



Stolen from the Garden: The Kidnapping of Virginia Piper

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On a July afternoon in 1972, two masked men waving guns abducted forty-nine-year-old Virginia Piper from the garden of her lakeside home in Orono, Minnesota. After her husband, a prominent investment banker, paid a \$1 million ransom, an anonymous caller directed the FBI to a thickly wooded section of a northern Minnesota state park. There, two days after her nightmare began, Ginny Piper—chained to a tree, filthy and exhausted, but physically unharmed—awaited her rescuers. The intensely private couple lived through a media firestorm. Both Bobby and Ginny Piper herself—naturally reserved and surprisingly composed in the aftermath of her ordeal—were subject to FBI scrutiny in the largest kidnap-for-ransom case in bureau annals. When two career criminals were finally indicted five years after the abduction, the Pipers again took center stage in two long trials before a jury's verdict made headlines across the nation. Drawing on closely held government documents and exclusive interviews with family members, investigators, suspects, lawyers, and others intimately connected to the case, William Swanson provides the first comprehensive account of the sensational Piper kidnapping and its long, eventful aftermath—and makes a case for the most plausible explanation for what really happened on that July afternoon.

William Swanson is the author of *Dial M: The Murder of Carol Thompson* and *Black White Blue: The Assassination of Patrolman Sackett*.

Stolen from the Garden: The Kidnapping of Virginia Piper Details

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From Reader Review Stolen from the Garden: The Kidnapping of Virginia Piper for online ebook

Karl Jorgenson says

A dry, journalistic recounting of the 1972 kidnapping of socialite Virginia Piper, the ransom, the FBI investigation, the suspects, the two trials, and the aftermath. No plot spoiler possible here: it seems likely that the FBI never solved the case. In any event, the ransom money was not recovered, indicating at least one kidnapper got away. More fascinating for the enduring mystery than for the mechanics of the crime.

Ivy Sinclair says

This was the selection for my neighborhood book club for November. I do enjoy a good true crime read on occasion, but it is not my go-to genre or even overall category (I read primarily fiction.) So my perspective might be a little skewed based on these factors.

Pros (What I Liked)

- It's set in Minnesota, where I live. I've actually read a few things in the last couple of months around crime in Minnesota and continue to be surprised at how much a criminal history such a seemingly innocuous state has. But, as the book mentions, the Piper family, who was the focus on this book, was actually only middle of the road wealthy considering all of the other well-to-do families here.
- It's interesting to see how the payment of the ransom played out considering the technology of the day.
- I was most intrigued by the narrative around the two trials. It's not a surprise in my mind that given the strength of the evidence presented (or really lack-thereof), the kidnapping was never solved.

Cons (What I didn't Like)

- The author wasn't consistent in their POV or use of present/past tense. That made the narrative extremely difficult to read.
- The pacing was off. Some parts seemed to take forever, while others seemed rushed.
- Lots of extraneous details were included that I ended up skimming.
- If as the reader we're supposed to be invested in the Piper family as our "main characters", then a good chunk of the latter half of the book where it went through the whole rooster of "where are they now?" detail on supporting characters is just extra fluff.

In the end, this one was pretty forgettable for me.

Nicola Mansfield says

Something about the description of this book piqued my interest, though I'm not sure what. I read a lot of true crime but this is the first time the case has not been about a serial killer or at least a murder. No. Here we have a fairly simple crime. A wealthy socialite is kidnapped in the 70s, a ransom note for \$1,000,000 is sent, the money delivered and the woman found, scared and disheveled but unharmed. What follows however is a very long and twisting case. It goes cold, until 7 years later an arrest is finally made, but then that is when all the strangest parts of all happen. I enjoyed the book well. It's written in an easy to read style, The author is

more than respectful to the victim and her family. Included are pages of actual court case testimony and a few pictures. I had never heard of this case before; probably because many high-profile kidnappings happened during this time period (including Patty Hearst). But this is an absorbing and interesting case and Swanson has presented it in a compelling read.

Vicky says

This is the true story of the kidnapping of Virginia Piper. Mrs. Piper, the wife of the head of the Minneapolis MN Piper Jaffray Hopwood investment firm was kidnapped from their home on Lake Minnetonka in the summer of 1972. The kidnappers demanded a one million dollar ransom, which was a US record at the time. 1972 was the year I graduated from the University of Minnesota (in Minneapolis), which added a great deal of interest for me. The abduction was nationwide news and of course got a great deal of press coverage in Minnesota. I am familiar with Lake Minnetonka, a popular lake midst wealthy suburbs, and I recognized many of the roads and towns mentioned during the description of the kidnappers flight with Mrs. Piper as well as the convoluted trip the kidnappers set her husband on to deliver the ransom money. William Swanson's description of the abduction and the ensuing events does a great job recreating the tense couple of days that Virginia Piper endured after she was abducted to a northern Minnesota state park, held in the woods chained to a tree waiting for rescue.

The actual abduction and release of Virginia Piper is only the beginning of the story. The book does a great job describing the hunt for the kidnappers, the ultimate arrest of two suspects a number of years later, and the judicial process that followed. And it also does a great describing the lasting emotional toll the abduction had on Virginia and her family.

This book will appeal to fans of true crime stories, but I think even crime fiction fans will like it.

Kaelyn Carter says

Stolen from the Garden by William Swanson

In the book *Stolen from the Garden*, William Swanson does an outstanding job of describing the kidnapping of 49-year-old Virginia Piper. William Swanson created a book full of interesting events which are based on a true story. His description of the crime allows readers to gain a detailed perspective of this true story.

Virginia Piper (also known as Ginny) is a well-known socialite in her hometown within Minnesota. Her husband, Harry Piper, is a rich man who is the chairman and chief executive officer of the very successful Piper, Jaffray & Hopwood Inc., a regional stock brokerage with offices in ten states. The Pipers have a lot of money, and everyone around them knows it. One day, Virginia Piper is outside of her lovely house working in her garden. She is then abducted from her house after her maids are frightened from the 2 men wearing black masks over their faces. Virginia Piper is taken at gunpoint for ransom, but the Piper family has yet to find out what happened to their lovely Virginia. Once Harry Piper gets the news, he finds that there's a letter that was left by the kidnappers. The letter has all the instructions on how to receive Mrs. Piper. Through the novel, Harry Piper follows the instructions to reach his wife again. As you continue throughout the novel,

you will easily find that it teaches a strong lesson about self-determination, faith, and helping one another.

Anyone who likes a good mystery or a crime story will very much enjoy *Stolen from the Garden*. The novel provides the reader with the image of the crime by including strong detail and even pictures from the crime itself, which I really enjoyed. What I didn't like so much wasn't the book itself, but what the story was based on. Sadly, the story isn't unique because kidnappings have happened many times before. Knowing that the novel is a true story is a very powerful element. As this story is true, it can help to learn new lessons such as having faith, self-determination, and helping one another. I would definitely recommend this book.

Jackie Scott says

This book revealed how people in Minnesota were affected by this kidnapping. I did not remember this event, so learning about it was interesting, especially because I don't live too far away from there.

Ryan McGuire Grimes says

Swanson always does a great job of inviting readers in to a fascinating criminal case in Minnesota history. The Piper kidnapping will likely never be solved, which is disappointing, but the book is a fascinating exploration of what happened, the government's case, and a few theories of viable culprits.

Jennifer DeMeuse says

I enjoyed reading this book, in part because I know David Piper, Virginia's son. It was interesting/frustrating to follow the investigation. In the end the result was disappointing. However, it was an eye opener to some of life's realities. It was an easy and quick read.

Amy Schrecengost says

To be fair, I didn't read the whole book. I decided I didn't want to waste any more of my time after reading the first chapter. The writing was terrible. I just couldn't make myself continue. I was excited to read this book as I work at the Virginia Piper Cancer Institute, and wanted to learn more about the namesake. What a bummer.

Meghan Byrnes says

Though not well written, I think this is worth a read if you enjoy true crime and mystery.

Suzanne says

This is probably more interesting to people who are from the area and may remember the headlines.

Linda Zelig says

Lots of local color and personalities--here's the complete story in chronological order with the author's access to files and documents never before revealed. This fleshes out the story considerably. I still remember this news as huge!

Bre says

4.5 stars

This was really interesting, well researched, and well written. I had never heard of this case prior to picking up this book, and I find it fascinating. And frustrating.

Linda Spyhalski says

Being from Minneapolis I picked this up at a Half Price Book Store. I remember hearing of the kidnapping of Virginia Piper but never knew the details and found this so interesting. I would recommend it to other readers.

Rachael says

This book addresses my favorite topics: true crime, Minnesota, and mystery.

Swanson recounts the 1972 kidnapping of Virginia Piper, whom I will not describe as a "socialite." (Read the book and you'll know why). Piper was a victim because her husband, Bobby Piper, had some money as a partner of the Piper, Jaffray financial firm. She was held for a \$1 million ransom. When it was paid a day later, she was released.

Even though two men were convicted of the crime, the convictions were reversed on appeal. To this day, no one is certain who did the kidnapping. The point of Swanson's book is not to solve the crime (though he posits his own theory at the end). Instead, Swanson focuses on the facts of the case and the lengths to which the FBI, police, and Piper's family went to try to solve the mystery.

As such, readers are given a captivating narrative not only of the crime, but also of the journey people have taken to figure out what happened. One of the Piper's sons in particular did a lot of searching for answers, which Swanson describes.

Swanson has written other books that focus on Minnesota crime. His expertise as a narrative nonfiction

crime writer is evident. This well-written book should satisfy fans of true crime.
