

*by criminal law authority*

S A M P E R R O N I

# brainstorm

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE  
MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF FILM  
STAR **NATALIE WOOD**

**SAMPLE CHAPTER SUMMARIES**



## FOREWORD

Nearly 40 years have passed since beloved screen star Natalie Wood drowned off the coast of Catalina Island. And there have been very few days since then that I haven't thought about what might have been. You see, my fiancé, John Payne, my 8-year-old son, Anthony, and I were aboard John's sailboat, *Capricorn*, which was moored—unbeknownst to us—across the fairway from Natalie's yacht, *Splendour*, on the night she died. We did not know it at the time, but we were “ear witnesses” to some of the last terrifying minutes of her life.

Shortly before midnight on Saturday, November 28, 1981, John and I were awakened by a woman's desperate cries for help. We could tell from her cries that she was in the water near *Splendour*, but it was too dark to see her. I wanted to jump in to find her, but John talked me out of it. In this skillfully written book, Sam Perroni explains in perfect detail our efforts to help the woman and how we thought she was being rescued by a man who said, “Hold on. We're coming to get you.” Her cries stopped a short while later.

But the end of the woman's cries for help was not the end of the tragic incident for me. It was just the beginning. I was not prepared for what I would face—simply for trying to do the right thing. When John and I learned Natalie had drowned, we called the lead detective on her case to report what we had heard that night. He never bothered to call us back. I was insulted and angered that a detective would make no effort to contact me for more information. I felt dismissed as a witness.

So, I called the *Los Angeles Times*, because I believed someone needed to know what we had heard. It was only after the *Times* published my account that I was telephoned by a crime scene investigator from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. And the same day, an anonymous threatening note was left for me at my place of business.

During the LASD's 1981 investigation into Natalie's death, no one ever took the time to talk to John or me *in person* or to determine if we were credible witnesses. In doing what good citizens ought to do, we were not only snubbed by the investigators, we were attacked by the lead detective as publicity hounds.

Those events fueled other challenges to our credibility over the years, including during the LASD's so-called "reopening" of Natalie's case in 2011, which caused me to question ever getting involved.

Since 1981, every time the subject of Natalie Wood's death comes up in public, I become uncomfortable and nervous. It was—and still is—so surreal, confusing and frightening for me. However, my willingness to write this Foreword stems not from my desire for you to believe my personal account. Instead, I seek to encourage others similarly situated to press for the truth no matter how difficult it may become.

Due to Sam's unselfish efforts, my faith in truth-seeking was restored when I read the remarkable, fact-based revelations contained in this book. Little did the occupants of *Capricorn* know that instead of being vehicles for truth, we were obstacles to overcome in an LASD cover-up. Now, as I look back through the prism of Sam's meticulous timeline, it becomes crystal clear why no one seemed interested in *what* we heard and *when* we heard it. Yet, unlike the "eyewitnesses" on *Splendour* that night, our story has never changed.

Sam's piece-by-piece, person-by-person investigation unveils lies, deceit, violence, greed, brazen arrogance, dirty cops and Hollywood scare tactics, and it finally identifies the true cause of Natalie's death and the culprit behind it. Now, Natalie can rest in peace.

—Marilyn Wayne, September 2021

## CHAPTER 2: THE “OFFICIAL” ACCOUNT

In this chapter, the author lays out the “official” account of what happened that Saturday night as told by investigating officers of the LASD’s Homicide Bureau. Thereafter, the author juxtaposes the official conclusions in the autopsy report with the official press conference by the chief pathologist, Dr. Thomas T. Noguchi; a television interview with his administrative assistant, Richard Wilson; and statements of law enforcement officers concerning the bruises, scrapes and scratches on Natalie’s body, Natalie’s intoxication level and the “accidental” manner and time of death. The author concludes the chapter with an examination of the unseemly actions and statements of Robert Wagner immediately after Natalie’s death, the general lack of cooperation and frankness of Christopher Walken and Dennis Davern, and the “hands-off” attitude of law enforcement because of the celebrities involved.

## CHAPTER 5: CORPUS DELICTI

This chapter explains the reasons why the case was never prosecuted as a circumstantial evidence second-degree murder case in 2011. The LASD detectives misunderstanding of the basic legal concept of corpus delicti — “the body of the crime.” The chapter concludes with the author highlighting that the LASD has never made any effort to discover the most fundamental evidence in any unexplained death of a spouse: motivations such as jealousy, envy, marital discord and financial gain and/or loss. As the author discovers, Robert Wagner had ample motivation in each category.

## CHAPTER 6: THE BOND GIRL

This chapter profiles actress Jill St. John and reveals the intertwined close personal relationships between Natalie and Frank Sinatra; Wagner and Natalie; Wagner and Jill St. John, Wagner’s current wife, and Sinatra and St. John before and after Natalie’s death. For the first time, the author exposes a confirmed timeline establishing Wagner began publicly seeing St. John less than two months after Natalie died. The author also describes a timeline of Wagner’s suspicious movements between October 28, 1981 and November 14, 1981, two weeks before Natalie’s death, and provides a reasonable basis for believing that Wagner was seeing another woman (most likely St. John) *before* Natalie died.