

Book on Twitchell long project

Correspondence began with phone call from killer

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It started with a phone call.

Steve Lillebuen, a former Edmonton Journal reporter, had just arrived home from a dental appointment when his cellphone rang. He answered and heard an unfamiliar voice introduce himself as Mark.

"He knew and I knew that he didn't need to say his last name," said Lillebuen, 32.

Lillebuen's book about the Mark Twitchell case, *The Devil's Cinema*, is set for re-release Tuesday. Lillebuen has followed the Internet-luring case since the story broke in 2008, when he was a crime reporter at the Journal.



CREDIT: Bruce Edwards, Edmonton Journal

Author Steve Lillebuen became interested in the Twitchell case as a crime reporter for the Journal in 2008.

Over roughly three years, Lillebuen worked to weave together interviews and research into the more-than-300-page book, which includes exclusive interviews and correspondence with Twitchell.

Twitchell called Lillebuen a few months before his case went to trial. Twitchell heard about the book through friends and family that Lillebuen had contacted.

After negotiating some ground rules - including an agreement from Twitchell that he would have no editorial control of the book - the pair exchanged more than 350 pages of letters and some phone calls. Lillebuen also visited Twitchell while he was in the Edmonton Remand Centre.

Twitchell was convicted of the first-degree murder of Johnny Altinger on April 12, 2011, after a three-week trial that attracted widespread media coverage, including a feature-length American news segment. Altinger, 38, a quiet oilfield industry worker, was lured to his death by Twitchell when he posed as a woman looking on a dating website.

Twitchell kept a manuscript on his computer called *SKconfessions*, a document that was deemed to be a largely true account of his plan to kill and what he did after the murder.

Twitchell had also made a short film that loosely mirrored some of his real-life actions. The film featured a lead character who posed as a woman online to lure men to his home and kill them. Like the character in his movie, Twitchell used Altinger's Facebook page to send messages to friends to imply that Altinger had left Edmonton with a new girlfriend.

Lillebuen said he was cautious with the information Twitchell gave him in interviews and letters.

He included in the book only information from Twitchell that could be verified by other sources.

While there were some details Lillebuen chose to leave out because he couldn't confirm them with outside sources, he said he was surprised by how candid and thorough Twitchell was. Twitchell would sometimes respond to a simple question with a three or four-page letter.

Lillebuen's in-person interviews with Twitchell also revealed an energetic, funny and charismatic side of the convicted murderer.

"I was really expecting this terrifying, frightening fellow," Lillebuen said. "I was really surprised that there was this other side of him that existed. - While he is charming, there is something very off about him as well."

Lillebuen used the correspondence to show how Twitchell went from a husband and father working sales jobs to the prime suspect in an outrageous murder case.

"On the one Halloween, he's basically at the top of the world," Lillebuen said. "He's just won this Halloween costume competition, his wife is pregnant, his film career is taking off - everything is on the up for Mark Twitchell. Within 12 months, he's charged with first-degree murder."

Twitchell and his ex-wife, Jess, have one daughter.

The Devil's Cinema also features exclusive interviews with friends and associates of Twitchell, including prison pen pals.

Lillebuen will be speaking about The Devil's Cinema (hardcover, \$29.99) and his correspondence with Twitchell at a Lit Fest event at the Ga rneau Theatre on Wednesday.

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