



GREGG OLSEN

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author of

IF YOU TELL

**THE
AMISH
WIFE**

UNRAVELING THE LIES, SECRETS,
AND CONSPIRACY THAT LET
A KILLER GO FREE

PRAISE FOR GREGG OLSEN

If You Tell

“This riveting account will leave readers questioning every odd relative they’ve known.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“Olsen presents the story chronologically and in a simple, straightforward style, which works well: it is chilling enough as is.”

—*Booklist*

“An unsettling stunner about sibling love, courage, and resilience.”

—*People* magazine (Book of the Week)

“*If You Tell* accomplishes what it sets out to do. The result is a compelling portrait of terror and a powerfully honest, yet still sensitive, look at survival.”

—*Bookreporter*

“This disturbing book recounts the unimaginable abuse and torture three sisters Nikki, Sami, and Tori Knotek endured from their own mother, Shelly . . . The strong bond they form to survive and defy their mother’s sadistic tendencies is inspiring.”

—*BuzzFeed*

“A true crime tour de force.”

—Steve Jackson, *New York Times* bestselling author of *No Stone Unturned*

“Even the most devoted true crime reader will be shocked by the maddening and mind-boggling acts of horror that Gregg Olsen chronicles in

this book. Olsen has done it again, giving readers a glimpse into a murderous duo that's so chilling, it will have your head spinning. I could not put this book down!"

—Aphrodite Jones, *New York Times* bestselling author

"A suspenseful, horrific, and yet fascinating character study of an incredibly dysfunctional and dangerous family by Gregg Olsen, one of today's true crime masters."

—Caitlin Rother, *New York Times* bestselling author

"There's only one writer who can tell such an intensely horrifying, psychotic tale of unspeakable abuse, grotesque torture, and horrendous serial murder with grace, sensitivity, and class . . . A riveting, taut, real-life psychological suspense thrill ride . . . All at once compelling and original, Gregg Olsen's *If You Tell* is an instant true crime classic."

—M. William Phelps, *New York Times* bestselling author

"We all start life with immense promise, but in our first minute, we cannot know who'll ultimately have the greatest impact on our lives, for better or worse. Here, Gregg Olsen—the heir apparent to legendary crime writers Jack Olsen and Ann Rule—explores the dark side of that question in his usual chilling, heartbreaking prose. Superb and creepy storytelling from a true crime master."

—Ron Franscell, author of *Alice & Gerald: A Homicidal Love Story*

"A master of true crime returns with a vengeance. After a decade detour into novels, Gregg Olsen is back with a dark tale of nonfiction from the Pacific Northwest that will keep you awake long after the lights have gone out. The monster at the heart of *If You Tell* is not your typical boogeyman, not some wandering drifter or man in a van. No. In fact, they called her . . . mother. And yet this story is about hope and renewal in the face of evil and how three sisters can find the goodness in the world after surviving the worst it has to offer. Classic true crime in the tradition of *In Cold Blood* and *The Stranger Beside Me*."

—James Renner, author of *True Crime Addict*

“This nightmare walked on two legs and some of her victims called her mom. In *If You Tell*, Gregg Olsen documents the horrific mental and physical torture Shelly Knotek inflicted on everyone in her household. A powerful story of cruelty that will haunt you for a long time.”

—Diane Fanning, author of *Treason in the Secret City*

“Bristling with tension, gripping from the first pages, Gregg Olsen’s masterful portrait of children caught in the web of a coldly calculating killer fascinates. A read so compelling it kept me up late into the night, *If You Tell* exposes incredible evil that lived quietly in small-town America. That the book is fact, not fiction, terrifies.”

—Kathryn Casey, bestselling author of *In Plain Sight*

I Know Where You Live

“In *I Know Where You Live*, master of suspense Gregg Olsen peels back layer after layer to reveal an ugly underbelly of family secrets and revenge. This unbearably tense, serpentine tale probes the darkest corners of the heart and mind. The suspense never wavers in this electrifying page-turner, guaranteed to keep your heart pounding until the very last page.”

—Heather Gudenkauf, *New York Times* bestselling author

The Hive

“Readers who relish the aftershocks of cult exploitation will turn every page with keen anticipation.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“*The Hive* is Gregg Olsen at his finest. Exciting, anxiety provoking, and twisty . . . You will stay up all night reading . . . not wanting to put it down until the final and shocking conclusion. This book will take you right down a rabbit hole you never suspected.”

—*Mystery and Suspense Magazine*

“Mesmerizing! Gregg Olsen tautly reveals layer after layer of lies, secrets, and betrayals in an increasingly horrifying exposé of one cult leader and her terrible sway over others. Forget the evil men do. These women will have you fearing for your life.”

—Lisa Gardner, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“*The Hive* is a riveting thriller, a tsunami of a story that starts out strong and absolutely knocks you over at the end. The characters are fascinating, their world so real and absorbing—I was transfixed from the very start. Gregg Olsen is such a compelling writer.”

—Luanne Rice, *New York Times* bestselling author

“In this gripping thriller, everything is not as it seems, and beauty is only skin deep. *The Hive* is a brilliantly engrossing read—exactly what we have come to expect from Gregg Olsen.”

—Karin Slaughter, *New York Times* and internationally bestselling author

“A charismatic wellness guru, a dead young journalist, and a slew of secrets are the ingredients that make up this fiendishly fun thriller. *The Hive* will have readers buzzing.”

—Greer Hendricks, #1 *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of *The Wife Between Us*

“Gregg Olsen’s *The Hive* is a fast-paced, intriguing, intense, and suspenseful read that is as creepy as it is fantastic. Brilliant, thought-provoking, heartbreaking, and original, *The Hive* will keep you up at night and leave you reeling long after you’ve finished it. Every page carries weight in this novel. There are plenty of twists and turns to satisfy even the most seasoned crime fiction reader, and the characters feel authentic and alive in ways that only Olsen can achieve.”

—Lisa Regan, #1 *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of the Detective Josie Quinn series

“Die-hard Gregg Olsen fans will love *The Hive*; new readers will become fans. Olsen deftly guides the reader through the pages, cranking up the

suspense as long-held secrets rise to the surface. The result is compulsively page turning as Olsen keeps the reader’s mind buzzing in suspense. He hooks the reader as a dark crime from the past collides with a crime from the present.”

—Kendra Elliot, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author

“Gregg Olsen’s *The Hive* begins with a fascinating premise and a spellbinding opening scene that held me in its grip as I flew through the pages. Olsen expertly weaves together a multilayered tale told by a complex array of unforgettable characters in his latest jaw-dropping thriller. In this dark and dangerously addictive read buzzing with secrets, betrayal, and murder, queen bees and wannabes take on a whole new meaning. Not to be missed.”

—Heather Gudenkauf, *New York Times* bestselling author of *This Is How I Lied*

Lying Next to Me

“*Lying Next to Me* is a clever, chilling puzzle of a tale. A riveting, sharp-edged page-turner, it’s Gregg Olsen’s best book yet.”

—A. J. Banner, *USA Today* bestselling author

“A dark, claustrophobic thriller filled with twists and turns. A brilliant book.”

—Caroline Mitchell, #1 international bestselling author

“In *Lying Next to Me*, [Olsen] has given us a first-rate work of psychological complexity as well as a mystery that is full of twists and is quite a grabber.”

—Popular Culture Association

The Last Thing She Ever Did

“Gregg Olsen pens brilliant, creepy, page-turning, heart-pounding novels of suspense that always keep me up at night. In *The Last Thing She Ever Did*,

he topped himself.”

—Allison Brennan, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Beguiling, wicked, and taut with suspense and paranoia, *The Last Thing She Ever Did* delivers scenes as devastating as any I’ve ever read with a startling, pitch-perfect finale. A reminder that evil may reside in one’s actions, but tragedy often spawns from one’s inaction.”

—Eric Rickstad, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Silent Girls*

“Olsen’s latest examines how a terrible, split-second decision has lingering effects, and the past echoes the present. Full of unexpected twists, *The Last Thing She Ever Did* will keep you guessing to the last line.”

—J.T. Ellison, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Lie to Me*

“Master storyteller Gregg Olsen continues to take readers hostage with another spellbinding tale of relentless, pulse-pounding suspense.”

—Rick Mofina, international bestselling author of *Last Seen*

“Tense. Well-crafted. Gripping.”

—Mary Burton, *New York Times* bestselling author

“With *The Last Thing She Ever Did*, Gregg Olsen delivers an edgy, tension-filled, roller-coaster ride of a novel that will thrill and devastate in equal measure.”

—Linda Castillo, *New York Times* bestselling author

**THE
AMISH
WIFE**

ALSO BY GREGG OLSEN

Fiction

I Know Where You Live

The Hive

Silent Ridge

Water's Edge

Snow Creek

Lying Next to Me

The Weight of Silence

The Last Thing She Ever Did

The Sound of Rain

Just Try to Stop Me

Now That She's Gone

The Girl in the Woods

The Girl on the Run

Shocking True Story

Fear Collector

Beneath Her Skin

The Bone Box (novella)

Dying to Be Her

Closer Than Blood

Victim Six

Heart of Ice

A Wicked Snow

A Cold Dark Place

Nonfiction

If You Tell: A True Story of Murder, Family Secrets, and the Unbreakable Bond of Sisterhood

A Killing in Amish Country: Sex, Betrayal, and a Cold-Blooded Murder

A Twisted Faith: A Minister's Obsession and the Murder That Destroyed a Church

The Deep Dark: Disaster and Redemption in America's Richest Silver Mine

Starvation Heights: A True Story of Murder and Malice in the Woods of the Pacific Northwest

Cruel Deception: A True Story of Murder and a Mother's Deadly Game

If Loving You Is Wrong: The Teacher and Student Sex Case That Shocked the World

Abandoned Prayers: An Incredible True Story of Murder, Obsession, and Amish Secrets

Bitter Almonds: The True Story of Mothers, Daughters, and the Seattle Cyanide Murders


If I Can't Have You: Susan Powell, Her Mysterious Disappearance, and the Murder of Her Children

American Black Widow: The Shocking True Story of a Preacher's Wife Turned Killer

THE AMISH WIFE

UNRAVELING THE LIES, SECRETS,
AND CONSPIRACY THAT LET
A KILLER GO FREE

GREGG OLSEN

 **THOMAS & MERCER**

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First edition

*For Daniel Gingerich,
a loving brother and uncle who sought the truth*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PART ONE
SUMMER 2022

CHAPTER ONE

It took some doing to respond to Daniel Gingerich's message.

It was first relayed via email from a Plainview, Minnesota, librarian named Alice Henderson.

Dan wanted to talk with me and since he didn't have a phone, I'd have to wait for his call.

I knew it must be something important. We hadn't talked, written, or seen each other for more than three decades, though I had thought of Dan often.

The last time I'd seen him was on a dark and frigid winter day in 1989 at his farm in Harmony, Minnesota, south of Rochester and its famed Mayo Clinic. He was the picture-postcard image of an Amishman—if picture postcards were allowed among his people, that is. His wavy brown hair and full beard brushed against the light-blue fabric of his shirt. His eyes were bright and alert, and his smile was genuine. Even to a stranger like me. A kerosene lamp illuminated the kitchen as we sat at a big wood-planked table. He ate sunflower seeds and spat the shells on the floor. His wife, Salome, had a shy but wary smile. Our eyes seldom met. I can't recall if she said a single word. They are Swartzentruber Amish, which is considered Low Amish, or the most conservative. No electricity, of course, hence the lamps. Muscled teams of horses plow fields of corn, hay, and soybeans. Women secure dark-blue or black dresses with straight pins. Men fasten their plain attire—pants, cotton shirts, dark coats—with hooks and eyes. Buttons are too militaristic and zippers, well, too worldly. Women wear bonnets and prayer caps to conceal the glory of their hair, a sight only for their husbands. Men don dark, wide-brimmed hats in the winter, straw hats in the summer.

I had come to talk with Dan about his nephew and namesake, Danny Stutzman, whose body had been found in a Chester, Nebraska, cornfield on

Christmas Eve 1985. Only nine at the time of his death, Danny was clad in a blue Carter's blanket sleeper. The members of the community called him Little Boy Blue. His identity remained a mystery until a magazine article prompted the Amish in Ohio to ask first among themselves, and later a sheriff in Thayer County, Nebraska, if Little Boy Blue was Ida and Eli Stutzman's missing boy, Danny.

Dan and I spoke for hours about his nephew, but also about his sister Ida and the barn fire that took her life. He didn't talk in circles, and yet he didn't lay specific blame—only hints—on anyone but his brother-in-law. Dan was torn about how much to tell me. Church leadership is clear about the Amish staying away from the world of the “English,” which is the Amish term for outsiders.

My little Craig tape recorder and airport rental car were decidedly the trappings of the English.

I remember standing outside after the interview, ice crystals forming on our facial hair. Puffs of white vapor followed each word. Truly, I don't think I've ever felt that cold in my entire life, and I've been to North Pole, Alaska, in December. I was about to leave when Dan said something that'd stick with me for years. We had been speaking about some of the things I'd learned about Eli. It was dark stuff.

Dan stretched out his arms, palms up, and looked me in the eye.

“I'd rather hold shit in my hands,” he said, “than do what you do.”

I understood. I think so anyway. Crime is depressing. In a lot of ways, it is dirty work. Dredging up stuff. Bringing back terrible memories that people want to keep buried. And this was what I did to earn a living, or it would be. I was writing what would become my debut book, *Abandoned Prayers*.

Research for the book took me from Ohio to Michigan, Minnesota, Wyoming, Texas, Colorado, and Indiana in what felt like a never-ending quest for the truth. If I can be forgiven for being sentimental, part of the pull into the story was the pale-blue footed pajamas that Danny was clad in when he was found. My twins were born in 1985, and those Carter's sleepers were what they wore at the time. Most parents have touchstone memories of their children. I can still hear the sliding noise of my twin daughters' feet as they shuffled over the tiles of our kitchen floor. Danny and that Carter's sleeper broke my heart.

Because of the mystery. Because it involved a child. Because it felt so unresolved, more so than any other book I'd written, my first one continued to haunt me. So many unanswered questions lingered. Eli Stutzman was convicted only of murdering his Texas roommate, Glen Pritchett. Two murders in Colorado—David Tyler and Dennis Sleater—were connected to Eli in time, place, and signature. Little Danny's cause of death remained undetermined. Eli only served a short sentence in the prison near Lincoln, Nebraska, for failing to report his son's death and abandoning a human body.

And then there's Ida, which is where Eli's string of crimes started. The cause of her death during a barn fire in 1977 was deemed natural causes and attributed to a weak heart. Eli wasn't questioned as a suspect, despite suspicious circumstances. Instead, he was free to excise himself from the Amish and take Danny on a trail of destruction and murder out west.

To switch up Dan's memorable line, I'd rather eat a handful of shit than let go of what I know to be the truth.



When Dan and I finally connect over the phone in August 2022, we compare notes on our lives. Our children and grandchildren. That he moved. That I am still writing. There is nothing awkward. Small talk. Friendly. He tells me that he'd been in Seattle a time or two over the years and had tried to find me in the phone book but hadn't found the right Gregg Olsen. I ask about his parents, Amos and Lizzie, whom I'd interviewed at their farm near Gladwin, Michigan. He said they'd both passed. Lizzie, at ninety-two, earlier in the year.

Then the reason for the phone call.

"I have a box of things," he says. "Things about Eli."

"What kinds of things?"

"Letters," he says. "I haven't read them all. You might want to take a look. Might interest you some."

"Interest" was putting things mildly.

In reality, I couldn't book a flight to the airport in Marquette, Michigan, fast enough. I didn't care about layovers, stops, whatever.

I wrote about Eli's life and crimes decades ago, and yet Ida remained somewhat of a mystery. Her death, her life. I'd wondered about her over the years, this devoted Amish wife and mother who had no idea of the true nature of the man beside her. I hoped that the box of letters—though Dan had said they were about and from Eli—would tell me about her.

During my layover in Detroit, I kill time at the P.F. Chang's counter, reacquainting myself with key dates in the lives of Eli and Ida Stutzman. The full chronology, in which I logged every detail that had a date associated with the Stutzman family, was as long as Santa's wish list. The devil is in the details, right? In this case of true crime, quite literally so. When I trace Eli's spiral into crime, I keep coming back to 1977, the year Ida died in a barn fire.

The letters could give me a new way in, to secrets that have been buried now for over forty years.

1975

- December 25—Eli Stutzman and Ida Gingerich marry.

1976

- September 7—Ida gives birth to Danny.

1977

- July 12—Ida dies in a barn fire.

1982

- July 16—Eli and Danny relocate to Colorado.
- November 8—Eli and Danny move to Austin, Texas.

1985

- May 12—Glen Pritchett, Eli's roommate, is found murdered.
- June 15—Eli is interviewed by Tarrant County detectives about Glen's murder. Eli drops off Danny in Wyoming with foster parents.
- December 13—Eli returns to Wyoming to get Danny.
- December 24—Little Boy Blue is found in Chester, Nebraska.

1986

- Spring—Eli moves to Fort Worth/Azle, Texas.

1987

- December 11—Little Boy Blue is identified as Danny, and a warrant is issued for Eli's arrest.
- December 14—Eli is taken into custody in Azle, Texas.

1988

- January 11—Eli pleads guilty in a Nebraska courtroom for abandoning a body and concealing a death.

1989

- July—Convicted of killing Glen Pritchett, Eli is sentenced to forty years.

2002

- March—Eli moves to Fort Worth, Texas, on parole.

2007

- January 31—Eli is found dead.