

# Ted Bundy Gets a Feminist Treatment

Joanna Schaffhausen

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I just finished watching the recent Amazon Prime documentary on Ted Bundy, *Falling for a Killer*, which I took on because filmmaker Trish Wood set out to tell the story from the women's perspectives. Its primary focus is on Elizabeth Kendall and her daughter Molly, who lived as a family unit with Bundy during the time of the murders, but it also included women who pursued Bundy, surviving victims, and female lawyers who worked on his behalf.

Elizabeth Kendall with fiancé Ted Bundy. She turned him in to authorities multiple times but couldn't seem to break up with him.

The documentary is interesting because it contains perspectives from people who have never spoken before, like Molly and Ted's first known victim. Because my Ellery Hathaway series focuses on what it's like to live your life in the shadow of an infamous serial killer, I found these narratives particularly intriguing. I appreciate that Bundy himself isn't given the star treatment. Wood places the crimes in context with the Women's Liberation movement at the time. Women enjoyed more freedom and thus they were more available targets for predators like Bundy. There was also a kind of free-floating rage at women's efforts for independence that the film suggests forms a backdrop for the whole Bundy narrative. Experts have documented an explosion of male serial murderers in the 1970s into the mid-1980s, and this timing has to be considered when trying to figure out where these men came from.

The film also talks a bit about how women are socialized to be nice and cooperative, and how Bundy used this trait against his victims by luring them to "help" him with various tasks. There is some discussion on how violence against women is prevalent in USA entertainment. As one girl says, "I thought it was normal for men to want to kill women."

You might think we've come so far and we're in a much better place now. Maybe in some ways we are. Serial murder is down nationwide, mirroring other violent crimes. But the reactions to the documentary in the comments reveal how very far we still have to go. There is a lot of fury, much of it from women, about how the film "glorifies" the victims. They are "whiners" with a "leftist agenda" when really Bundy is just a sick individual and there is nothing to be gleaned from examining societal influence on or reaction to his crimes. There is literal anger that the focus of the story is not on Bundy. Everything is fine now, so ladies should "relax and enjoy life." The women are "boring" and these viewers wanted more of Bundy himself.

I think if you're in the comments of a documentary deliberately focused on women's voices complaining that we didn't hear enough from the man who tried to murder them, you are part of the problem. As Bundy himself noted, he didn't like it when the women talked. He knocked them unconscious so they didn't ruin his fantasy of what he wanted them to be. He didn't want their real selves to impinge on his forceful reimagining. I liked one woman's perspective that ultimately Bundy was a thief. He stole dozens of young women from the world, people who would have potentially accomplished great things, and you have to wonder if that was part of his plan all along.

The Ted K Archive

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