



## INTERVIEW WITH BRAD TEMPLETON

The author of *The Kingwood Killing* talks about Donald Faulk, Roland March, and what it was like being imbedded with the police

December 2003

If you were following Brad Templeton's byline in the early nineties, that last thing you would have expected when the Houston Post folded was the end of his career as a journalist. The Chronicle would have taken him in a heart-beat, but that was never an option. "I

felt a certain loyalty," he recalls. "And besides, by '95 I was already writing my first feature for *Texas Monthly*." That article, about the double murder of a Houston real estate developer and his mistress, was anthologized in the Best Crime Writing of 1995, and served as a basis for Templeton's first true crime book. It was the follow-up, however, that made his name.

In 1999, the wife of Kingwood oil executive Donald Faulk was found floating in the couple's swimming pool. She'd been stabbed to death while her husband visited family in Florida. Templeton started researching the case early on, when detectives were still trying to pin it on the recently apprehended Railroad Killer, Rafael Resendez-Ramirez. When the lead investigator retired, though, an eager newcomer named Roland March took over—and Templeton was there to follow the action. March punched a hole in Faulk's airtight alibi, then flew to Florida to apprehend him in person. Their return flight was grounded in New Orleans on the morning of September 11, 2001. As the nation reeled, March rented a car to drive Faulk back to Houston and coaxed a confession from the guilt-ridden oilman. "It was a once in a lifetime story," Templeton remembers. "And I don't think anyone involved came out of it unscathed."

*Q. What was it about "true crime" that made you give up journalism?*

I'm still a journalist. Only now I have more information and more perspective on the things I write about. There's no rush to package the story for a tight deadline. But it was a natural progression for me.

*Q. Were you a crime reporter at the Houston Post?*

I wrote a lot about crime, but I wrote about other things, too. The first book, to me, was as much about the way developers were carving up the city as it was about murder. It was an extreme example that pretty much illustrated the trend. The Donald Faulk case

was like that, too. One of those crimes that seems to stand for something.

*Q. To have broader significance.*

Exactly. I think Faulk was one of those powerful, arrogant men whose position gives them the right to do whatever they want. This was before the Enron implosion, but it was that kind of deal. He was done with his wife and it was easier for him just to kill her than to go through a messy divorce. Houston was full of guys like that in the late 90s. Still is.

*Q. Your books always start as Texas Monthly pieces.*

Yeah, I guess I've been fortunate. But I've written features for them that haven't turned into books, too. The ones I get letters about, I keep going on them. *The Kingwood Killing* was like that. A lot of people wanted to know more.

*Q. About Faulk?*

And about Roland March, the cop who put him away. When he inherited the case, they were ready to write it off as a Railroad Killer thing, even though it didn't really fit the profile. The detective in charge was well-liked, too, so there was some inertia behind that outcome. March was the new guy, full of enthusiasm, going over every detail again and again.

*Q. You got to know him pretty well?*

During the investigation some, and a lot more afterward. To me, he's the hero of the story, because if he'd let it go then Faulk would still be living his new life in Florida with the big house and the pretty young girlfriend. March's idealism is contagious. You can't spend time with the guy and not admire him. Without

giving away the book, I'll say that he went through some serious tragedy during the course of this case. My heart goes out to him.

*Q. Is he still working homicide?*

Absolutely. The Faulk case really raised his profile.

*Q. I bet your book didn't hurt, either.*

No comment.

*Q. So what was it like being imbedded with the police? You seemed to have pretty much unlimited access.*

I had a fairly good relationship back then with Clarence Bradford, who was chief of police, pretty much clearing the way for me. The original detective on the case, an old-time legend by the name of Buddy Fitzpatrick, treated me like a snot-nosed kid, but he couldn't be bothered to complain about my being there. March and I hit it off, probably because neither one of us bought the Railroad Killer connection. He's got a few years on me, but compared to Fitzpatrick we were contemporaries.

*Q. March doesn't say much about Fitzpatrick in the book.*

And he's not happy with what I said, either. There's no question he was frustrated by the work Fitzpatrick did on the case, but that wasn't something he talked about. Not with me, anyway.

*Q. What about Donald Faulk? He cooperated with the book at first, but had a change of heart, didn't he?*

Fauk has expressed what I assume is genuine remorse about the murder of his wife, but there's no question the man is an ego-maniac, and as far as he's concerned, this is *his* story. He gave some pretty candid interviews early on, including his own account of the confession, which is much more detailed than March's. When he read the *Texas Monthly* piece, though, he turned off the spigot. He thought he'd come off as a great tragic figure—he actually compares himself to Othello at one point—and seeing himself depicted as a selfish ... as resorting to murder through some kind of mid-life crisis ... Well, he wasn't flattered.

*Q. He supposedly wanted Anthony Hopkins to play him in the movie.*

There's not going to be a movie, but yeah, that's one thing he said. Maybe he was joking, but I don't think he has much sense of humor. That's one thing about Fauk that always crept me out: his sincerity.

*Q. So what's in the future for you? Another crime book?*

I have some ideas rattling around in the back of my brain. You remember Claude Caux, the drama and fencing teacher at University of Houston who stabbed his girlfriend to death and then killed himself? He admitted to the killing, but never said why. That's one that always stuck with me. I've always been fascinated by Dean Corll case, too, the way he operated so long without the police really taking notice.

*Q. This is the Candy Man from the early 70s?*

Yeah, the one in the Heights. I've been researching it off and on, but I don't know ...

*Q. How about something from outside Houston?*

This is my stomping ground, and anyway, there's enough evil in this town to keep me busy for awhile.