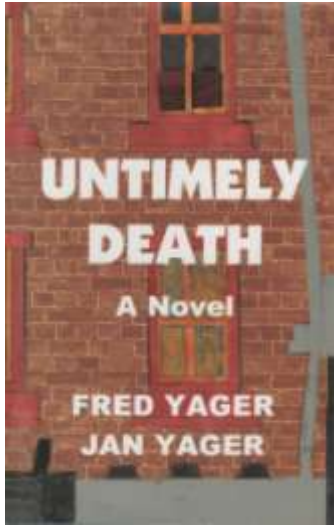


# Reading Group Guide



*UNTIMELY DEATH* by Fred Yager and Jan Yager

Published by Hannacroix Creek Books.

(Available at your favorite local or online bookseller in hardcover or e-book editions)

## About this Book

A vicious killer sets out to silence anyone who might know the secret behind the untimely death of an attractive criminology professor, whose nude body is found by her best friend and co-worker, Professor Kimberly Stone. Driven to find her best friend's killer, Kimberly joins forces with a reluctant homicide detective as they scour Manhattan's underground night life, following the trail of a tortured soul, who may have chosen Kimberly as the next target.

## Discussion Questions

1. Describe the role of secrecy in the novel. How is it a factor in Joan Walsh's murder? What is student Wayne Clark's secret? Does criminology professor Kimberly Stone have a secret? detective Alan Blake? Joan Walsh? Charlotte Katz? Bill Gardner? Richard Meyer? the housekeeper? How did secrecy shape the killer's formative years?
2. *Untimely Death* is, in part, the story of how a crime impacts on everyone touched by it: the murdered woman Joan Walsh, her best friend Kimberly Stone, Joan's boyfriend Bill Gardner, the boyfriend's young son, the investigating detective, the victim's parents, and the students and faculty where she worked. One critic (Danny Yee) wrote that the novel had "an unusual insight into grief." How did each of the characters deal with their grief following Joan Walsh's murder?
3. The critics are calling *Untimely Death* "a riveting thriller." How do the Yagers create suspense in their novel? What are the parts that were especially suspenseful to you?
4. The novel begins with Kimberly Stone getting flipped by Richie at her weekly self-defense class. Throughout the novel, Kimberly, "a theorist but not an activist," as the Associated Press wrote, evolves as she becomes more aggressive and active. What are some of the situations where she is passive? When is she more active and in charge? Dr. Stone goes from a professor who discusses the causes of crime to an amateur sleuth. How do you think participating in the actual solution of a homicide will influence the way Dr. Stone will teach her criminology classes?
5. Friendship is another theme in *Untimely Death*. At the end of the book, the authors write about Kimberly Stone, "As she leaned back until her head pressed against his chest, she silently mourned the loss of one friend while letting herself feel the warmth and comfort of

another." How did those words affect you? Where does this scene take place? Who is the other friend that Kimberly is referring to and is that relationship more than just friendship? How would you describe the friendship Kimberly had with Joan Walsh?

**6.** Why do you think the authors began the novel focusing on Kimberly Stone in her self-defense class rather than Joan Walsh's murder? How would switching those sections of the books have changed the emphasis or tone of the novel?

**7.** When did you guess the identity of the killer? Were you surprised? Were there any clues that you missed? One reviewer wrote, "...you solve this mystery by carefully matching the killer's thought patterns with the behavior of the characters in the book. I haven't seen this technique used before." What do you think he meant by that?

**8.** What does the title, *Untimely Death*, mean? How and when does that theme recur in the novel?

**9.** What themes, experiences, or emotions in your own life were invoked by the Yagers' novel? What character did you relate to the most, and why?

**10.** What ideas in *Untimely Death* do you find particularly absorbing or interesting? Why? What did you think of the artificial daisy in the victims' ears? What was the symbolism of the artificial daisy?

## Critical Praise

"In their first novel, *Untimely Death*, husband-and-wife authors Fred and Jan Yager achieve the literary equivalent of a rookie who hammers a home-run in his first big-league at bat...The prose is smooth, with no puzzling moments to bedevil the reader...The Yagers have written a winner."

—Associated Press

"The plot is excellent, the writing is great and suspense is maintained for about as long as any mystery author can keep adding to the goose bumps. In short, it's a page-turner of a thriller."

—*Naples Daily News*

"The Yagers keep readers engaged with a nicely paced plot, a love affair between the victims friend and the detective, and some spooky glimpses of the killer from the killer's point of view."

—*The Advocate & Greenwich Time*

## About the Authors



Fred and Jan Yager are husband and wife who write books, on their own or as a writing team. A communications executive, Fred worked for the Associated Press for 13 years as a reporter including four years as film critic and entertainment writer, and for Merrill Lynch for 14 years

including 7 years running their business television subsidiary. His company is called World News and Information Network, Inc. (<http://www.worldnewsandinformationnetwork.com>) Jan has a Ph.D. in sociology and an M.A. in criminology. In addition to her writing career, she is a publishing professional who has also taught full-time and part-time at the college level – Penn State, Temple University, and the University of Connecticut – since her early twenties including criminology courses.

*Untimely Death* is their first co-authored suspense thriller. (There have been Swedish and Vietnamese translations of *Untimely Death*.) Their second suspense thriller is *Just Your Everyday People* (Hannacroix Creek Books, 2001, e-book version, 2012) They are also co-authors of two career books, published by Facts on File, Inc., *Career Opportunities in the Publishing Industry* and *Career Opportunities in the Film Industry*.

A completed screenplay by the Yagers, based on their novel, *Untimely Death*, is available for film or TV consideration.

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