

Just as I was fired from a job
I had coveted almost all my life,
I learned about the murders. A
man named Christian Longo, who
was wanted for killing his wife
and three young children, had
fled to Mexico. He'd been hiding
out there, pretending to be a
writer for the *New York Times*—
pretending, in fact, to be me.

True Story

Michael Finkel



TRUE STORY:

MURDER, MEMOIR, MEA CULPA

MICHAEL FINKEL

For Jill

What is true lies between you and the idea of you—
a friction, restless, between the fact and the fiction.

—Alastair Reid, “Where Truth Lies”

CONTENTS

PART ONE: LIES

ONE

THIS IS A true story. Sometimes—pretty much all the time—I...

TWO

THERE WERE, it turned out, four murders. The first was...

THREE

THE STORY THAT resulted in my firing from the *New York Times*...

FOUR

THE LONGO FAMILY murders, according to investigators, all...

FIVE

AS ADAMA MALE stood in the tiny room in the Ivory Coast town...

SIX

WHAT I DID was take a handful of interviews and meld them...

PART TWO: MEXICO

SEVEN

BY THE TIME the Oregonian reporter called, I had already exiled...

EIGHT

A MONTH PASSED. There was no reply. Except for his lawyers, it...

NINE

YOU CAN'T SPEAK with an inmate of the Lincoln County Jail right...

TEN

AND SO WE were free to talk. For a long moment, though, there...

ELEVEN

THE LINCOLN COUNTY JAIL is a shoebox-shaped building, made of...

TWELVE

THE DECIDED YES. The letter came in the same envelope Longo...

THIRTEEN

OVER THE CARIBBEAN came the plane, low and smooth, the...

FOURTEEN

THE REAL MR.FINKEL absorbed this letter with no small measure...

FIFTEEN

DURING HIS SECOND WEEK in Mexico, Longo finally met a...

SIXTEEN

THERE WAS A TIME, just after I'd handed in my article on the...

SEVENTEEN

THE VERY DAY that Christian Michael Longo was placed on the...

PART THREE: LOVE

EIGHTEEN

THERE WAS ONE thing I wanted to get straight between Longo...

NINETEEN

IN THE FALL of 1990, when Christian Longo was sixteen years old..

TWENTY

SOON AFTER LONGO began unfolding his life story, I mailed him...

TWENTY-ONE

A FEW MONTHS after MaryJane Baker house-sat for the Longos, a...

TWENTY-TWO

FROM APRIL OF 2002, when Longo first called me, until the start...

TWENTY-THREE

TO SEAL THEIR engagement, Longo and Baker made a pact. They...

TWENTY-FOUR

ON THE FIRST OF OCTOBER, 2002, just after nine o'clock in the...

TWENTY-FIVE

WHEN LONGO LEARNED that his wife was pregnant, he created a...

TWENTY-SIX

IN THE MONTHS leading up to his trial, Longo met several times...

TWENTY-SEVEN

WITH FINAL TOUCH booming and, at the same time, collapsing,...

TWENTY-EIGHT

I HAD PLEDGED to Longo that I would be completely honorable...

TWENTY-NINE

AT THE POLICE STATION, under interrogation, Longo confessed...

PART FOUR: DEATH

THIRTY

SO THAT WAS HIS STORY. He never wrote a word about the day...

THIRTY-ONE

THE LINCOLN COUNTY COURTHOUSE and the Lincoln County...

THIRTY-TWO

SOON AFTER RETURNING TO JAIL, through the walkway, Longo...

THIRTY-THREE

THE OPENING STATEMENT for the prosecution was delivered by...

THIRTY-FOUR

AFTER BRIGGS COMPLETED his opening statement, it was the...

THIRTY-FIVE

THAT WAS THE prosecution's case. They presented seven days'...

THIRTY-SIX

A FEW MINUTES before Longo returned to the witness stand to...

THIRTY-SEVEN

AS I SAT in the courtroom, with a pen in my hand and my note book...

THIRTY-EIGHT

LONGO FINISHED TESTIFYING late in the afternoon on April...

THIRTY-NINE

I REMAINED IN the courtroom as Joe and Joy filed out, and then...

FORTY

IT WASN'T. A week later, I received a thin white envelope in the...

FORTY-ONE

WHY?...

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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