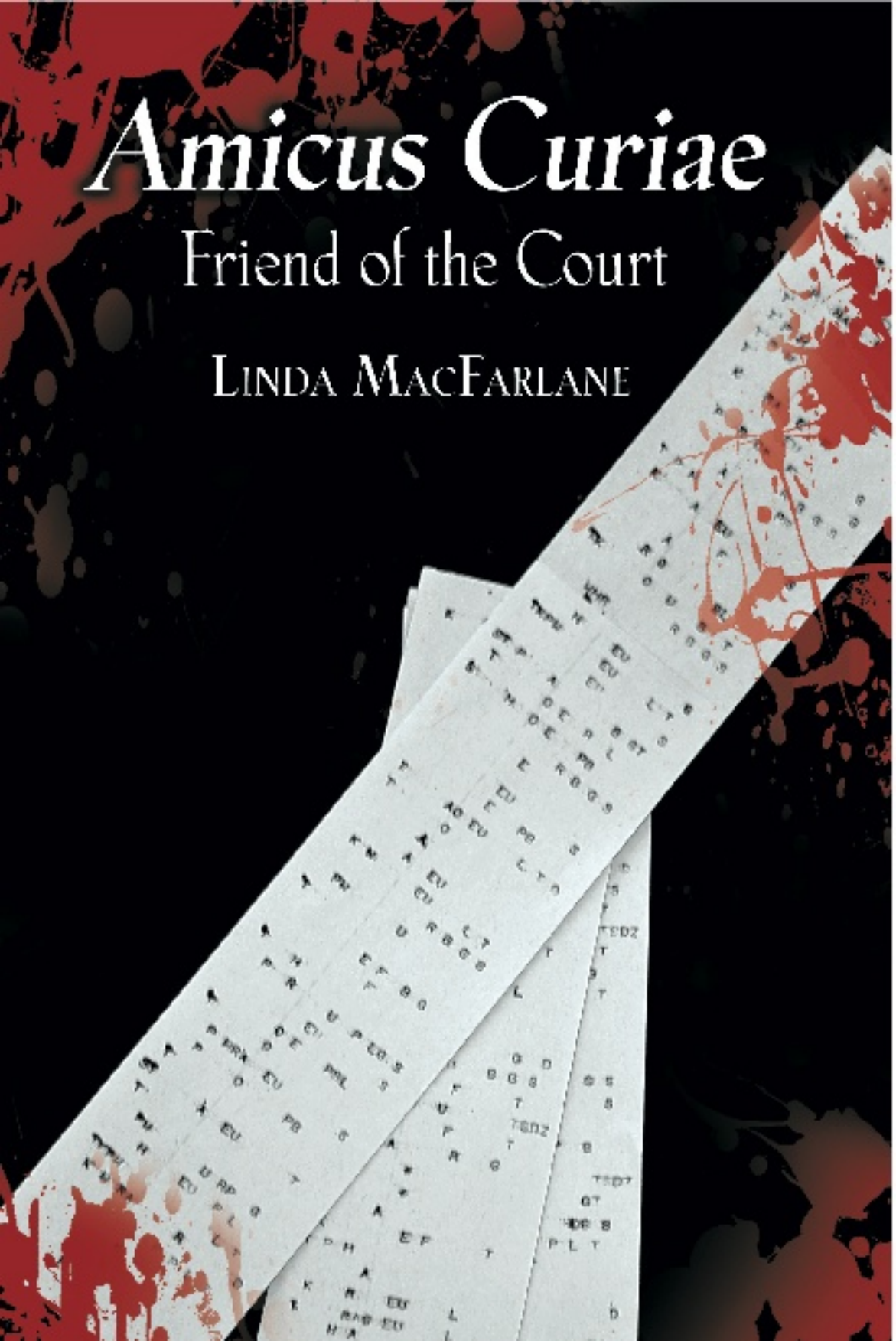
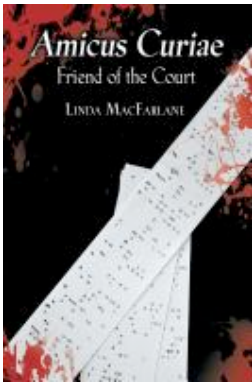


Amicus Curiae

Friend of the Court

LINDA MACFARLANE





Amicus Curiae, legal Latin for "friend of the court," is a compilation of stories from a shorthand reporter's experiences in the courtroom; the subtle nuances and the stark realities, alike, seen through the eyes of an inside observer. You may smile at some of these stories. You may resonate with others. A few will, doubtless, leave you horrified by the depths of depravity to which mankind can plummet...

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First Edition

~o0o~ The Prosecutor had been giving opening remarks for almost five hours and showed no signs of wearing down. He's a gifted public speaker, perhaps the best in the Contra Costa County District Attorney's office, now holding the jurors entranced with his legal rhapsody. His presence was captivating, the definition of looming large.

Most of his remarks were aimed at laying out in an organized—and at times even clinical—manner the evidence the twelve jurors and four alternates seated could expect to hear in the first of three phases of the proceedings. It was a chronological outline of what Hal Jewett—this case's representative of the People of the State of California—anticipated he would prove.

Hal held between his thumb and forefinger a substantial gold wedding band, a ring that had lain unexplained on the edge of the witness stand for the entirety of his opening, a distraction meant to worry the curiosity of his audience. He held it up to the light of the windows, squinting against the sun and in concentration, at once. He opened his mouth and his body moved forward almost imperceptibly, signs that he was about to break this uncomfortable silence. But then his face twisted in emotion and the choke in his throat rendered him momentarily without a voice.



He dropped his shoulders and blew out deflation, an effort to collect himself. Then in a controlled voice, his words not much more than a stage whisper, he asked, "What do you think they found on the floorboard of Selina Bishop's car?" His voice so low it compelled the undivided attention of everyone in the room, "Ivan Stineman's wedding ring."

Ivan and Annette's daughters, anguished women who took up their place of dubious distinction behind the Prosecutor day-after-day, wiped their glassy eyes. I looked away, cognizant that my job was made more difficult by acknowledging the emotional hell all five of the victims' loved ones were going through. Stay

detached, focused, I reminded myself. On this, the first day of the guilt phase for Justin Helzer, I had no idea how important, nor how impossible that admonition would prove to be over the 10 months of trial that followed.

"Why?" Mr. Jewett plaintively implored. Now he was shouting, his teeth clenched in barely-restrained rage. He closed the gap between himself and the defendant in three long, threatening strides. Justin Helzer and Hal Jewett locked eyes, perhaps for the first time in the four years between the commission of these horrifying crimes and this day, and held a very personal man-to-man stare. "Because *this* man," and he stabbed an accusing finger at the air, "Justin Alan Helzer put it there." Thus began the trial on April 30th, 2004.

~o0o~ In some ways, it was the good fortune of the parties to our case that 40 miles south of Contra Costa County, Scott Peterson was being tried for the murder of his pretty wife and their unborn son and the media coverage of the Helzer brothers' trials neared insignificant. To have every detail flamboyantly splashed across newspaper headlines, analyzed *ad nauseum* on talk radio, and the subject of information crawling across the bottom of televisions, makes it more difficult to find a pool of people unaffected one way or the other by the stain of journalistic bias from which to pick a jury.

Criminal trials have gained increasing attractiveness to the media since the advent of Court TV. Trial analyzers trot out lurid details of those cases chosen for high profile by the celebrity name attached to them, and apparently, the sensationalism of a manure salesman from Modesto who murdered his wife. Lines between the entertainment industry and the justice system have gotten smudged. We seem intent on knowing which side of political issues actors and rock stars come down, and are enamored with electing folks whose face value at the box office

is the most compelling part of their resume.

Allowing the media to influence our every decision of what to wear, what to eat, who to elect to public office and what is the truth undermines critical thinking. We connect to the umbilical cord of information via our televisions and our phones and are dosed endless messages. I have long been exasperated by the notion we have granted high-profile criminals their 15 minutes of fame, just the elixir they were seeking for their otherwise hollow and pathetic lives.

The dichotomy here is the paltry media attention paid the Helzer case inured to the benefit of Court and counsel by offering these men a fair and impartial jury. But the meager interest in this less headline-worthy case was, to me, a kind of disrespect to the victims and their loved ones. That people in the community where the crimes were committed did not even know the victims' names—Annette and Ivan Stineman, Selina Bishop, Jennifer Villarín and James Gamble—but were entranced by jury selection for the Peterson trial was borne of a lack of media focus on a case with similarly Machiavellian details to that of Manson's murders some 35 years before.

I wanted the senses-jarring account of what the victims endured at the hands of Helzer to be the topic of discussion over nail appointments and cocktail sausages. I wanted the eventual death verdicts to draw cheers of victory or upraised fists of protestation from the crowds assembled outside the courthouse in anticipation.

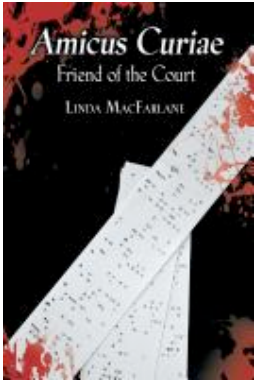
However, I go unrequited. I can only say, Taylor's story is that of a classic charismatic psychopath and his minions, a man every bit as good looking and bright as Scott Peterson. He drew together a wicked "trinity" to help execute his baleful plan. He kidnapped an elderly couple, extorted their life savings, then murdered them as they lay side-by-side on the bathroom floor. He murdered the daughter of a great blues guitarist when she no longer served his purposes. He cut their bodies up with a reciprocal saw, packaged them into garbage bags, and disposed of them in the Sacramento Delta like the trash they

were to him. He murdered two others as they slept, their connection to him thin as spider silk. As is the way with religious zealots, he justified his scurrilous deeds in the name of divine revelation from *his* God of how to spread *his* brand of peace and love throughout the world.

GLENN TAYLOR HELZER

~o0o~ The Red Dragon, the first of Thomas Harris' Hannibal Lecter series, begins a chapter: "He was born a psychopath. His parents made him a sociopath." On July 26th of 1970, Glenn Taylor Helzer, too, was born psychopathic, ripe for his eventual descent into depravity. While his parents, Gerry and Carma, did not torture him as Lecter's had, the extremism of being raised in a sometimes fundamentalist-leaning Mormon theology became a key ingredient in this recipe for cataclysm.

A relative observed in his defense—and I am paraphrasing—Taylor could not have lived for 30 years as a devout Mormon, and within a few months' time, become the bewitching devotee of death that was portrayed. I agree, but in the antithesis; that is, the church mission to Brazil, the honorable discharge from military service, the mantels of marriage and fatherhood, *those* were the frauds Taylor Helzer perpetrated. Helzer's twisting down the path of wretchedness started in childhood. He was born to a family of staunch generational practitioners of LdS dogma. He grew up steeped in countless recitations of stories from the Bible and the Book of Mormon, particularly that of Lehi who received divine inspiration to kill Laban for the brass plates which would be translated into the Book of Mormon, saying, "*It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.*" This ideology was reworked in Taylor's criminal mind and laid the bedrock for creating his nihilistic cult, Children of Thunder.



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