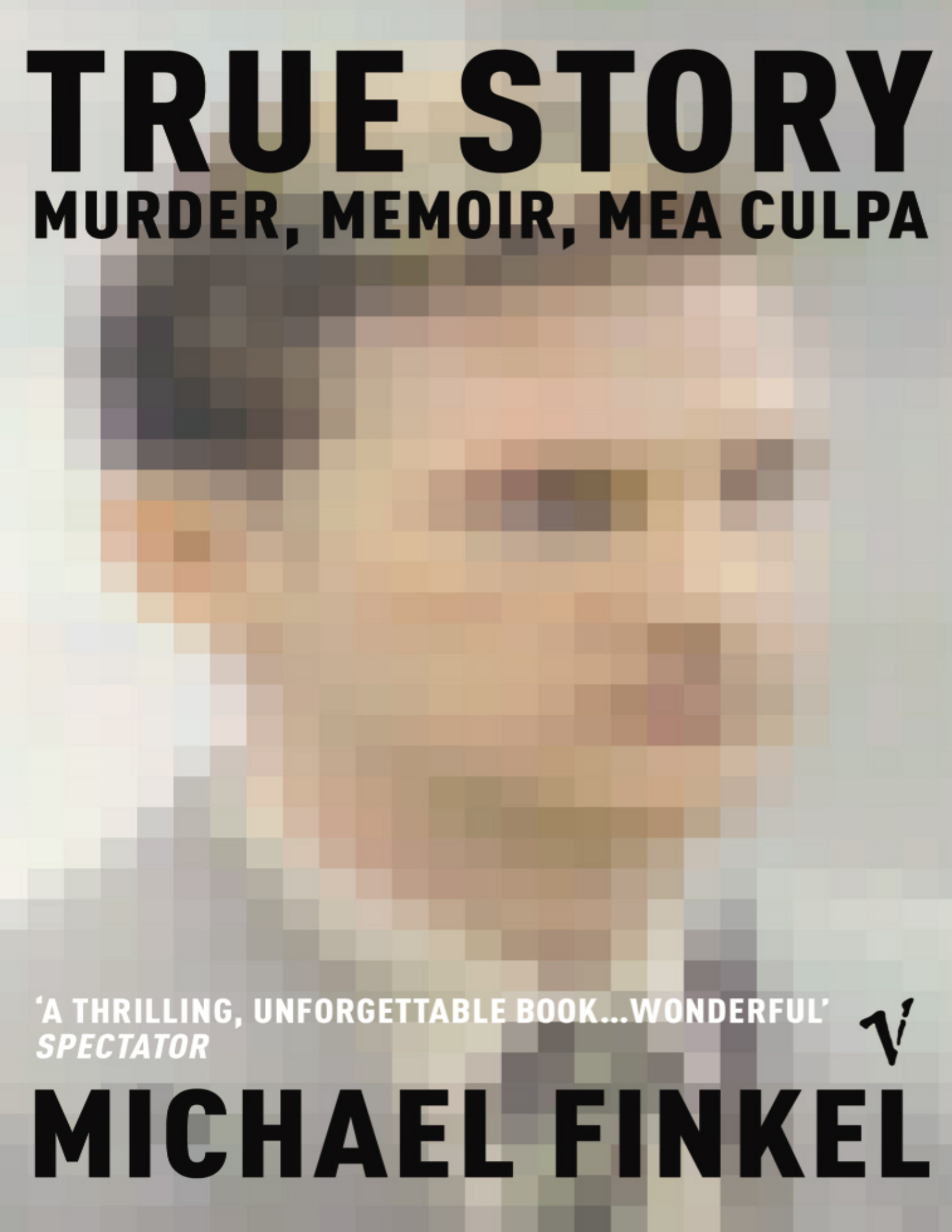
TRUE STORY

MURDER, MEMOIR, MEA CULPA



'A THRILLING, UNFORGETTABLE BOOK...WONDERFUL'
SPECTATOR

MICHAEL FINKEL

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About the Book

Michael Finkel was a top *New York Times Magazine* journalist publicly fired and disgraced for making up a composite character for a big investigative news piece about Africa. This book is about how this brilliant, high achieving journalist found himself at that point in his life. But in parallel it's also about Christian Longo, a man accused of the multiple murder of his own wife and three children.

After the deaths, Longo fled to Mexico, where he passed himself off as Michael Finkel, *New York Times* journalist. These two weird stories come together as Finkel in turn becomes fascinated (perhaps obsessed) with Longo the accused murderer, who while in prison and during his trial would talk only to Finkel. Who is using whom ...?

About the Author

A young journalist in his mid-thirties who raises chickens and grows hay at his home in Montana, Michael Finkel had a prestigious job on the New York Times Magazine until February 2002. Before that he wrote adventure-travel pieces for several publications, including *National Geographic Adventure, The Atlantic Monthly, Skiing* and *Rolling Stone*. He has recently married.

For Jill

MICHAEL FINKEL

True Story

Murder, Memoir, Mea Culpa

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

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”

PART ONE

ONE

THIS IS A true story. Sometimes—pretty much all the time—I wish that parts of this story weren't true, but the whole thing is. I feel the need to emphasize this truthfulness, right here at the start, for two reasons. The first is that a few of the coincidences in this account may seem beyond the bounds of probability, and I'd like to affirm that everything herein, to the best of my abilities, has been accurately reported: Every quote, every description, every detail was gathered by me either through personal observation, an interview, a letter, a police report, or evidence presented in a court of law. No names have been changed, no identifying specifics altered. Anything I did not feel certain of, I left out.

The second reason is painful for me to admit. The second reason I am making such an overt declaration of honesty is that, relatively recently, I was fired from one of the more prestigious journalism jobs in the world—writer for the *New York Times Magazine*—for passing off as true a story that was, instead, a deceptive blend of fact and fiction.

The firing occurred in February of 2002, soon after I was caught. The following week, on February 21, the *Times* made my dismissal public by publishing a six-paragraph article, on page A-3, under the headline EDITORS' NOTE. The article's final line announced that I would no longer work for the *New York Times*—a line that, I feared, represented the guillotining of my writing career.

Sure enough, within weeks of the appearance of the Editors' Note, I was flogged by the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune, New York* magazine, an Associated Press

report, a dozen different web sites, several European, Mexican, and South American papers, and in a four-minute report on National Public Radio. One writer described my actions as “sleazy,” “arrogant,” “offensive,” and “pernicious,” and then concluded that people like me should “burn in Journalism Hell.”

I had been informed of the contents of the Editors’ Note a few days before its publication, and I’d assumed that responses of this sort might arise. When someone in the fraternity of journalists fails, it’s important for the profession to demonstrate that it can be at least as fierce toward its own as it is toward others. So I devised a plan to shield myself. Once the note was made public, I would retreat into a kind of temporary hibernation: I would not answer my phone, or collect my mail, or check my e-mail. The Editors’ Note, I figured, would be posted on the *Times*’ online edition shortly before midnight on February 20, 2002. I live in Montana, where the local time is two hours behind New York, so I determined that I would commence my hibernation at 10 P.M.

Less than ninety minutes before the cutoff time, my phone rang. I answered. It was a newspaper reporter for the Portland *Oregonian*; his name, he said, was Matt Sabo. He asked to speak with Michael Finkel of the *New York Times*. I took a breath, steeled myself, and said, resignedly, “Well, congratulations. You’re the first to call.”

“I’m the first?” he said. “I’m surprised.”

“Yes,” I said. “You’re the first. I didn’t think anyone would call until tomorrow, after the story runs.”

“No,” he told me, “the story isn’t running until Sunday.”

“No,” I said, “it’s running tomorrow—it’s already at the presses.”

“But I’m still writing it,” he said, “so it won’t be in until Sunday.”

“What are you talking about?” I said.

“What are you talking about?” he said.

“I’m talking about the Editors’ Note,” I said. “Isn’t that what you’re talking about?”

“No,” he said. “I’m calling about the murders.”

TWO

THERE WERE, it turned out, four murders. The first was discovered on the morning of Wednesday, December 19, 2001, near the town of Waldport, Oregon, in a muddy pond about a mile inland from the Pacific Ocean. It was the body of a young boy, floating facedown a few feet off the rocky shore. A sheriff's lieutenant called to the scene estimated that the boy was between four and six years old. He had dusty blond hair and brownish green eyes. He was wearing only a pair of underpants, white with blue and green pinstripes. He weighed about fifty pounds. He hadn't been dead long, a day or two at most.

There was no identification on the body, and no obvious sign of injury. No one had filed a missing-persons report with the local police. All absentees at local kindergartens and day-care centers were accounted for. No one knew the child's name. A photograph of the dead boy, tastefully retouched—his hair tousled, his eyes shut, his lips slightly parted—was distributed to the local media, in hopes that someone could help identify him.

For a while, the police theorized that a vehicle might have run off the road. A narrow bridge, part of State Highway 34, bisects the pond, which is officially known as Lint Slough, and a city road winds about its perimeter. Maybe the rest of the boy's family, perhaps tourists, were still entombed in a sunken car. This would explain why no one had come forward to identify the body. There were no skid marks on the road, however, and no oil slick in the water, and the bridge's concrete railing was intact.

Even so, three days after the body was found, the local sheriff's office dive team performed an underwater search of the pond, hoping to discover a clue to the boy's identity. Near the cement pylons of the State Highway 34 bridge, in seven feet of water, the divers made a curious find—not a car, but a pillowcase. The pillowcase was printed with characters from the *Rugrats* television cartoon. Inside it was a large rock.

Later in the day, just after noon, the divers made another discovery. This time it was the body of a young girl. She had blond hair and pale blue eyes; she was younger than the boy, but had the same slightly upturned nose and the same rounded cheeks. She, too, was dressed only in a pair of underpants. As with the boy, her body displayed no signs of trauma.

Tied to the girl's right ankle, though, was a pillowcase, this one with a floral print. Inside the pillowcase was another large rock; the weight had held the girl's body under water. The boy, it seemed clear, had been similarly weighted, but had slipped free of his pillowcase and floated to the surface.

The discovery of a second dead child initiated the most extensive criminal investigation in the history of Lincoln County, Oregon. Every child in the two-thousand-person town of Waldport was checked on. No one was missing. Police departments throughout the West Coast were alerted about the unidentified bodies. None could provide a lead. Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation searched national databases of missing children. There were no matches.

The mood in Waldport was one of bafflement and fear. Christmas decorations were everywhere, and two children were dead, and nobody knew if a killer was living among them. A few people placed flowers and cards along the railing of the Highway 34 bridge. Once this was started, it seemed the local residents couldn't stop, and soon the

bridge was piled with bouquets of roses, handwritten notes, helium balloons, ceramic angels, and a big Barney the Dinosaur inflatable toy.

Some answers were finally provided by a woman named Denise Thompson, who had babysat the children. She had looked after the kids, Thompson told investigators, on Saturday evening, December 15, four days before the first body was found. She'd seen the photograph of the boy, which had been released to the media. Her husband contacted the sheriff's office, and shortly after the girl's body was located, the couple went to the morgue and made the identifications.

The boy, authorities announced, was named Zachery Michael Longo. He was a few weeks shy of his fifth birthday. The girl was his younger sister, Sadie Ann Longo, three and a half years old. Still missing from the family was another sister, two-year-old Madison Jeanne Longo, as well as the children's parents—MaryJane Irene Longo, thirty-four years old, and Christian Michael Longo, twenty-seven. The family lived in the town of Newport, twelve miles north of Lint Slough. The Longos were new to the region; they had moved to Oregon from Ohio three months before.

The whereabouts of the other three members of the Longo family was unknown. No one knew whether they were alive or dead. The babysitter, though, had further information. Denise Thompson told investigators that she had eaten lunch with Christian Longo on the very afternoon that his son's body was found. They'd met that Wednesday at two o'clock—a few hours after Zachery had floated to the surface of Lint Slough—at the Fred Meyer department store, where both Longo and Thompson worked. At the time, Thompson had not yet heard of the boy's discovery, and neither, apparently, had Longo.

In fact, as Thompson informed the sheriff's office, while at this lunch, Longo revealed that his wife had just left him for another man. MaryJane had taken their three children,

Longo said, and flown to Michigan. This news came as a shock to Thompson; she and her husband had become friends with the Longos and had not sensed that anything was amiss.

Officers promptly searched the Longos' last known residence, a rental condominium on Newport's Yaquina Bay. It appeared as though the family had abruptly moved out. No notice had been given to the condominium's manager; the rent was left unpaid. The condominium's furnishings were still there, but all of the family's possessions were gone, except for two stuffed animals—a Clifford the Dog and a Scooby-Doo—which were found in a closet. A television set and a microwave oven, both owned by the condominium, were missing. There was no sign of Christian Longo, his wife, or their youngest child.

Many of the Longos' personal belongings, including infant clothing, family photos, women's clothing, and a wallet containing MaryJane Longo's driver's license, were found in a nearby dumpster. In the photographs, the Longo children appeared happy and healthy.

The day after the Longos' condominium was searched, divers investigated the waters in front of the unit. It was December 27, eight days after the first body had been found. Just below a wooden ramp leading to docks where dozens of sailboats were moored, the divers retrieved two large, dark green suitcases. One of the suitcases appeared to have a bit of human hair emerging from the zipper. Inside, bent into a fetal position, was the body of MaryJane Longo. She was nude. A mixture of blood and water was seeping from her nose and mouth; later, the medical examiner determined the cause of death to be head trauma and strangulation.

The second suitcase was also opened. Inside was a pile of clothing, a five-pound scuba-diving weight, and the body of two-year-old Madison Longo. There was no blood on her body, and no obvious injury. She was wearing a frog-

patterned diaper. She’d been hit on the head and strangled, according to the medical examiner, then placed in the suitcase and dropped into the water.

THREE

THE STORY THAT resulted in my firing from the *New York Times* was supposed to be about child slavery and chocolate. It was assigned by the magazine's editors, who mailed me a package of materials from a London-based humanitarian agency called Anti-Slavery International. In the package was a videotape of a documentary entitled *Slavery*, which had been produced by a pair of highly regarded British filmmakers, Kate Blewett and Brian Woods, and shown on British television.

The film explained that about half of the world's cocoa beans—the primary ingredient in chocolate—are grown on plantations in the central valleys of the Ivory Coast, in West Africa. Many of these plantations, according to the documentary, are worked by teenage and pre-teenage boys who are trafficked in from poorer neighboring countries such as Mali, Benin, and Burkina Faso. Rather than being paid for their work, these boys are enslaved. They labor from dawn to dusk; they are scarcely fed; they are locked each night in cramped, bedless rooms; they receive no medical care and no money; they are frequently whipped.

"When you're beaten," one boy said in the film, according to the subtitles, "your clothes are taken off and your hands tied. You're thrown on the floor, and then beaten—beaten really viciously—twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon." Runaways who are captured, he added, are sometimes pummeled to death.

The documentary stated that nearly every plantation in the Ivory Coast uses slave labor. And, said the film, we who live in wealthy countries and eat chocolate bars are directly

responsible. In one scene, a young boy stared blankly into the camera and, when asked what he'd like to say to people who eat chocolate, responded, "They enjoy something I suffered to make. I worked hard for them, but saw no benefit. They are eating my flesh."

It was a powerful and haunting film, probing what was clearly an important topic. My editor told me that this was expected to be a cover article, which meant that the story would receive a considerable amount of exposure. I had recently signed an exclusive contract with the *New York Times Magazine* and had, in the past year, written three cover stories—one detailing the ill-fated voyage of a boat crowded with Haitian refugees; another about the lives of a group of Palestinian teenagers in the Gaza Strip; and a third describing the international black market in human organs.

Before signing on with the *Times*, I'd spent twelve years writing travel articles and sports stories. My main source of income, for much of my career, was *Skiing* magazine. The reception I now received for my *Times* pieces was overwhelming. The CIA invited me to its headquarters to speak about the situation in Haiti; hundreds of people, including a congressman, wrote letters in response to the Gaza story; I was given a $10,000 Livingston Award for being a "superior" young journalist. I was thirty-two years old, single and energetic and intoxicated by the attention. I agreed to write the slave story, and in June of 2001 I flew to Abidjan, the capital of the Ivory Coast.

Slave practices on the plantations had apparently been ongoing for decades, but the story, as is often the case with news cycles, had just become a hot one. Packs of journalists had descended upon the fertile valleys of the Ivory Coast; I met reporters from France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Mali. The *Chicago Sun-Times* had already run a long story, as had National Public Radio and *Newsweek*. A writer for Knight Ridder Newspapers, the second-largest newspaper

chain in the United States, had just spent several weeks in the area.

As regularly happens when a number of journalists are chasing the same story, a well-worn path had formed, complete with guides and drivers and translators. You stepped off the plane, made a phone call to a so-called fixer whose number had been passed to you by a colleague, and everything fell into place. The arrangement was symbiotic. Our work was made easier in a challenging part of the world, and for those on the media path we provided an excellent source of income. In the Ivory Coast the path led directly to the town of Daloa, in the heart of the cocoa-growing region, and once there, to a group representing the child slaves—most of whom had come from Mali—called the Malian Association of Daloa.

The association was staffed by Malians who had emigrated to the Ivory Coast, and its chief mission was to investigate and expose the abuses that befell young Malian-born laborers. I found the group's members extremely helpful. They arranged interviews for me with several teenagers who'd escaped from the cocoa plantations, and these boys told me stories of miserable working conditions, of constant hunger, of brutal beatings.

The young laborers explained how they had been tricked into coming to the Ivory Coast by traffickers promising easy, high-paying jobs. They described how they'd been held captive by the plantation owners and forced to dig holes, plant seeds, and machete weeds under a broiling sun for twelve or more hours a day, six or seven days a week. They related chilling stories about being beaten for no apparent reasons—struck with whips or sticks or bicycle chains. They told me of their harrowing escapes, running through the jungle by night, hiding by day, until they were fortunate enough to find safe harbor with the Malian Association of Daloa.

Officials with the association talked about the prevalence of slavery and called for new child-labor laws in the region and tougher enforcement of existing laws. They told me that the slaves had to either run away from the plantations or work for years before being allowed to leave. Their association, they said, was arranging buses to transport the boys who'd escaped or been released back to their families. They asked for donations to help cover the cost of these bus trips.

It was a tailor-made feature story, an easy winner. A few days after I arrived in Africa, a series of articles with titles like "The Taste of Slavery" began to appear in many Knight Ridder papers, including the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Miami Herald*, and the *San Jose Mercury News*. I read several of them on the internet from my hotel in Abidjan.

The Knight Ridder stories, while not as dramatic as those presented in the British documentary, reported that there were perhaps tens of thousands of child slaves toiling on cocoa plantations in the Ivory Coast, and that most chocolate bars were therefore tainted with slave labor. According to the articles, some of the slaves were as young as nine years old, and many were routinely and savagely beaten. A boy named Aly Diabate was featured in one of the stories. Diabate said that he was not yet twelve years old when he was tricked into working on a plantation. He said that he had labored for a year and a half and was whipped nearly every day.

The stories were superbly written, peppered with illuminating details and heart-wrenching quotes. They had such a profound impact on a U.S. congressman named Eliot Engel, a Democrat from New York, that he read much of the Aly Diabate story on the House floor. ("Aly was barely four feet tall when he was sold into slavery, and he had a hard time carrying the heavy bags of cocoa beans. 'Some of the bags were taller than me,' he said. 'It took two people to put the bag on my head. And when you didn't hurry, you

were beaten…. The beatings were a part of my life.’”) Engel eventually sponsored an amendment to a bill that included $250,000 to develop standards for labeling chocolate as slave-free. It was passed easily by the House. The authors of the Knight Ridder series later won the $10,000 Livingston Award—the same prize I had won the previous year—and also the Polk Award for international reporting, a journalism honor probably second in prestige only to a Pulitzer.

My plan was to write a piece very much like the Knight Ridder ones. But after about a week in the Ivory Coast, I began to sense that the story was not quite what it seemed. There was something unsettling, I felt, about a few of the members of the Malian Association of Daloa. For one thing, I didn’t like the way that some association officials aggressively solicited money. One vice president, Cisse Samba, proudly showed me a two-inch-thick stack of journalists’ business cards and insisted that every one had “contributed” to the association.

In journalism, there’s a hard-and-fast rule about paying people who are quoted or who provide key information: You can’t do it. But the ethics governing the treatment of ancillary helpers such as interview facilitators, cultural liaisons, or city guides are not at all clear. In order to uncover a good story, I’d learned over the years that it was often necessary to present a timely gift, or grease a few palms, or pick up a hefty bar tab. In Haiti, I’d once paid for the rental of an electric generator, a professional DJ, and several cases of beer so that I could entertain some people whose help I needed in researching my article. In Gaza, I made sure to buy all my provisions from a certain shop because I wanted permission to interview the owner’s teenage son.

Soon after I arrived in Daloa, a Malian Association vice president named Diarra Drissa spent several hours introducing me to various interview subjects, then listening

in and occasionally aiding my translator as I conducted interviews. When I said good-bye to Drissa at the end of the day, he refused to shake my hand, instead telling me, “Our business is not done.” I was uncomfortable with the situation because I considered Drissa himself a source for my story, but I wanted more introductions, so I gave him a generous tip for that part of the world—$30 in cash, as well as my raincoat, which he’d been eyeing all day.

Later that evening Drissa showed up at my hotel, furious, saying that I had not paid him nearly enough. Other journalists, he insisted, were far more generous. I wasn’t sure whether he was telling the truth, and when I refused to give him further payment, he announced that he would never work with me again, and marched off.

Lying in bed that night, I thought about the incident and replayed, in my mind, the interviews Drissa had organized. Something was off. Even with allowances for language barriers—most of the laborers spoke only Bambara, a main tribal language in Mali—many of the stories the child slaves told me sounded remarkably similar. A level of detail seemed missing. The narrations felt overly rote and unemotional for such disturbing experiences. No matter how I’d phrased the questions, the answers I heard had a faint whiff of falseness about them.

The next day, I worked with a different Malian Association official. He arranged for me to speak with a former cocoa-plantation worker named Adama Malé. The interview took place in the association’s cramped cinder-block office. At one point, Malé began describing a failed escape attempt that had occurred several months before he was finally released by the plantation’s owner.

This is what Malé said to me, as related by my translator: “I tried to escape and I was caught and beaten. When they catch you they take your clothes off and tie your hands.” At this point, Malé stood up from the wooden bench he’d been sitting on and demonstrated, pressing his wrists together in

front of him and leaning slightly forward, as though looking for something on the ground. I'd seen the same reenactment from several other boys. "I was hit with a fan belt from a motor. On my back." I asked him if he bled and he said, "Yes, there was much blood."

As he said this, I thought about the mosquito bite on my right hand. I'd been bitten days earlier, in the fleshy spot between my thumb and forefinger, and had picked at it until it bled. Though I'd rubbed antibiotic lotion on the spot, it had become infected and was now a yellowish purple mass, inflamed with pus. Such things happen in a tropical environment.

If my insignificant bite, carefully tended, appeared so bad, I could only imagine what a person would look like if his back had been ripped open by a fan belt and he had no access to medical supplies. In the *Slavery* documentary, one child described what became of such lesions. "After you were beaten," he said, "your body had cuts and wounds everywhere. Then the flies would infect the wounds, so they'd fill with pus. You had to recover while you worked."

I asked Malé, politely, if he would mind taking off his shirt. He was wearing a threadbare oxford that had likely been donated by an aid agency. He looked at me with partly hooded eyes—we were both embarrassed—and then, still standing and facing me, he began to unbutton his shirt. He was tall and painfully thin, with beautiful, delicate fingers. When he reached the last button, he pulled his arms through the sleeves and held the shirt balled up in his hands.

I asked him to please turn around. My translator translated, and Malé turned slowly around. I really wasn't surprised. His back was as smooth as marble. There was not a nick, not a scratch, not so much as the slightest shadow of a scar.

FOUR

THE LONGO FAMILY murders, according to investigators, all probably occurred shortly before dawn on Monday, December 17, 2001. There was one possible witness. A man named Dick Hoch had seen someone at the spot where the two older children were dumped. That Monday morning, at about 4:30 A.M., Hoch had been heading to the coast, on his way to work—he removes beach sand that has blown onto people's driveways—when he saw a reddish minivan stopped on the State Highway 34 bridge just outside the town of Waldport, Oregon. The van was facing east, away from the Pacific Ocean.

Hoch, who contacted the sheriff's office after he learned of the dead children, said he was concerned that the vehicle was disabled, so he pulled his pickup truck over to assist. There appeared to be a lone white male in the van, Hoch said, though he could not see clearly because the van's interior lights and headlights were both off. It was a cold morning, a few degrees above freezing, the streets glazed with rain. Hoch asked the man if he needed help, and the man said that he did not—his engine light had flashed on, he explained, and he was just checking it. Hoch drove off, and he watched through his rearview mirror as the van headed across the bridge and down the road.

Christian Longo's vehicle happened to be a maroon Pontiac Montana van. That Monday afternoon, Longo drove the van to the Fred Meyer department store and worked, according to the store's records, from 2 P.M. until 11 at night. Tuesday was his day off, and by midmorning he had

driven about a hundred miles north, to the Portland outskirts.

In the months before the murders, the Longo family had lived a rather chaotic existence—they'd moved from a rental house to a hotel room to another hotel room to a condo in just the past few weeks. Before that, for a fortnight, they'd lived in a tent, and before that, in an old warehouse. The van was one of the family's few constants, and its interior was a jumbled collage of their lives. Later, when officers enumerated every item in the vehicle on search-warrant forms, the list required twelve pages. There was a scooter, a miniature car, a stuffed animal, a sippy cup. There were videotapes—*Toy Story 2*; *Time for Counting; Cartoon Crack-Ups*—and, installed over the van's rear seats, a pull-down video monitor. There was camping gear, sunscreen, diet pills, lipstick. There was a children's book, *Zoo Book*, and an adult book, a Lisa Scottoline legal thriller entitled, curiously, *Running from the Law*.

Longo drove his van to the Town & Country Dodge dealership, in the Portland suburb of Wilsonville. He parked in the dealership's outdoor lot and pulled the license plate out of the metal frame at the rear of his van. The plate, from Michigan, where Longo and his family had lived for several years, read KIDVAN. Longo also grabbed his tool kit, his cell phone, and a folder of personal documents, then entered one of Town & Country's large indoor showrooms.

Some of the vehicles in the showroom had keys inside them. Many also had legal plates. A salesman approached, but Longo waved him away, saying that he didn't need any help. The salesman wandered into another showroom. Earlier in his life, Longo had owned a green Dodge Durango, and here in the Town & Country showroom was another green Durango, nearly new. Longo climbed inside. The keys were already in the ignition. It was unbelievably simple. He started the car and drove it over the weight-sensitive trigger on the showroom floor, which activated

the automatic garage door. The door opened, and Longo drove out. Nobody saw him.

When employees of Town & Country noticed that the Durango was missing, they figured a customer was merely taking it for a test drive. Not until the following morning—Wednesday, December 19, the same day Zachery Longo's body was pulled from Lint Slough—did they contact the police.

After stealing the car, Longo drove back down to the waterfront condominium he was renting in Newport. That evening he went to a Christmas party. The gathering was held at an Italian restaurant across Highway 101 from the Fred Meyer department store. It was hosted by the staff of Fred Meyer's in-store Starbucks, where Longo had worked until his promotion to the home-furnishings section three weeks before. For the party's gift exchange, Longo brought along an unopened bottle of his wife's perfume.

The next day, Wednesday, Longo arrived at work on time for the 5 A.M. shift. He informed the home-furnishings manager, Scott Tyler, that his wife and kids had moved away, and that he could now work whatever hours Tyler needed. This was also the day he had lunch with Denise Thompson and told her that MaryJane and the children had gone to Michigan.

Longo worked the same shift, 5 A.M. to 2 P.M., on Thursday. On Friday, he was scheduled for a late shift that started at three in the afternoon. Longo was usually punctual, so when three o'clock passed and he hadn't come in, his manager tried to call him at home. Nobody answered, and Longo did not show up at all.

The desire to escape Newport, Longo later recounted, had come upon him after work on Thursday, while he was at the gym. He'd just arrived there when the radio station on the gym's sound system announced that a young boy had been found dead in the water. The station gave the boy's description and said that he had not been identified.

As soon as Longo heard this, he felt nauseous and hurried to the bathroom. He splashed water on his face until he settled down. Then he played volleyball for two hours with a few friends from work.

He didn't sleep much that night—he stayed in the condominium and drank a couple of beers and eventually dozed on the couch. Early the next morning, Longo packed the stolen Durango with most of his belongings, as well as the television and microwave that came with the condo, and drove out of town. He wasn't sure where he was going, he later explained, except that it had to be where no one would recognize him. He drove east, toward Interstate 5, and about fifty miles from Newport he realized it was a Friday—payday at the Fred Meyer. He turned around, drove back to Newport, picked up his $230 check, cashed it at the store, and left again.

Longo returned to the interstate. He didn't know whether to go north, toward Seattle, or south, toward San Francisco. He took the first on-ramp he came to. It was south. The farther he got from Newport, he later said, the better he felt, so he kept driving, past the Cascade Mountains and the Klamath National Forest and the Sacramento Valley. He drove six hundred miles, then exited the highway in Sacramento. He parked in a residential area and slept in the Durango.

Longo reached San Francisco around noon on Saturday, just about the time that divers found his daughter Sadie at the bottom of Lint Slough. He stopped by a bookstore and bought a guidebook to inexpensive San Francisco hotels and another on local campgrounds. He decided to take a room for two nights, at $22 a night, at the Fort Mason Youth Hostel, adjacent to the Marina District. He hadn't eaten a full meal in two days, so he walked to a Safeway and purchased bagels, ramen noodles, cheddar cheese, and Triscuits, then ate them in the hostel's kitchen.

He'd spent nearly half his paycheck on gasoline during the drive down, and he had nothing in the bank. In a matter of days, he'd be out of money. The next morning—Sunday, December 23—he filled out a job application at the Starbucks on Union Street. By this time, Denise Thompson had spoken with sheriff's officers in Newport and had identified the bodies, and Longo was a murder suspect, pursued by federal authorities.

The Starbucks application he completed in San Francisco was later recovered by the FBI. On it, Longo wrote his name, accurately, as Chris M. Longo and said that his social security number was 315-02-4297, which is correct except for the last digit. He listed as a reference his manager at the Fred Meyer Starbucks. For callbacks, he left his cell-phone number. The manager of the Union Street Starbucks said he'd likely have a job for Longo in a few days.

Back at the hostel, Longo checked the news online. He pulled up the web site of the *Oregonian* and saw a headline about the two bodies found in Lint Slough. Longo clicked on the story, and up came a retouched photo of his son.

Longo fled the hostel, climbed into the Durango, and drove away. He parked the car and, he later said, cried as hard as he'd ever cried in his life. He decided that he couldn't return to the hostel—he didn't want to be around people. Instead, he drove to a beach by the Presidio, in the shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge. He sat in his car, gathering his nerve. His intention was to walk to the center of the bridge and jump off. He sat in the car for hours, envisioning stepping onto the bridge. But he couldn't do it. He never even got out of the car.

That night, he parked the Durango on a San Francisco side street. He hung towels and shirts over the windows, crawled into the backseat, covered himself with his leather jacket, and tried to sleep. In the morning, he used the bathroom at Golden Gate Park, then drove to the San Francisco Zoo and sat for most of the day in a secluded

spot in the Africa section. That evening, Christmas Eve, he parked for the night on a steeply sloped street. He could hear, he later said, the sounds of a Christmas party emanating from an apartment above him—people playing the piano, people singing carols.

On Christmas Day, a Tuesday, Longo left the Durango and began walking. Nearly every place was closed, except a movie theater. He bought a ticket and watched *Ali*. When it was over, he didn't want to leave, so he stayed and watched it again. Then he walked some more. A Walgreens drugstore was open, so he went in and wandered aimlessly through the aisles. Then he walked again. At a Chinese restaurant, he ordered a noodle dish to go and walked back to his car and ate it there.

He drove around the city on Wednesday and eventually found himself at a park called Lands End. He followed a trail for a few miles until he reached a set of cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. He sat with his feet dangling from the edge and again wanted to end his life. He stood up, backed away a few feet, and then ran to the lip of the cliff, but he couldn't fling himself off.

The next day—Thursday, December 27—FBI agents got the break they were hoping for. That morning, the manager of the Union Street Starbucks decided to check the reference on Longo's employment application. The manager called the Newport Fred Meyer, and an employee there, upon hearing Longo's name, contacted the police. The police notified the FBI. The FBI, with the assistance of Starbucks officials, swiftly devised a sting operation.

In the meantime, Longo had determined that he needed to leave the United States. Wednesday afternoon, the day before the FBI learned of his Starbucks application, he drove to a Kinko's and used their internet service to book a flight to Cancún, Mexico, leaving late that night and returning a month later. He made the reservation under his