

# It Gave Everybody Something To Do

By Louise Thoresen  
With E. M. Nathanson.  
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By RICHARD ELMAN

Louise Thoresen writes about 10 years of courtship, marriage, child-rearing and deterioration with a wealthy, sadistic, murderous lunatic. William Thoresen III was never really the misunderstood kid he played so often; after age 13 everybody in his life seemed to know he was as mean as this memoir, devoid of any redeeming social or psychological insights. Largely self-justifying, pseudo-remorseful, his widow (and executioner) remains just as insensi-

Richard Elman's novels include "An Education in Blood."

tive to who he and she were together and what was going on between them from day to day as she must have been during all their years together. "Despite everything rotten he'd been responsible for in my life," she writes here, "I loved him deeply."

Intimidated by William's accounts of an unhappy childhood and manipulated by the prospects of a million-dollar family inheritance, as well as William's never-ending quarrel with his Kenilworth, Ill., parents, she accepted every new humiliation.

Louise became a practiced petty thief, allowed herself to be set up for police arrests, provided alibis and shelter for William, and participated in his childish rampages against the family's property and respectability. Eventually she was a co-conspirator in a nationwide illegal arms purchasing tear during which over 70 tons of munitions were accumulated in the Thoresens' San Francisco mansion. One morning, about three-and-a-half years ago, in their cluttered Fresno ranch house, Louise was afraid for her life. William wanted to kill her. She reached for his pistol and shot and killed him. She

was tried and acquitted of murder, and, when released, dictated this book to the author of "The Dirty Dozen."

Married couples almost always deserve each other, but William Thoresen was unusually angry, a loner, hostile and destructive—and rather open about it, too. Never mind that before he was 21 he had gone through a number of boarding schools and mental institutions, that he never learned a trade or acquired an education, that he regularly smashed up cars, terrorized young women and fought with authority. William apparently married Louise to escape commitment by his family to a state mental institution.

Later, William became increasingly nomadic, a remittance man and a parasite. Moving back and forth from Chicago to Phoenix to Tucson (with frequent sorties to Los Angeles and San Francisco). William got his kicks from drugs and setting off explosives; he turned to LSD and other women. He stole more than a half a million dollars worth of securities in a duffle bag from his parents' cellar vault because, he claimed, it was his legacy and he had been cheated out of at least

another half-million.

To compensate for this, William conned his younger brother into writing a will making him his sole heir for at least another million. While alleged to be abroad, he wrote a contract for his brother's murder with a semiprofessional chum; eventually he murdered that chum, too. Though Louise was forced to participate in almost all of these schemes without really knowing what was going on, she devotedly hung in there. After all, she says, she had a son, and it may also be true that a million and a half bucks is a lot of money to a kid from a working-class Chicago family.

In fact, it was only after William had depleted his various legacies and was strung out on drugs and a number of felony charges, had slipped Louise LSD and forced her to undergo rape and a miserable abortion, and had also threatened to murder her for being unfaithful to him, that she finally left him to file for divorce. But she was easily cajoled back, she claims, because he needed her. William did. This time he beat her with his fists, stabbed her with knives, razor-hacked her,

forced her to compose her own suicide notes to her family and friends, and then urged on her an overdose of Seconal. Came the night, after a whole week of such torture, when he confessed all his murders, as well as that he was trying to get her, too; also that he was hoping for a reconciliation with his family so that they would take care of him again. Louise woke up in the morning ready to kill somebody. I guess she really was in touch, at last, with how scared to death she was of William.

It's hard to stay with the persistent viciousness, squalor and cruelty of this account. Stripped of its headline-story appeal, on the periphery of the Haight-Ashbury scene of the sixties, it's a not-too-distinguished memoir of a couple of rather gloomy, angry, depressed, not very bright kids, putting each other on with words like love and devotion until "death do us part." But, as told in a lot of flattened-out "as told to" language by this dreary woman, it leaves one wondering if words like anger and rage and manipulation are really satisfactory explanations for what transpired between William and Louise. ■

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