, this book by Alexander, “Nutcracker,” first published in 1985. Sadly, the author is no longer with us, but I do hope this means that her other books will eventually be republished too. Sadly, the rather flippant title of this book masks the fact that this is a really well researched and written true crime account of a family who were truly dysfunctional.

The author came across this story when her friend and mentor, Tommy Thompson, died and she was given the notes he was working on before his death. However, this is very much her work and, although she is eager to give credit and thanks, it is obvious that this crime – and this family – intrigued her. The crime involved the murder, in 1978, when Franklin Bradshaw, aged 76, was shot and killed in the warehouse of his auto parts company. We then discover the background of this shooting. Bradshaw was an incredibly wealthy man, a workaholic who retreated from his family problems by re-creating a new family in his company. His wife, Berenice, was resentful and lonely. The mother of four felt isolated and depressed. Her only son was dead, her husband was a Mormon, but she was not and never really felt accepted in the devout Mormon State of Utah, and her three daughters were grown and married. The sisters had their own issues with each other, of resentment and jealousy and all the members of the family seem to have been having various arguments and disagreements. There are factions and fissures between various members of the family and this seems to have spilled over into the way the youngest daughter, Frances, treated her own children.

It is not a spoiler to say, because we find this out virtually immediately, that one of Frances sons has murdered their grandfather. The real issue of the book is whether or not Frances herself was involved in the murder and this book is built around her trial in 1983. Berenice is a caring woman, but she was often depressed when the children were little, and it soon obvious that she clung to her youngest daughter, Frances, for companionship and favoured her children – Larry, Marc and Ariadne. Frances is also guilty of favouritism and seems to swing between using her sons as her closest friends to entirely shutting them out, loving one and hating the other. Both Berenice and Frances adore Ariadne and she is their real reason for living and creates a link between them. Twice divorced, unsettled, reliant on her mother for money and unstable, Frances has a precarious life. She decides that her daughter will be a ballet dancer and begins to throw money towards achieving her dream. The question is, whether she used her sons to help her achieve the money and influence she needed. Neglectful, over emotional, needy and, often cruel, reading about Frances is both shocking and saddening. There are many victims in this book and many people who helped create the situation which ended in murder, but this is certainly a fascinating read and will appeal to all those who enjoy true crime books. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

Carol says

Really good book! I enjoyed her writing style and at various points thought she could've edited the book a bit better. But overall she did a great job and I was riveted by the story.

Kara says

The title says it all! Excellent true crime nonsense that proves the tired old adage that truth is stranger than fiction. Pulpy true crime drama about a high profile murder in 1978.

Frances Schreuder is a one woman made for lifetime tv movie. She is a deranged, status seeking, paranoid schizophrenic, racist, drug addict, alcoholic, sadistic psychopath. She physically and emotionally tortures her 3 kids, alternately bestowing on them over the top affection and then heartlessly tormenting them with either neglect or full on abuse. The kids become so crazed that she succeeds in manipulating one of her sons into murdering her father in order to get her grubby paws on his vast fortune.

Frances' father, Papa Schreuder is a parodic miserly coot who uses an empty beer carton as a briefcase and drives around in a rusty pickup even though he's worth millions from oil and auto parts. Frances' mother is a nervous woman stifled by her cold, penny pinching husband and by conservative life. She dotes on her needy and emotional youngest child, Frances and seems to live vicariously through her exciting and lavish lifestyle. Frances easily manipulates her mother into forging checks for her to cover her lavish purchases , like \$40,000 earringa and a luxury upper east side apartment (Apparently Frances had been thrown out of Bryn Mawr college for forging checks as a co ed).

Frances becomes a Manhattan socialite jet setter. A frustrated "dancer", she writes huge checks to the New York City Ballet who in turn are obligated to elect her to the board despite her reputation for being a lunatic. Some of the most entertaining parts of the book are the descriptions of Frances flitting around at the ballet events, often in inappropriate outfits with hundred dollar bills flying out of her handbag and rambling on about her (imaginary) relationship with "Mr. Balanchine". She abuses her influence as a board member by trying to strong arm the company into giving her daughter the title role in their production of the "Nutcracker".

Frances literally drives her one son insane and he ends up in a mental hospital after smashing his college roommate's skull with a hammer. The other she mind warps into planning the murder of her father.

Mandy says

There's no doubt that Shana Alexander tells a fascinating story in this true-crime tale of Frances Bradshaw Schreuder who managed to persuade her teenage son to kill her multi-millionaire father. A dysfunctional family par excellence, the Bradshaws were a strange lot, and Alexander left no stone unturned in finding out

all about them. Her research can't be faulted, but her desire to put every bit of it in this book can. I found it all just too detailed and with just too much background information. This slows the narrative and detracts from any tension. I would have preferred a more pithy account, and I would also have preferred many more photographs to make the people involved come alive. However, if you want to know more about this bizarre crime, this is a meticulously researched account of a complex woman and a complex crime.

Laura Dalton Wilson says

This was a stay-up-late page-turner for me. Great reading.

Janet says

A fascinating true crime with a completely unlikable family of characters. Good crime reporting. (But it took me forever to read due to the knee replacement.)

Michael Drakich says

True crime is always a riveting read because, in the back of your head, you know it really happened. The events surrounding the killing of Franklin Bradshaw with his youngest daughter and her two sons being accused of the murder was a sensational event in the media at the time. The author does her best to provide as many details as she can regarding the history of the characters and what she was able to glean as the interaction between them, but in this case, she carried things a little too far. What she would do is follow the trail of one character, then retell the same series of events from a different character resulting in me, as the reader, seeing the same thing reported to me not just once, but two, three or even four times becoming an irritant. Not only that, but this practice of hers played havoc with the time line. Rather than things occurring in a linear way, the narration jumped back and forth from one date to another.

If you want to know in detail this horrible sordid crime, then this is worth reading. If wanting something simply for the entertainment value, I'd give this a pass.

Valerie says

This book was published in 1985, and has to do with an extremely dysfunctional family from Utah. Franklin and Berneice Bradshaw had four children, three girls and a boy. The boy died at a young age. The youngest girl is the focus of this book; her name was Frances. She married twice, and two children from her first marriage, Lorenzo or Larry, and Marco, or Marc; and also a daughter, Ariadne from her second marriage. Frances was an extremely troubled person; no doubt mentally ill, and she could never get enough attention. Her narcissism caused her to emotionally abuse all of her children to the point that she coerced her son Marc to kill her father, his own grandfather. Why? Because of her greed and love of a lavish lifestyle. The whole family, Francis and her two boys, stole money from her parents, and forged checks all the time. Berneice seemed to go along with the whole sick game, although she was not involved in the murder of her husband, Franklin. At the time of the 1978 murder, Frances was divorced from her second husband F. Schreuder, and

she and her children went by that name, although the boys were born during her first marriage. Francis became enamored of the ballet in New York City, and donated thousands and thousands of dollars to the ballet company, and to the famous choreographer, George Balanchine. Her son Larry is also mentally ill and was in a mental hospital for quite some time. Marc was tried for the murder of his grandfather, and eventually Frances was also. I found the book quite an interesting story; apparently a TV mini series was made from it several years ago. I simply could not believe that when Berneice died, she still left Frances a healthy portion of her estate. This family was obviously extremely sick. Frances herself died in 2004 (she served 13 years in prison) due to chronic lung disease (she was a very heavy smoker).

The book reads more like a literary tale than most of the true crime books available these days. I was extremely shocked that someone could manipulate other people to such a degree that they would even go so far as to murder someone else. And all over the issue of money.....

Julie says

The Nutcracker by Shana Alexander is a 2015 Open Road Media publication. I was provided a copy of this book by the publisher and Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

This is the true crime story of the murder of Franklin Bradshaw whose youngest daughter, Frances plotted and planned his murder and coerced her son, Marc to do the deed.

While this case spawned numerous accounts of the crime, which primarily focused on the investigation and trial, none of the books, or TV movies delved as deeply into the family's psyche as this one. Originally published in the mid 1980's Open Road Integrated Media has re-issued the book in digital format. So much time has passed since the crime occurred, I had forgotten many of the details. Revisiting it now, I found myself once more riveted by this incredible case and it is as shocking now as it was then. What kind of person commits patricide? What kind of person lures their own child to kill his grandfather? That is the question that haunts many of us, so a good hard look at the inner workings of Frances' upbringing, her parents background, and the general dynamic of the Bradshaw family might shed a little light on the subject. Certainly it does raise some interesting questions. Mental illness, Franklin's demeanor and Berenice's issues, against the Utah scenery and the Mormon faith made an interesting atmosphere for the Bradshaw children to grow up in.

The family was certainly a little strange. Franklin was a self made millionaire, but you would never know by the way he and his family lived. He and his wife, Berenice had four children, two of which were riddled with serious health problems. Frances was born a with a fair distance of time between herself and her older siblings. By all accounts she was a difficult child, but had the full attention of her mother , a woman who was given to bouts of deep depression, perhaps even experiencing more than one breakdown. Berenice was always into dance and her daughters were given lessons which may have been where Francis acquired her interest in ballet and could explain her generous contributions to the New York Ballet. (which is where the apt title comes from)

Franklin was a cold man who worked more than he slept, rarely spent time at home, leaving Berenice to raise four children alone, was frugal to a fault, and was not too sensitive to his wife's mental illness, shrugging it off as having a nervous personality.

Naturally there was a will, one Frances was afraid she could be written out of, thus disrupting her lavish lifestyle.

As the story progresses, we get a chilling in depth look at the diabolical and cold blooded mother and son team of Frances and Marc. Certainly Berenice is also an enigma as she continues to disbelief her daughter capable of such a thing and she watches helplessly as her entire family crumbles around her. This family was mired in mental illness that went back several generations, but was never diagnosed or treated. One does have to wonder if Franklin had not had such a disdain for doctors, if he had not dismissed Berenice's symptoms, if perhaps they had seen the signs of mental instability in Frances, that maybe there was a chance none of these things would have happened. However, I am not totally convinced of that. I believed wholeheartedly that Berenice suffered from a form of mental illness, I also believe Frances was mentally unstable, however, this crime and all the others that went with it, such as Frances and Marc stealing family jewelry and Marc's lack of pride or ambition, refusing to work for his money like his grandfather did, leads me believe this murder was committed in cold blood with greed and money as the motive.

This case was debated over and over in the 1980's and 1990's as various books were published on the crime as well as made for TV movies one of which starred Lee Remick that was aired in 1987 and shares the same title as this book. (there were two made for TV movies, the other starring Stephanie Powers)

When all is said and done the author did a fantastic job of telling the story, not from the perspective of the investigators, or the lawyers, but from the family itself. The book was well organized and told a very disturbing, but sad story that is still perplexing after all this time. Frances' children, besides Marc were victims as well, and I do wonder what became of them. Marc served his time and I believe still resides in Utah, Frances as since passed away. If you remember the case, I still recommend reading this book if you enjoy true crime because of it's unique perspective. If you are not familiar with this case, then you certainly want give this book a look. I know you will find it a very absorbing and thought provoking read. 4 stars

Terry says

I have actually not read this book yet. However, in reading the comments, I see that, as in many accounts of this incident, Frank Bradshaw is portrayed as a skinflint who was a greedy and mean husband. Let me tell you, my grandparents were VERY good friends with Frank Bradshaw. He was a warm and loving man. His wife was the crazy, greedy one. Since Frank was the one murdered, Frank's reputation has been severely soiled. But I guess since he is not here to defend himself it is okay, right? People that grew up in that time and place (the depression era Utah) held on to their money and lived frugally because they grew up in uncertain times when you never knew where your next meal was going to come from. I just get tired of seeing Frank portrayed in such a terrible light when my grandparents loved him so much.

Dennis Littrell says

Alexander, Shana. Nutcracker: Money, Madness, Murder: A Family Album (1985) *****
Charming

Oh boy. Just how much intense, stupid madness can one family harbor? The story reads like a parody of human behavior. Alexander's narrative, chuck full of detail and precise diction and some wonderful turns of phrase, often spirals into something like a long-running slapstick comedy too bizarre for television. The horror of neglect and greed, hatred, prejudice and violence are all here, but the form they take in this tale is so absurd sometimes that you have to laugh aloud at the sick antics.

The three most important characters are: Franklin Bradshaw, the miserly patriarch, apparently murdered by his grandsons at the insistence of his youngest daughter, Frances, an incredibly depraved creature nobody could have invented, and Berenice, mother of Frances and husband of Franklin, a slavish practitioner of "smotherly love." They hail from Utah where Franklin is a non-practicing Mormon. He has spent a lifetime of working sixteen hours a day and has, through his auto parts business and oil and land leases, amassed a fortune estimated in the hundreds of millions of (1981) dollars. Frances and everybody else in the family would like to get their hands on the money, and each of them is deathly afraid that the others are scheming to cheat them out of their fair share, and they are. But Frances, the youngest of the four Bradshaw children, is particularly evil. She is the pretty baby of the family that no one could ever say no to, who always got away with everything as a child and expects that to continue. When the world says, "Whoa, child, no!" she fights back with every scheme and wile she can muster, committing nearly any and all crimes imaginable. She usually gets away with them because she has a quality about her that prevents anyone from saying no to her, at least anyone in her family. She is perhaps as neglectful a mother as one can imagine, physically beating and mentally torturing her children, using them as pawns in her wars with her two ex-husbands and her parents and sisters. She is an alcoholic, a drug addict, a paranoid schizophrenic, a bigot, a class-conscious low life, who hates blacks, Jews and poor white trash; a woman who is as trashy as one can get, yet a woman who manages to manipulate her mother and father and others so that she always has time to drink and whore around and send her children to private schools (even as she pushes them out the door in the morning in their underwear without breakfast or bath).

But enough. It's a good read, and I have to admire Alexander's writing ability. She makes it all very vivid and she does it with style and grace and without taking up some phony political position or presenting some shallow psychology. She sparkles the narrative with insight and bon mots and never slows down or bores.

--a review by Dennis Littrell

Erin says

ARC for review - looks like a new edition of a book originally published in the mid-1980s.

A seemingly endless true crime where the youngest daughter of a prominent Utah family has one of her sons kill her father. Basically about 85% percent of this family would be given some sort of DSM diagnosis, and at least a few of them are pathological. There's an innocent child, and that's unfortunate, but nearly every other character has some sort of culpability and that makes it hard to empathize with anyone at all (even though Alexander seems to have had a soft spot for Berenice, the widow, but I thought she caused a lot of her own problems.)

The book is about three times as long as it needs to be, but if you enjoy true crime, remember the story of the death of Franklin Bradshaw or the trial of Frances Schreuder, and/or have a great interest in the inner workings of the Board of the New York City Ballet during the waning days of George Balanchine, it might be worthwhile. Otherwise, it's simply too long, and too rambling, and that makes what might have worked as a better story fail.

Anne Hawn Smith says

As I continue to explore the mind of the female sociopath this book provided an incredible multilayered example. I read the book years ago and it was so powerful, I remembered most of the story, but it was still fascinating. This time I tried to focus on the relationship of Berenice to her daughter, Frances. The story is about Frances Bradshaw Schreuder who contrives to get her son to murder her father. Aside from the sociopathy, there are other serious mental illnesses in this family of three generations.

Frances is clearly the most disturbed, but on this reading, I was more struck by the toxic relation between Frances and her mother, Berenice. At first, Berenice seems to be a good-hearted soul who is terribly abused by her daughter and bilked of hundreds of thousands of dollars. There is more than meets the eye. Berenice and Frances have a symbiotic and deeply pathological relationship. In the beginning chapter there is a description of the entire family standing around Frances' cradle singing to her all night long, night after night. Frances cries constantly and begins her life as the narcissistic center of this family and nothing changes through out her life. Berenice seems to demand that everyone in the family cater to Frances just to keep her from throwing a tantrum of epic proportions over the slightest thing.

I have to wonder at why Berenice turned her back on her husband and 3 other children in order to constantly placate Frances. The older daughters seemed sane and reasonable, but Berenice was always turned towards Frances. She allowed her to live a lavish lifestyle in New York and ended up paying for the legal defense of her grandson, Mark, and her daughter for the murder of her husband. That is almost more unbelievable than the fact that she focused all her love and attention on this one child to the detriment of everyone else in the family.
