

Books

Barrenjoey Road: new detail added to local investigation

The disappearance of teenager Trudie Adams in 1978 has never been solved; now a new book by award-winning journalists Neil Mercer and Ruby Jones is shedding new light on this compelling mystery. Story by Rosamund Burton

Just after midnight on a Saturday night in June 1978, having been with friends at a dance at the Newport Surf Club, 18-year-old Trudie Adams (*below*) walked up to Barrenjoey Road and hitched a lift to her home in Central Road, Avalon. Most of the surf crowd hitchhiked back then as buses were few and far between. Her boyfriend followed her out of the club and saw her waiting for a lift, before a vehicle pulled up. She was never seen again, and even after four police investigations and a coronial inquest in 2011, no-one has been charged.

Award-winning investigative journalists Ruby Jones and Neil Mercer (*right*) worked on the ABC podcast and three-part documentary TV series *Barrenjoey Road*, both of which went to air in late 2018, and now their book has been released.

Mercer says that writing the book has enabled the authors to provide a level of detail about this case which wasn't possible in the medium of television or audio. Mercer started writing about crime in the early 1980s, and has worked in broadcast and print media for more than 45 years,

When Mercer and Jones met Steve Norris, Trudie Adams' boyfriend at the time of her disappearance, he gave them seven lever-arched folders, containing the brief of evidence presented to the coronial inquest in 2011. It included 700 pages of "running sheets" - pieces of foolscap paper, on which were statements from Trudie Adams' friends and family, as well

as suspects in 1978, and also tip-offs from members of the public.

Among the evidence, explains Mercer, were 14 detailed statements by young women "... saying they had been handcuffed and sexually assaulted at gun point, and clearly the police working on the case thought that the rapes and Trudie's disappearance were inexplicably linked".

Mercer says that several of the women were able to identify their attackers from photographs, there was a range of circumstantial evidence, and a statement from a fellow prisoner of one of the suspects.

identified the main suspect from a photo, then was taken by the homicide squad to court, where the suspect was appearing in an unrelated case, to formally identify him. Having identified him at the court, she said she didn't hear back from the police for more than 26 years.

"As we were writing it, we both felt angry that nothing had been done. These women had come forward, so they were pretty courageous, and they didn't get justice from the system. Which is why we say, it's a significant investigative failure on the part of the NSW



police, despite the efforts of some of the detectives, because I think some of them tried really hard."

Despite Jones and Mercer's extensive research, the police investigations and the coronial inquest, Mercer says it remains unresolved as to why the main suspects were never charged with the rapes. He says it could have been that the homicide squad was focused on Trudie Adams' disappearance and the rape cases didn't fall into its brief, there could have been a mole in the police at the time, or maybe there was doubt that the women who had made statements would be willing to give evidence in court, given that their attackers had their addresses and details.

Then in the early 1990s the main suspect became an informer to a very powerful member of the police force.

"The police need inform-



"The police had plenty to go on, but the rapes seem to have never been thoroughly investigated."

He says that one woman

ers,” explains Mercer, “but should you have an informer who has a record of sexual assault, who is a prime suspect in these 14 assaults, and in two murders?” This chief suspect died in jail in 2013, while serving time for drug charges, and Mercer says the policeman is currently serving time, having been found guilty of drug importation.

Fast-paced and clearly written, Barrenjoey Road brings together the innumerable threads of this case.

After all their research and many interviews, the authors are only too aware of the huge impact Trudie Adams’s disappearance has had on her friends and family, as well as the local community. With the book’s publication Mercer is hopeful that there might be some snippet of information in it, which makes someone come forward.

“You hope that somebody will read it and be prepared to share some information that they weren’t prepared to share for 40 years. It’s a long shot, but you don’t give up hope.”

How to Be An Author: The Business of Being a Writer in Australia

Georgia Richter & Deborah Hunn
Fremantle Press \$34.99

Booksellers are often the first line of enquiry for aspiring authors. Everyone has a story to tell, and many have a dream to see theirs on a bookshelf one day. The number one question is how to get published – and who better to answer that than published authors.

This book covers everything, including excellent guidance for writers thinking about self-publishing (which is the majority of writers who seek out bookseller advice.) Even if you are not planning to put pen to paper soon, this book offers a fascinating insight to the publishing process, from what happens after a manuscript is acquired, to its journey to reader’s hands.

The most frank insight is the significance of promotion for authors, and how much of that will fall back onto the writer. As if the writing part is not hard enough, the harder work comes after publication. Even established authors with big publishing houses must fight for their share of publicity (and book sales) and COVID has cut off many traditional forms of promotion such as events or store-signings.

A big thanks to the authors for stressing bookshop etiquette for writers. As an important champion of local authors, Chapter 4 says it all!

Libby Armstrong, Beachside Bookshop Avalon



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