



On South Mountain: The Dark Secrets Of The Goler Clan

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Imagine a lush green valley, dotted with prosperous farms and towns. It could be anywhere in North America—the Okanagan in B.C., the Niagara orchards of Ontario. In this case it happens to be the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia. But on one hill, South Mountain, lives the a clan of impoverished, inbred hillbillies, ignored or shunned by the people in the valley below for two hundred years. Few have much schooling, most are unemployed, and they keep almost entirely to themselves.

Two solitudes side by side, until one day in January 1984, Sandra Golder, aged thirteen, burst into tears in class. When her teacher took her out into the hall to ask her why she was crying, a gruesome story of incest and sexual abuse began to emerge. Within hours the story had spread to the principal, a social worker, and finally the police. Within weeks a full-fledged scandal had been unleashed on the valley: sixteen adults—men and women—from the Mountain were charged with hundreds of allegations of incest and sexual abuse of children as young as five. It gradually became clear that this had been going on for generations, a cycle endlessly repeated.

This book tells the amazing story not only of the court cases that followed, but the way the valley community reacted. Dark secrets weren't the exclusive property of the Golars: the townspeople had their own, including the fact that some of them had known about the abuse for decades and done nothing about it.

On South Mountain: The Dark Secrets Of The Goler Clan Details

Date : Published October 23rd 1998 by Penguin Group Canada (first published January 1st 1997)

ISBN : 9780140263695

Author : David Cruise , Alison Griffiths

Format : Paperback 304 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Crime, True Crime, Mystery, Cultural, Canada

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Danielle says

I was introduced to this book by the author of Our Daily Bread, Lauren B. Davis. It was partly based on a family of "hillbillies" in Nova Scotia. It is a very hard book to read. The children were all abused, physically, sexually and emotionally. It made me so angry that they hardly spent any time in jail. Thus is our legal system, right? Justice? Both books are amazing, and I hope that you read them both. God bless the children of the Goler clan.

George Ilsley says

It is hard to enjoy a book with such a gruesome focus. Especially interesting to me since I grew up in the Valley, and went to school in Wolfville in the years just before these events came to light. I have to say I was struck at the division between the mountain and the valley described in the book, because, yes, I did not know these towns just a few miles away on the South Mountain. (On the other hand, I've been all over the North Mountain). The "Stile" also was completely unfamiliar, and I've driven along the Ridge Road many times.

I'm not sure why social services tends to break up siblings, but this was one of the saddest developments in this case, that Donna and her younger sister were separated and effectively estranged. All in all, I'm not sure how much has even changed since this story came to light in the early 80's.

Tracey Tobin says

The first few chapters, while interesting history of the valley and mountain, were a bit difficult to get through for me personally because I wasn't concerned about things like how the mountain was formed and what geographic features dot the landscape. But then the real story began and I was engrossed, horrified, amazed. It's truly difficult to believe that in the very months that my parents were getting used to the little infant who was me, less than six hours drive away the Goler trials were taking place.

This book did an amazing job of describing the horrors of South Mountain and the Goler Clan, and I'm left shivering with disgust at the thought that some of these people still live just a few hours away from where I'm raising my own child.

Lester says

So very disturbing!!

I read this book many years ago and decided to read it again. Having read a fictional book (Our Daily Bread by Lauren B. Davis) with the same 'theme'..a non fiction book brings life right into our faces!

Oh human..the things you do..the very most disturbing animal of the world we live in.

Tracy says

bought this at the Bathurst Market, figured it would hold my attention....

Although the middle of the book is quite graphic because it includes the text from the trial, the book is a fascinating sociological study about regions, generations, and the isolation of families and culture that can happen in such close proximity.

Karen J. says

I'm still processing my response to this book. It's hard to say "I liked it," because it is such a horrific, true and damning story. It would be more appropriate to say "I'm glad I read it."

Karen Martin says

A good book on a very difficult subject. I found the first 75 or so pages a little tedious, as they went into much detail of the background and history of the Valley and the Mountain. The socioeconomic differences set the backstory of the generations of the Goler Clan and those who were less isolated, better schooled and better raised on the "good" side of the beautiful area known as the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia.

It is worth slogging through the dry, factual, descriptive scene setting. Once you start reading of the actual goings on of this highly dysfunctional and sexually twisted family, it is a page-turner. Witnessing the horrors the youngest three girls in one family live through from their eyes - sexually, physically, and psychologically by father, uncles, brothers, cousins, and even female relatives, is both gut and heart-wrenching.

Though her older sister Sandra ultimately blows the whistle at school, it is young eleven-year-old Donna who has the courage and backbone to become the heroine whose shoulders the Crown pins their hopes on to prosecute 16 adults with multiple sexual crimes. Her reason is mostly to protect her five-year old sister Lisa, whom the sexual predators have begun to rape, like a flock of vultures at a fresh road kill.

The authors have done an inordinate amount of research, and worked with Donna and some of the other victims to get this horrific event, the trials, and the aftermath as factual as possible.

Heather says

Slow to start - VERY slow to start, actually, so a bit hard to get into - but once it gets going, this is a really interesting read.

Arah-Lynda says

That's the way it was on South Mountain
You took your ~~medicine~~
You kept your families dark secrets
You gagged
You wept
You coiled
You survived.

One day, in 1984, in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia, 13 year old, Sandra Goler burst into tears in her classroom.

When questioned by her teacher Sandra's response was that her father had been using her as a wife.

What emerges then are the dark secrets of The Goler Clan of Nova Scotia.

They are not easy to bear witness to.

Sandra is not the only victim.

All of the children of the Goler Clan have been brutally and repeatedly used for sexual pleasure, by the adult men and women of South Mountain.

It has been going on for generations.

For generations, no one from the closest village in the valley,

No one among those in contact with the children; no doctors or teachers or anyone, brought forward any concern for these children.

Once the oppressed

Now the oppressor

I apologize for the crudeness of my words.

But the hard core testimony I heard from these children,

should not be cloaked in luscious prose. (even if I was capable of writing it)

I have been gutted.

I feel drained.

Just a puddle

So I walked around the block my nose full of perfume and the smell of her skin, my head swirling with what I had seen and heard in the house, so much like ours, and yet not at all. And I realised as I walked through the neighbourhood how each house could contain a completely different reality. In a single block, there could be fifty separate worlds. Nobody ever really knew what was going on just next door.

"White Oleander"

Morgan Rector says

Very, very disturbing. These stories of generational child abuse (in every form) has proven impossible to

forget. The fact that those people lived the way they did is shocking and what is miraculous is that some survived to escape and tell their tale. Kudos to Donna Goler for her activism. She grew up in a veritable hell on Earth and it's a testament to her bravery and inner-strength that she is alive today and holding it together.

Mayday133 says

This book is true and onpoint, saw the t.v. commentary of the actual girl along with the two authors' I now will write my own story that this book has come out. It still is happening today although this includes all the denials that come with it.

Tasha-Lynn says

I'm really not sure how to rate this book. How DO you rate a story like this that has come from the darkest corners of a persons life. Especially with such a dark subject matter. I want to say I enjoyed the book but that seems so wrong too. I went from interested to disgusted to horrified to disbelieving to shocked and all around again. I've been to the area and it's so beautiful it's hard to believe that it had such a dark past... I'm gonna have to think about this one still...

Norma says

This is a worthwhile read for the insights into the strong ties that keep individuals in incestuous and abusive relationships. The somewhat academic approach to the topic makes it more palatable for the average reader. There may be no supprises in this study-type book but the information is worth learning.

Hanaa says

I'm still having a hard time rating this book. On one hand, the writing was awful and I didn't care for it at all, but on the other hand, the story of the *JUST* the Goler Clan was fascinating and terrifying.

I found the majority of this book to be a throwaway but the only reason why the authors kept in these irrelevant parts was because they likely didn't have enough information about the Goler's to have more than 100 pages. The throwaway parts contained the long, long history of South Mountain, and how it got the way, way back in the day (read: 150 million years ago). I don't know about you, but in this case, I didn't care about the geography, geochronology, or too much information about the history of the land, and who walked there before the Golars. It was ridiculous and completely unneeded. Maybe I'm just one of those people who don't like to be teased for 100+ pages, but I wanted the details. I wanted to know everything that happened to the children and why the Goler's were the way they are. The authors spent too much time hitting us over the head with how isolated the land was (is), and the gap between those who lived there and 'city folk.' Yeah, I get it. There's no need to say it another 50 times. All in all, the writing was all over the place and it seemed like the authors LOVED their thesaurus and adverbs. Looks like Stephen King's *On Writing* would have been helpful to them.

That being said, the parts I did like were the court transcripts because the authors didn't write that shit. Whenever the kids were talking about their abuse and trauma or whenever the perpetrators were denying any wrong-doing were the only viable parts of the book. I also found the aftermath to be intriguing but heartbreaking. Seeing what Donna was going through after the entire court fiasco, and her never being let go of her Goler identity was awful to read about. Sadly, it's something that happens more often than not. "Once a Goler, always a Goler"

Because my experience with reading the book was negative, mostly due to the writing, I'll give the book a 2.5/5

andrew y says

Never before have I read a true crime book covering something truly horrific that doesn't just revel in the dirty details but instead takes a wide, anthropologic perspective on the community that created this horror and why it happened at all. Masterfully done, with the first part really informing everything that comes after. The power of religious institutions and human nature really can't be overstated. Great reporting, great writing, great job all-around.
