

Dirty 'cover-up' of a murder

Award-winning author delves into the 1970s death of Shirley Finn, writes Elaine Fry

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Award-winning TV journalist and author Juliet Wills was driven by moral outrage to write about the murder of Shirley Finn, the brothel madam, shot dead in the grounds of the Royal Perth Golf Club in June, 1975.



Finn's execution in such a public place remains unexplained, those responsible for her death remain unidentified. But Wills' extensive research into the case has uncovered persuasive evidence of a "state-sanctioned" killing, indicating that Finn was a problem to certain powerful and influential figures who wanted her dead and who were behind the seeming lack of any genuine attempt to investigate her murder.

"All the great cities of the world have had episodes in their past that are dark," Wills says as she explains why Finn's story is so important to WA. "We should try and embrace our stories, even if they are dark."

Wills says she was originally going to call her book *The Festering Lily*, after Shakespeare's "But if that flower with base infection meet . . . for sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds, lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds".

"The whole point of this story being that the festering lily here is our entire justice system, which was so compromised by the people implicated in this crime being at such significant levels within that system," she says. "It was corruption of the worst possible kind. Witnesses were threatened and bashed, people in this town were living in fear. The wrongs

and injustices of this case are just so multi-layered . . .”

Dirty Girl is a mesmerising read, the truth being more outrageously evil than any fiction. Its in-depth expose of Perth’s insalubrious side will shock many unaware of such an existence. Kipling’s sentiment, “Nothing is ever settled until it is settled right,” is echoed by Christie’s Miss Marple in her pursuit of murderers and now by Wills, paying tribute to those who have repeatedly tried to do the right thing at great personal cost. “We need to learn from mistakes, from the past and aspire to be a better society so that these mistakes can’t happen again,” she says. “So that brave individuals like Spike Daniels and Archie Marshall can be acknowledged. They went up against the toughest, most corrupt bullies in town, to stand up for the rest of us and to say, ‘This is wrong.’

“I wish society would care enough to acknowledge these good people. If we are not a just society, if you bury your head in the sand, then the very fundamentals that have been fought for over time can be put at risk.”

Wills acknowledges the courage of such brave individuals who want history to be put right, despite having their lives made miserable by some “unbelievably unscrupulous methods”, as documented in her book. “There are new witnesses who have emerged in the past few years,” she says. “They had needed to keep their silence because of a genuine threat to their lives and safety.” With one particular individual in mind, she says, “Those who wanted history to be righted, even if they were involved, were better men than those who ruled by deceit and kept their secrets to the grave, destroying good men along the way.”

Dirty Girl is an exceptional read. The truth that evil flourishes when good men do nothing will haunt those who know that the past is never irrelevant to the present.

Dirty Girl is published by Fontaine Press (\$30).

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