



# Deadly Secret, A: The Strange Disappearance of Kathie Durst

By Matt Birkbeck

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Robert Durst was the secretive heir to a vast, New York real estate fortune when a New York State Police detective began probing the disappearance of Durst's first wife, Kathie, who had been missing for nearly two decades. But as the investigation intensifies and receives national attention, more people die. Durst's best friend, Susan Berman, is shot and killed in Los Angeles. Another friend, a mysterious drifter named Morris Black, is dismembered and his body parts are found floating in Galveston Bay. Durst flees Texas but is found weeks later in Pennsylvania, his hair and eyebrows shaved. He's returned to Texas to stand trial for one murder while police in New York and Los Angeles try to connect him to two others. But as investigators probe deeper, they uncover new clues about Durst and uncover his terrifying secrets. Investigative journalist Matt Birkbeck, who covered the Durst case for Reader's Digest and People Magazine, tells the true story of the Durst saga in this stunning work of investigative reportage. The bestselling author of *A Beautiful Child* and the critically acclaimed *Deconstructing Sammy*, Birkbeck carves a gripping, page-turning narrative in *A Deadly Secret*. Based on first person interviews with many of the participants and access to the NYPD files into the original investigation of the disappearance of Kathie Durst, Birkbeck exposes the politics of police work, the power of an iconic family, and adds new, updated information to a True Crime classic that is sure to chill your spine.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

People magazine reporter Birkbeck offers little insight in this muddled look at Robert Durst, the eccentric New York real estate heir suspected in the 1982 disappearance of his troubled wife, the former Kathie McCormack. Although investigators had circumstantial evidence against him, including statements about long-term physical and mental abuse, Durst was never indicted. In 1999, after receiving new information, the New York State Police opened a new investigation into the case. Durst proved elusive until he was arrested in Galveston, Tex., for murdering his neighbor. After making bail, he disappeared, and police determined he'd impersonated a deaf-mute woman in order to rent apartments there and in New Orleans before finally being apprehended in Pennsylvania for shoplifting. Durst goes on trial in Texas in September, but the investigation into Kathie's disappearance remains stalled. Birkbeck is attuned to the subtle conflicts among the Durst family, Kathie's family and the police and district attorney's office, which scuttled the original inquiry. But Birkbeck's breathless prose ("Kathie was clearly on a downward spiral, a 747 that had lost its engines") almost buries these moments of clarity. He relies on unnecessary digression (such as Westchester DA Jeanine Pirro's troubles); tinny recreated dialogue; and nasty portrayals. He paints the NYPD detectives as bores, the Dursts as coldhearted robber barons and Kathie's supporters as trashy hangers-on. This voyeuristic true-crime may "dish the dirt" on Durst, but it makes for prurient reading.

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### Review

Mr. Birbeck presents a startling inside-look at the politics of policework that can place roadblocks in the place of justice. -- *R. J. Marx, Westchester County-Times*

### About the Author

Matt Birkbeck is an award-winning investigative journalist and critically acclaimed author. Birkbeck's latest book, "The Quiet Don" (Berkley/Penguin) tells the remarkable story of Mafia kingpin Russell Bufalino, who built a vast organized crime empire in the decades between Prohibition and the Carter presidency and whose power and influence reached the highest levels of government. Once described by a U.S. Senate subcommittee as "one of the most ruthless and powerful leaders of the Mafia in the United States," Bufalino's legacy left a culture of corruption that continues to this day. Birkbeck also authored "Deconstructing Sammy: Music, Money, Madness, and the Mob" (Amistad/Harper Collins 2008), which tells the riveting story of Sammy Davis Jr. and the efforts to resolve his millions in debts and restore his legacy following his death in 1990. The New York Times Book Review called Deconstructing Sammy "Gripping" and "Sensational," and the Los Angeles Times called it "Epic." A Beautiful Child (Berkley/Penguin 2004), is the international best seller which tells the remarkable, tragic story of Sharon Marshall, a brilliant young woman who was kidnapped as a toddler by Franklin Delano Floyd, a convicted felon, fugitive, and pedophile who raised her as his daughter while traveling the country using stolen identities. Birkbeck spent six hours in a Florida prison in 2003 interviewing Floyd, who had just been sentenced to death for torturing and murdering a Tampa woman. Birkbeck also authored A Deadly Secret (Berkley/Putnam 2002), which explores the investigation into Robert Durst, the heir to a New York real estate fortune accused of killing his wife and two others. Birkbeck is also the coauthor of Till Death Do Us Part (Atria/Simon & Schuster) in 2006 with Dr. Robi Ludwig, a noted psychologist who appears regularly on The Today Show and Larry King Live. Birkbeck has written for the New York Times, Reader's Digest, Rolling Stone, People Magazine, Boston Magazine, and the Philadelphia Inquirer. He is currently a senior writer at Harrison Scott Publications, covering Wall Street and financial regulatory issues in Washington,

D.C.

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