



**SEARCHING**  
FOR THE  
**LADY OF THE DUNES**

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**Searching For the Lady of the Dunes**  
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*Disclaimer:* The events of this book are true and complete to the best of the author's knowledge. Facts and conversations were collected through many hours of conversation and copious pages of written questions and answers with Lady of the Dunes documentary producer Frank Durant. Historical information was collected through painstaking research of newspaper archives and relevant books. Some names were changed to protect the identities of those who did not voluntarily agree to appear in the documentary or in this book.

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## **Introduction**

“Ruth Marie Terry,” Victor said as he ran his gloved fingers over the engraved stone, “she finally has her name back.” Christopher was crouched beside the stone placing a piece of sea glass he had found earlier alongside many other trinkets that had been left there. For nearly

fifty years this had been the resting place of the Lady of the Dunes. Nearly two years earlier Victor had begun what he thought would be just another film project. He could not have been more wrong. Through persistence, perseverance, and causing good trouble where needed Victor had created conversation and helped push the Lady of the Dunes case back to the forefront of law enforcement's minds.

Victor had returned to Provincetown for closure. He had walked miles over the desolate dunes to visit an unremarkable spot among scrub pines where a body had been found in 1974. Christopher, who had become a reliable ally and the writer of the book chronicling Victor's documentary film, had accompanied him on the journey. He had never been to the actual crime scene and needed that closure himself.

As the pair left St. Peter's Cemetery, saying goodbyes to others that had been important to the story of the Lady of the Dunes, Victor felt as though a chapter of his life was over. How did he get there though?

To understand the resolution it is important to go back to the reason why he had been there in the first place. The beginning is long before Victor had heard of the case. It is even before the moment that Ruth Marie Terry ceased to exist and the Lady of the Dunes took her place. The beginning highlights another young woman, another restless soul, taken from this earth too soon. The beginning starts with Sydney.

## **Prologue**

To Sydney -

Eighteen

Fifty-five years ago we were both eighteen, mentally and emotionally rushing to finish high school and begin our forever journey to whatever the future held for us.

That Senior Year, the 'Lunch Bunch' spent every noon across the table from each other, all talking at the same time, trading sandwiches, laughing over the latest joke, or at some girl's huge hair. No worries, no drama, and no way to know what monster was coming for you.

A lot of years have past, but not for you. I'm seventy-three and you'll forever be eighteen, as you are in that class picture I've carried in one handbag to the next for fifty-five years.

I wish we could have been seventy-three together. Rest In Peace, little one. You'll never be forgotten.

Sydney Monzon was murdered in 1968 by notorious Cape Cod serial killer Tony Costa. That is not her legacy. Her legacy is that she was a real person. She was a graduate of Nauset Regional High School in Eastham, full of life, with hopes and dreams, and friends like Elaine who still miss her and remember her.

The Lady of the Dunes was murdered in 1974 by an unknown assailant(s), and left to rot in the barren Provincetown seashore. That should not be her legacy. Like Sydney, the Lady was a real person, full of life, with hopes and dreams, and friends. Some of these friends might still be missing her to this day, wishing they could memorialize her in a beautiful way like Elaine did for Sydney.

Sydney Monzon has a grave where family and friends can at least visit and pay respects. The Lady of the Dunes has a grave, but for nearly five decades had no name, no identity. The overarching purpose of this book, and the film it is a companion to, is not so much to find the killer. It is not so much to ask why this case nears a half-century without a full resolution. No, the purpose of this book is to give the Lady of the Dunes her name back.

It will be stated repeatedly in the forthcoming pages, the Lady of the Dunes was a human, a real person, and at the very least as a human she deserved to have her birth name on her grave stone. For all that she had taken we at least could return that to her.

What follows is an in depth look into the battles fought to find resolution. What follows goes far beyond a behind the scenes look at a true crime documentary. What follows is a search for the truth. Whether that truth ruffled some feathers, was seen as inconvenient, or was welcomed by those feeling it was long overdue, it was a search for the truth nonetheless. What follows is the search for the Lady of the Dunes.

## **Chapter 1, The Story of the Lady of the Dunes**

"Have you ever heard the story of the Lady of the Dunes?" Victor Franko asked of his wife Maura.

"No, I don't think I have. Who is she?"

Victor Franko knew the name, but knew nothing of the person behind one of New England's most enduring and somber unsolved murder mysteries. He was a young filmmaker with a wife and an infant son.



Only recently Victor had spent nearly five months researching and filming his latest project, a documentary about iconic author Henry David Thoreau. He had enjoyed *Walden* as a child in school and fell in love with the idea of Thoreau after coming across a copy of Cape Cod when on a trip to Salem years later.

The subject of the *Lady of the Dunes* had been brought up to Victor in several interviews during the Thoreau documentary. He thought that it would be wise to at least look into it. On the drive home from Provincetown to Norton, Massachusetts after wrapping up the filming of the Thoreau project Victor had made up his mind to begin searching for the *Lady of the Dunes*.

Cape Cod, Massachusetts is a sandy peninsula with no shortage of pristine beaches, quaint shops, and delicious restaurants. For nearly a century and a half people have flocked there in the summer in the hopes of creating lasting memories. It has seen more than its share of beautiful moments captured by countless visitors.

Victor was no novice when it came to Cape Cod. Despite growing up an hour from Cape Cod in the small town of South Attleboro on the Rhode Island state border Victor had frequented the Cape a lot during his childhood. Summering in Dennis from the mid-1980s through 1998 afforded him ample opportunity to discover why the peninsula was a vacation destination. Whether it was attending and being kicked out of summer camp in Brewster, dropping untold amounts of quarters into the machines at the Holiday Hill arcade, or simply walking to Sea Street Beach from his family's home on Shad Hole Road, Victor had Cape Cod sand in his shoes and the sea air in his lungs.

Much like in the 1980's when Victor first stepped foot on the Cape in the 1970's Cape Cod in the summer was blissful. There was a year-round population of only 96,656 in 1970. Though summers routinely saw that number more than double the Cape was seen as safe and friendly. It was common for the younger generation to hitchhike all over the peninsula and spend the night sleeping on the cool beach sand if a suitable room was not available.

The Hippie spirit of the 1960s was still alive and well, permeating every nook and cranny of the Cape. T-shirt and bell-bottom clad people filled the streets in their Volkswagens, Toyotas, Fords, and Datsuns. There were sunny days at the beach, dinner at Thompson's Clam Bar or Mildred's Chowder House, and maybe a few drinks and dancing at the Mill Hill Club.

For all of the fun and sun, there have been several notable and disturbing crimes on the peninsula. Truro, barely a town of 1,234 in 1970 saw Tony Costa murder at least four people there between 1968-69. American fashion writer Christa Worthington was brutally raped and murdered in 2002 in her home in Truro. Hadden Clark, currently in prison for two known murders, has claimed to have murdered others and buried some of the evidence on his grandparents' property in nearby Wellfleet.

Having little to no knowledge of the *Lady of the Dunes* gave Victor Franko a relatively clean slate as to where to start looking for information. General overviews of the story were one thing. To get the true feel of the murder Victor had to be in the moment. He began

searching online newspaper archives. An in-depth article from a Boston-based newspaper from December 1974 began to give the basic facts Victor needed.

On the hot afternoon of Friday, July 26, 1974, a woman's body was found in the dunes roughly a mile east of the Race Point Ranger Station in Provincetown. A young girl had been chasing a dog when both dog and girl came upon the body among a cluster of scrub pines. After the young girl had alerted her mother both went to find someone in authority. They returned accompanied by park ranger James Hankins who was quoted in the article saying the scene was 'ghastly.'

Determined to be anywhere between 20-40 years old, 5' 6 1/2" and 145 pounds, the woman had long auburn or reddish-blond hair tied in a ponytail with rubber elastic. Her nude body was lying face-down on half of a light-green heavy cotton beach blanket, with her head rested on a pair of folded blue jeans.

Upon closer inspection, the scene was quite gruesome. The woman's hands had been removed, with one arm removed at the elbow, presumably to preclude fingerprint identification or other distinguishing markings being found. Blunt force trauma had crushed the left side of her skull. In addition, the young woman's head was nearly severed with an instrument possibly similar to a military entrenching tool though no weapon was found at the scene.

Victor found it interesting when park ranger Hankins was quoted saying 'there was no sign of a struggle, even the sand hadn't been disturbed.'

Initial coroner's reports had her death occurring anywhere from ten days to three weeks before the discovery. Attempts to identify the woman were unsuccessful at the time. In the Boston newspaper article, nearly five months after the murder, there were few leads. Two sets of footprints had been nearby, as well as a set of tire tracks located fifty feet from the body, but no suspects were seen as case solvers.

Unable to be identified she was buried at St. Peter's Cemetery in Provincetown on October 19, 1974, with a simple granite marker stating:

*Unidentified Female Body  
Found Race Point Dunes  
July 26, 1974*

The woman's identity has remained unknown for decades. Extensive dental work had been done yet had revealed no definitive answer as to who the 'Lady of the Dunes' was.

For many years the theory was that the mysterious woman was Rory Gene Kesinger. Kesinger was a young criminal. She was part of a gun-running and drug-smuggling group that had been able to elude capture from authorities in Alaska, Texas, Kansas, and California.

In May 1973 Kesinger was finally caught in Pembroke, Massachusetts. She was able to procure an officer's gun during a scuffle but was unable to use it before being cuffed. Kesinger was taken to Plymouth County Jail. On May 26, 1973, while awaiting her trial, and likely a



lengthy jail sentence, Kesinger used a smuggled hacksaw to saw through the bars of her cell. She repelled down the wall using bed sheets and escaped in a waiting car. Kesinger has never been seen again.

Kesinger was not connected to the Lady of the Dunes until 1990. Former Provincetown Detective Warren Tobias was of the belief that Kesinger was the unidentified female found in the dunes. She matches the body found in age range and most physical features. Tobias said in an interview with the Provincetown Banner in 1995 that he thought Kesinger was murdered by accomplices that feared she might turn 'snitch' and that her body was subsequently dumped in the dunes.

In 2000 the Lady of the Dunes' body was exhumed for a second time, the first being 1980, in the hopes of using DNA technology to identify her. A sample had been taken from Rory Kesinger's mother for comparison. The results seemed to rule out Kesinger as the Lady, at least according to those who did the testing and saw the results. The body was exhumed a third time in 2013 again with inconclusive results.

In May 2010 new facial recognition software allowed forensic experts from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Smithsonian Institution to create a composite of the woman's face again in the hopes of her being identified.

Victor spent hours scrolling through archival photos, news clips, and YouTube videos about the case. He was even able to find a black and white crime scene photo from the Provincetown Police Department in the public domain of Wikipedia. It was the most infamous unsolved murder on Cape Cod and one of the most well-known yet unknown crimes of the 20th century. Why was this case such a mystery?

Days were spent combing the internet for information. Victor began to form his own ideas and opinions. Despite it being a brutal and shocking crime the story of the Lady of the Dunes itself was not that uncommon.

According to the FBI's Uniformed Crime Report Data, as of 2020, there were currently 250,000 unsolved murders in the United States. That number is estimated to grow by roughly 6,000 each year. Some of the most infamous unsolved murders and murderers include the Black Dahlia, JonBenet Ramsey, Jack the Ripper, the Zodiac Killer, and others.

In the late 20th and early 21st century missing person data was far less structured and reliable. In a post from the International Commission on Missing Persons dated 2019 there are several reasons why this has been the case:

"There are few comprehensive and reliable statistics regarding the number of persons who go missing throughout the world as a result of trafficking, drug-related violence, and migration. Even the numbers of persons missing as a result of armed conflict and human rights abuses, which are more intensively monitored, are difficult to verify, given the reluctance of most states to deal honestly and effectively with this issue."

Modern forensic testing and an increase in online databases have made it increasingly possible to find and identify missing persons. This is even the case for those missing for decades. DNA testing is far more prevalent today more than 35 years since British geneticist Sir Alec Jeffreys first discovered the technique of testing at the Department of Genetics at the University of Leicester in England in 1984.

According to Hopkins Medicine.org, a proper DNA test can be performed with as little as 15-25 micrograms of high-quality material. A microgram is one-millionth of a gram. In other terms less than a small grain of sand material is necessary.

So what of the Lady of the Dunes? Her skull resides in Boston. There is enough material, and enough reason, for another DNA test. As of August 2022, there were more than twenty million people in Ancestry's database and more than twelve million people in the 23&Me database. Could one of those people be a connection to the mysterious Lady of the Dunes?

Victor's mind went beyond the Lady herself. He thought of the family whose loved one met her end on Cape Cod in 1974. They deserved closure. What if Victor could be the one to give that closure? His mind got ahead of itself with visions of major media interviews about how he was the one to crack the seemingly impossible Lady of the Dunes case. Now he just had to find that first step.

Another surprising fact in his initial research was the lack of any sort of credible documentary films about the case. Anything Victor found was filled with speculation and sensationalized.

To create something worth spending considerable time and effort on Victor needed sources. He needed people he could speak to that were much more familiar with the Lady of the Dunes than he was. Not just any sources though, he wanted reputable ones. People who could give Victor's newfound project something it could not buy: credibility.

Reading through more news articles Victor quickly amassed a list of people he thought might be helpful. He would do a little background work on them and it would ultimately lead to a dead end. It became frustrating. If he could not find a credible source to begin with then no matter his intentions his project would be seen as nothing more than a retread of other past Lady of the Dunes pieces that he felt were sensationalized.

The list of potential names to interview became filled with lines crossing most of them out. One promising lead remained though his name was James Meads Jr. His father James Sr. had worked extensively on the Lady of the Dunes case while the Chief of the Provincetown Police Department. Victor had seen his name in the first newspaper article he had read from December 1974. It was worth a shot to reach out. The only roadblock was how to contact him.

## Chapter 2, The First Step

James Meads Sr. sadly passed away in December 2011 at the age of seventy-eight. He had been the Chief of the Provincetown Police Department for twenty-two years ending his tenure in 1992. It was while reading his obituary through an online news website that Victor had seen Jimmy Jr.'s name. He wrote down all of the potential leads from the obituary, which felt a bit creepy to him, and hoped that one of them could be helpful.

In the day of everybody having caller identification on their telephones, it was not a big surprise that Victor, an unknown number to them, did not have his calls answered by many people. Victor tried them all, including calling a plumbing contractor business. He felt as though that roadblock might be insurmountable. That was until he found Nancy Meads.

Through fate or a stroke of sheer luck, Jimmy Sr.'s sister, Nancy, picked up the phone after only one ring. Being used to having his calls ignored or going to voicemail Victor was caught off guard by the gentle hushed voice that filled his ears.

She said hello in a kind manner. However, once Victor began to explain who he was and why he was calling her the tone changed.

"I'm terribly sorry to bother you," Victor said as humbly as he could, "I am working on a documentary about the Lady of the Dunes murder mystery. I know that Jimmy Meads was your brother and the former Chief of police in Provincetown." There was an audible sigh from Nancy that disheartened Victor.

"Yes he was my brother," she replied, "but I don't have any information that you haven't heard before. You might be better off contacting somebody else."

"I've been trying to find people with intimate knowledge of the story," Victor said quickly. He was speaking faster than he normally would as he knew Nancy was getting close to hanging up. "Please Ms. Meads," he continued, "I'm just trying to find out who she was and why this happened to her."

"Why me though?"

"Your brother was the closest connection to the case I have found thus far. I was hoping maybe he had shared some of his thoughts with you over the years."

"Jimmy was a great man," Nancy said firmly, "we don't want anyone coming around trying to sully his name or reputation."

Victor explained that his only goal with this project was to try his best to solve the Lady of the Dunes case. He told Nancy about Maura and their young son, about their home in Norton, Massachusetts. It was an attempt to build trust with someone who was justifiably protective of her own family's good name.

As the silence lingered on both ends of the phone line Victor began losing hope. Then as if by fate his son came tooling into the room adorably shouting gibberish. He heard a chuckle from Nancy.

"Why don't you give me a call in a few days," she said sweetly, "I think someone else needs your attention right now." The fact that she was willing to speak again was huge in Victor's mind, and his son deserved a little Daddy Time. He thanked her and set up a call for three days from then and the two parted ways.

Victor could hardly contain his excitement as he bounced his son on his knee. He had a good feeling that he had won over Nancy Meads thanks to his little boy.

Three days after their initial call Victor called Nancy Meads again. This time her tone was far more jovial. He explained a little more about his son, in an attempt perhaps to butter her up if that was necessary. It ended up not being the case. Nancy almost immediately had a piece of important information to share.

"I think the best person for you to speak with is my nephew, Jimmy's son," she said. "His name is also Jimmy. If you give me your number I'll have him call you." Victor pumped his fist in celebration.

"Thank you so much, Ms. Meads," he replied.

"You can call me Nancy. I might have a few other people for you to reach out to." Victor's eyes widened and he smiled so widely that he thought Nancy might be able to hear it through the phone.

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate this Nancy," Victor said as the brief phone call ended. Although he knew a call from Jimmy Meads Jr. was likely not imminent he could not help but stare at his phone in anticipation.

Two days passed with no phone call. On the third day after speaking with Nancy, Victor began to think maybe Jimmy was not swayed by his aunt to give a chance to some strange filmmaker. The afternoon drifted on and Victor began helping Maura prepare dinner after she had gotten home from work. It was nearing 6 pm and he was in the midst of unevenly peeling several Russet potatoes to be boiled when from the living room he heard the familiar sound of his phone ringing. He dropped the potato in his hand and ran off.

The name on the Caller ID was unfamiliar but said Provincetown, Massachusetts. It was him! Victor answered, trying to stay as calm as he could.

"Is this Victor Franko?"

"Yes, it is."

"My Aunt Nancy told me I needed to call you," he said with a hint of hesitation. "My name is Jimmy Meads Jr."

"Thank you so much for speaking with me," Victor replied. He shook his head as he sounded overly wooden in his response.

"I apologize for not getting to you sooner, but I was working all day. When I got done and checked my phone there was a message from my aunt saying I needed to speak with a film director about my Dad. So what is this about?"

"I am in the beginning of a possible project about the Lady of the Dunes murder mystery and I know your father was an important person when it came to that case." Victor could hear Jimmy sigh loudly.

"There are plenty of resources you can find online about the case and my father's involvement in it."

"I've started looking into them but I thought it would be better to have those who actually knew him speak on it."

"You know, my father was a great cop, a credit to the force and to Ptown," Jimmy said sounding like he was ready for the phone call to end. "Yet after all of his years of service, the main thing people want to remember him for is the Lady of the Dunes. I'm sorry but I will not be part of something that points the finger at my father as to why it hasn't been solved."

"That's not my intention," Victor quickly replied. He was trying to stop the inevitable hanging up of the phone. "I want to try to solve it, to find out who she was. I don't want to blame law enforcement, and definitely not your father." The line was quiet. Had Jimmy hung up during Victor's explanation? He then heard another sigh from Jimmy and breathed his own in relief.

"So how exactly can I help you then, Mr. Franko?"

"I just want as much information as I can get about your father, about his connection to the case. I am just getting familiar with the Lady of the Dunes and am looking for people to help guide me in the right direction."

"How much time do you have?" Jimmy chuckled a bit and Victor grabbed a notebook and a pen.

"As much as you'll give me." What came next was the turning point for Victor as far as the Lady of the Dunes project went.

Jimmy started with the bad news. It was highly unlikely that any law enforcement, current or former, would be willing to speak on the record about the case. Much like Jimmy Meads Sr. many law enforcement associated with the case had previously been attacked by the media.

"It's a unique case, and a tough road if you go that way Victor," Jimmy admitted. "I'm not saying don't contact past and present members of the Ptown Police. Just don't expect much cooperation."

"I understand. I mean almost fifty years and no suspects, no real leads. There's not much positive that can come from people asking about that."

"There's a reason why my family has declined every chance to participate in any story surrounding this case. It's never a glowing portrait of law enforcement and we love my father too much to put our names behind any smear campaigns."

Jimmy told a story of how in 2006 a documentary television show came asking about the Lady of the Dunes and his father's involvement. The show centered around a psychic profiler, a medium, and a paranormal investigator as they tried to solve cold cases with their unorthodox methods. The Meads Family declined involvement when they were approached.

"They didn't solve a thing on that show," Jimmy said angrily. "So you can understand why I was naturally skeptical of you when my aunt mentioned you were a documentary filmmaker, right?"

"I can understand," Victor replied, "that's why I tried to explain my motives from the start. I figured after almost fifty years I was not the first weirdo to ever contact you about the Lady of the Dunes." Jimmy had a hearty laugh and from there the conversation became more of old friends catching up rather than strangers who had just met.

Victor spent copious time scribbling notes onto a few pages of his notebook, Jimmy rattled off several names of people that needed to be contacted next. There were also several minutes-long stretches where Victor simply listened to wonderful stories being told. Jimmy spoke of Provincetown in the 1970s and how different it was from present-day. He painted such a vivid picture. Fishermen were arriving with their catch, young people dancing the night away at the affectionately nicknamed Piggy's nightclub, and families lining up thirty-deep to grab lunch at the Lobster Pot. Victor could see it as he closed his eyes. It seemed impossible that such a horrific crime as what happened to the Lady of the Dunes could have happened during such a Utopian time.

After nearly an hour on the phone, and with the tantalizing scent of dinner coming from the kitchen, Victor knew he was needed by Maura. He began to wrap up what ended up being a delightful conversation with Jimmy Meads Jr.

"Thank you so much, Jimmy," Victor said. "I know I've taken up a lot of your time and I wanted you to know how much I appreciate it and the leads you have given me."

"You're very welcome," he responded, "if you need any more information just give me a call. Good luck with your story. My aunt said she had a good feeling about you and she was right." The two ended the conversation with the intention of connecting again somewhere down the road.

Victor entered the kitchen with Maura sitting at the table halfway done with her meal and their son with half his meal on himself.

"How did it go?" Maura asked curiously. "I heard you laughing a lot more than I expected."

"It went really well," Victor replied with a wide smile. "I think I've got something here."