

Chapter 41

On May 6, 2008, I received a call from Dennis. Ruth Davern, his mother, had passed away at the age of eighty-eight. Ruth's obituary captured the essence of this gracious woman I had known for almost forty years—a very thoughtful and generous person, always taking time to ensure that everyone around her was taken care of. If anyone needed anything, she would do whatever she could to satisfy their needs. Ruth loved to sew, knit, quilt, and crochet. Her many handcrafted baby items were donated to local hospitals and her Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls put smiles on many faces on Christmas mornings. Ruth's generosity was a gesture Natalie Wood once told Ruth was one of the kindest things she could imagine.

I was glad I had a set of Mrs. Davern's dolls at home, just as I was certain that Natalie's daughters appreciated having something their mom had needlepointed, perhaps one of Natalie's pillows.

When the funeral parlor quieted for Ruth's eulogy, granddaughter Amy started to read the verse on Ruth's funeral card, Linda Ellis's world-famous poem "The Dash." I paid special attention this day to the many poignant lines, but it is the end of the verse that delivers the most impact:

*So when your eulogy's being read, with your life's actions to rehash,
Would you be proud of the things they say about how you spent your dash?*

As I stood at Ruth's gravesite in the pouring rain, I bowed my head and thought about her "dash." She had been my refuge on a long-ago night in Florida, the first night I had met Dennis.

Natalie's gigantic "dash" in a shortened life weighed heavily on me this day. Natalie had loved her husband. You could see it in her eyes when she looked at him, in photographs and in interviews. Dennis maintained that Natalie and R.J. had adored each other.

Part of Natalie's dash included a friendship with the son of the woman being buried this day. Mrs. Davern had always spoken of Natalie's dash and of her son Dennis's dash with pure pride. And she had every reason for that pride.

I looked over at Dennis, standing in the rain, as he said goodbye to his mother. His "dash" needed to be understood.

I met up with Dennis at the wake and we talked about getting together again soon for something long overdue—Dennis's polygraph test.

The American Polygraph Association believes that scientific evidence supports the high validity of polygraph examinations. However, a valid examination requires a combination of a properly trained examiner; a polygraph instrument that records as a minimum cardiovascular, respiratory, and electrodermal activity; and the proper administration of an accepted testing procedure and scoring system.

The American Polygraph Association has a compendium of research studies available on the validity and reliability of polygraph testing. The eighty research projects published since 1980 provide an average accuracy of 98 percent.

For Dennis's test, the polygraphist's solid reputation was our primary concern. I found **Howard Temple's** listing at Accredited Polygraph Service online. Temple, a member of the American Polygraph Association, has worked in the private sector of the polygraph industry since 1971. He has also served as a polygraph advisor/vendor for the city Bloomfield, New Jersey, for over twenty-five years. He received his training at and was subsequently employed by the prominent Backster School of Lie Detection. He has additional training in voice stress evaluation and psychological stress evaluation.

Temple has conducted examinations for a wide variety of clients, including law enforcement agencies at the local, state, and federal levels; private industry in the manufacturing, retailing, financial, and legal fields; and for private citizens.

Over the course of his career, he has served as an expert on several major television and radio news broadcasts. He has lectured at colleges, law enforcement agencies, and private industry on the use of the polygraph machine.

I called Howard Temple and was glad to learn that he was registered in Pennsylvania, a state that requires polygraphists to be licensed.

Dennis flew in from Florida, and we met with Temple on June 19, 2008, at a Marriott business meeting room at the Newark Airport.

I had written a synopsis of what Dennis and I hoped to accomplish and had devised a list of questions for Temple, but as we studied the list at our meeting, Temple explained that some of the questions could be considered "interpretive." He suggested we change the questions to follow an "issue format" for a more precise reading.

Temple asked why investigators on the scene at Catalina had not asked some of the questions he now asked. Dennis and I felt that Temple doubted us as we told him about the weekend Natalie Wood died and the events that had led us to arrange a polygraph.

Dennis became nervous as Temple's questions became harder. We were his clients, but Temple treated us as if the cops had just delivered us for an interrogation. His attitude seemed intimidating, but Dennis and I realized that Temple's doubt was exactly the reason Dennis was taking a polygraph in the first place.

Temple seemed awed that R.J. and Natalie had fought on the back deck and then she just went "missing." He asked, "Okay, she could have fallen in, but then, why wouldn't Wagner save her or call for help?"

He asked Dennis if he ever saw Natalie in the ocean. (No.) He asked if Dennis ever saw Natalie swimming, wading, or even touching the water. (No.) He asked Dennis if he was scared that night. (Yes.)

Temple's most accusatory question was, "Why a twenty-seven-year wait?" Dennis explained that he had made a terrible mistake in covering for Robert Wagner, had even lied for him at the scene, but that there were many reasons for that choice.

I explained that Dennis had not actually waited twenty-seven years and informed Temple of the various media interviews and the *Vanity Fair* article. I explained that Dennis is a topic of controversy and has been accused not only of trying to profit from Natalie's death but also of being an accomplice or an actual murderer. We explained that the combined *total* of Dennis's "profiteering intake" amounted to Temple's standard fee

for three weeks of work. Therefore, only a manuscript could explain “the delay” and rumors reasonably. “Dennis needs to surmount this story, and Natalie deserves her justice,” I said.

Then Dennis said something that touched my heart. “It’s the kind of story that never goes away. A year or two can pass, then boom, there she is, walking down the dock, smiling at you when you’re ready to fall asleep, and you know you just have to do this for her.”

After an hour of discussion, Temple said that Dennis’s story was far more complicated than he had realized. He considered certain details bordering on “criminal” and could not comprehend how such a story could end up in a meeting room in Newark, New Jersey, for “testing.” He asked to postpone because the nature of Dennis’s experience required that Temple develop a new set of questions, leaving nothing for interpretation, because the test could not consist of what Dennis “believed” or what Dennis “thought,” even if Dennis’s beliefs stemmed from experience. The test must confirm information only relating to what is *fact*. “If you want the real deal,” Temple said, “we can’t do this test today. It’s just too complicated.”

I was extremely disappointed. We had a window of only four hours, because Dennis had booked a return flight for later that same afternoon. I asked if we could ask just the first three questions on the list: the ones that dealt with noninterpretive fact.

“Leave the room,” Temple told me.

I looked at him, confused.

He smiled. “I’ll ask the first three questions, since you both went through a lot to be here today. But there can be no distractions. Take a walk, and we’ll call you when we’re finished.”

Dennis looked nervous but determined. I left the room and went outside the hotel for a breath of air. I sat on a bench and watched the planes taking off just a short distance away. About thirty minutes later, my phone rang. Dennis said, “Come on in, Mart.”

I walked into the small meeting room, and there was an ink-filled scroll of paper on the table filled with green and red blotches. I picked it up and looked at it. Howard smiled. “That’s the start-up sheet,” he said. “Here’s the results sheet. Dennis passed each question.”

Temple had asked:

Did you tie the dinghy with two lines at the stern (rear) of *Splendour* after you returned from dinner at Doug’s Harbor Reef the night of November 28, 1981?

Davern answered: Yes.

Did you hear Robert Wagner and Natalie Wood having a huge argument in their master stateroom that carried outside to the rear deck of *Splendour* near 11:00 P.M. on the night of November 28, 1981, and was Robert Wagner with his wife from his smashing of a wine bottle in the main salon until the time he told you she went missing?

Davern answered: Yes.

Did you see or hear Natalie Wood in the ocean the night of November 28, 1981?

Davern answered: No.

Dennis had now passed a scientific test that substantiated the fact that Wagner was with Natalie the night she died right up until she disappeared—a noninterpretive fact that Dennis knew to be true. This result enforced that Robert Wagner had to have seen how Natalie got from the boat to the water. Wagner had not “discovered” Natalie missing. Wagner is fully aware of how Natalie Wood left *Splendour*.

And, finally, that Dennis passed the question of whether or not he had seen or heard Natalie in the water while her husband still fought with her, as claimed in Finstad’s *Natasha* was cleared up. Dennis had not been a spineless wimp who obeyed Wagner at the expense of a life, nor was he anything remotely resembling an accomplice.

Many people have a scenario for Natalie’s last moments, but Dennis was at the actual scene. All of his senses had absorbed what transpired that night. He witnessed partly with his eyes and partly with his ears everything that had happened up until Natalie was no longer on the boat, and then he was the *only* person with Wagner until a call for help was placed hours later.

Howard Temple seemed to change his impression of us after Dennis passed the test. Polygraphists are called upon for all sorts of bizarre cases, and Temple had come up against his share of people who think they can “fool the machine.” As an experienced professional, however, he knows it is virtually impossible to beat the test. And one thing was obvious to Temple: Dennis was not the kind of person who could fool a machine. Temple, who picked up on our every inflection while prepping us, impressed me as a conscientious professional who, by this time in his career, could probably detect with accuracy who was lying and was being truthful even without a polygraph machine. We arranged to rewrite the remaining questions in an “issue format,” and we would reschedule.

As I drove Dennis back to the airport, he described the testing. Temple had asked him to face the wall and to answer with a simple yes or no. Various sensors were attached to Dennis’s body, and Dennis was “strapped in.” Temple first asked general questions for a warm up, and he told Dennis afterwards that it is crucial to get a feel for the person being tested.

Dennis and I met with Howard Temple again on July 3, 2008, at his office in Pennsylvania. We discussed all of the issue-formatted questions for Dennis’s test. Temple eliminated a couple of questions, claiming they were slightly interpretive, but approved the rest. He dissected every single question, every single word, to be certain nothing could be misconstrued.

Soon, we were down to the final list of Temple’s questions:

Issue 1: Robert Wagner suddenly decided to move the yacht *Splendour* to the Isthmus on late Friday night, November 27, 1981. Natalie Wood left the yacht with you, and you spent the night with her at the Pavilion Lodge (in Avalon), where you talked, listened to her express anger at her husband, drank wine, and then you slept with Natalie in her bed, with no sexual contact. Is this accurate?

Davern : Yes.

Issue 2: The cruise resumed on the morning of Saturday, November 28, 1981, and after Natalie made breakfast aboard *Splendour*, later that afternoon, Natalie and Christopher Walken went ashore and you and Wagner followed a few hours later in the dinghy to meet them at Doug's Harbor Reef Restaurant for cocktails and dinner. Is this accurate?

Davern: Yes.

Issue 3: After the bottle smashing (by Wagner) on November 28, 1981, Christopher Walken retreated to his cabin and stayed there. You did not see Walken leave his cabin until early morning, November 29, 1981. Is this accurate?

Davern: Yes.

Issue 4: When Wagner followed Natalie to their stateroom after the bottle smashing, you heard loud cursing and yelling, and what sounded like things being thrown or pushed around emitting from their stateroom on November 28, 1981. Is this accurate?

Davern: Yes.

Issue 5: After Natalie was missing on the night of November 28, 1981, Robert Wagner told you he did not want to search for her because he needed to protect his image and did not want to draw attention to the situation, so he did not agree to your suggestion to turn on the searchlight. Is this correct?

Davern: Yes.

Issue 6: After Natalie Wood was missing from the yacht *Splendour* on Saturday night, November 28, 1981, Robert Wagner asked you that very night to say nothing to anyone but attorneys about what you had seen and heard. Is this accurate?

Davern: Yes.

Issue 7: In the months following Natalie Wood's funeral, Robert Wagner paid for your attorney and for your therapy with his therapist. Is this accurate?

Davern: Yes.

Issue 8: After Natalie Wood's funeral, you stayed at Wagner's home in a monitored atmosphere for months. Wagner's employees would drive you to your fiancée's house. One night, while visiting your fiancée, Wagner's bodyguards physically removed you from your girlfriend's house and dragged you down the sidewalk, while your girlfriend screamed. Is this accurate?

Davern: Yes.

Issue 9: Reporters sought you for interviews since Wood's death. Not until 1985 with the *Star* magazine did you approve an interview. In all following interviews you granted, you told the truth with details you offered about Natalie's death, and you have been truthful with Marti Rulli through the years she has worked on a manuscript about Wood's death. Is this true?

Davern: Yes.

Issue 10: In discussing Natalie Wood's death in January 1992 in what you believed was a private setting on the *Now It Can Be Told* magazine show, you and Marti Rulli

were discussing *facts* about the story, and about why you wanted to discontinue the interview. Is this accurate?

Davern: Yes.

Issue11: You did not release the dinghy, *Valiant*, from the *Splendour* after Natalie Wood went missing from the yacht on November 28, 1981. Is this true?

Davern: Yes.

Issue 12: There is an investigator named Peter Rydyn who calls himself “the Retributor.” You have no knowledge of this person and have never had any contact or interaction with this person. Is this correct?

Davern: Yes.

Dennis passed every question truthfully on Howard Temple’s polygraph machine. Dennis was not lying about any of the issues. Dennis was not lying about what he had experienced, heard, seen, and told about Natalie Wood’s suspicious death.

Dennis passed his two polygraph tests.

Howard sent us his verification:

2. Re: Capt. Dennis Davern — (Captain: *Splendour*) Former Pleasure boat belonging to Robert Wagner & Natalie Wood

On June 19, 2008, and again on July 3, 2008, a series of polygraph examinations were conducted on the above named subject at his own request and the request of Marti Rulli.

The Intent of these polygraph examinations were to determine whether or not Capt. Davern was being truthful in his statements regarding the mystery in the death of Natalie Wood in November 1981.

Prior to submitting to the polygraph examinations, Capt. Davern explained the circumstances as he recalled surrounding the mysterious death of actress Natalie Wood and his theory as to what actually occurred on that November 1981 weekend.

Prior to submitting to the polygraph examination, the entire process was explained to Capt. Davern to his complete satisfaction. He also agreed to the placing of the necessary objects on his person to enable this examiner to perform several series of polygraph examinations.

Prior to the actual administering of the polygraph examinations, all of the questions were reviewed with Capt. Davern to his complete understanding and satisfaction.

After reviewing this series of polygraph examinations that were given to Capt. Davern, it is this examiner’s opinion that Capt. Davern’s numerous polygraph exams showed no indications indicative of deception to the list of questions. This is an indication that Capt. Davern was being truthful in his recollection of the facts surrounding the death of Natalie Wood during the weekend of November 27, 28, 1981. It is therefore this examiner’s opinion that Capt. Davern was being truthful in his ability to remember the facts as he stated them in the questions.

Chapter 42

I had read Wagner's book, *Pieces of My Heart*, and was intrigued with his admission of obsessive love and jealousy for Natalie. He claims he had once chased Warren Beatty down with a gun!

Wagner's information about Natalie's death—touted as the “final word”—is constructed of lies even with documented records to prove him wrong, yet none of his details were verified or fact-checked.

But the most disturbing thing I took from Wagner's account was his description of the wine bottle smashing. He describes it by saying he smashed the wine bottle after Walken said Wood should devote more time to her film career, but the most startling of claims is that Natalie was *not* in the room when he smashed the wine bottle. He finally admits to having broken the wine bottle and to yelling out in anger, but he changes the dynamics of the entire scene. Not only does he remove Natalie from it altogether, he claims that he yelled at Walken: “Why the fuck don't you stay out of her career?” (Close, but not quite “So, what do you want to do to my wife? Do you want to fuck my wife? Is that what you want?”)

Wagner is still manipulating Davern by toning down the rage that accompanied the bottle smashing and by changing the number of witnesses to it. A logical reason for Wagner having confessed to the bottle smashing is that Davern and Walken had *both* witnessed it.

A stunning and revealing little story in Wagner's autobiography bothered me tremendously. He tells of a nameless photographer who had snuck a photograph of an ailing David Niven, and published it worldwide. Wagner says in his book that he and some others made sure it would be the last shot the photographer would take in a long, long time. He offered no elaboration.

How arrogant of Wagner to admit such an episode and to expect readers to cheer his implied violence. Dennis feared exactly such violence for decades, which is why, whenever he came close to revealing the whole truth, he would balk or say he had to leave the country. Dennis still fears for his physical safety. November 28, 1981, left Dennis with no doubt as to what Wagner is capable of.

On October 13, 2008, a Monday, I reached Frank Salerno after a dozen or so attempts since the previous Thursday. I explained about Wagner telling a new version of events that contradicted what he had told Rasure at Natalie's death scene, but Salerno said that he didn't want to get involved.

I pressed for an explanation, and Salerno said, “The investigation was based on what the three survivors of the cruise told Rasure, and it's not uncommon for stories to change years later, but that all three stories have changed years later is something of interest.” Apparently not of interest enough for him to listen further. When I told him that Dennis had passed polygraph tests to verify his truth, Salerno said he was impressed but that all he can do at this point is to step aside.

I gave Salerno every opportunity to read what I had discovered throughout my amateur investigation that would put the professional one to shame. Again, Frank just

wished me luck. I made one last appeal to his conscience by reminding him of his reputation—his penchant for justice. He paused, but I was still going to get no help from Salerno. I was terribly disappointed

It is undeniable, given all of the contradictory statements Robert Wagner has made in published sources since 1981, that the man is a liar. Yet law enforcement officials, writers, interviewers, journalists, and friends continue to overlook his deceptions. Not one interviewer has asked Robert Wagner about Dennis's presence on *Splendour*.

If Wagner has indeed “gone over it and over it” with Walken, then Walken could likely have been asked by Wagner to go along with the lies. Dennis and I had not included the bottle smashing in the initial polygraph test because Wagner had owned up to it. But since Wagner has changed his wording of the event from “So, what do you want to do to my wife? Do you want to fuck my wife?” to asking Walken to stay out of Natalie's career, it was imperative that Dennis be asked on a polygraph machine about the bottle smashing.

But first, upon excellent advice, I called Dennis to ask the ultimate of him.

“Den, what do you think about being hypnotized?” I asked, “Just so we leave no stone unturned. If there's anything you've subconsciously blocked, now would be a good time to search for it.”

“Make an appointment and let me know,” Dennis said, “I'll book a flight.”

Dennis was willing to be scrutinized with polygraph tests, hypnotism sessions—whatever it took to prove he is telling the truth. I admired his determination.

I made an appointment with Dr. Jaime Feldman, a forensics hypnotist. Since 1990, Dr. Feldman has been the director/certified instructor of hypnotherapy at the Institute of Hypnotherapy in New Jersey. He is also the certified instructor for basic and advanced hypnotherapy for the American Board of Hypnotherapy, the International Medical and Dental Hypnotherapy Association, and the International Association of Counselors and Therapists. For 18 years, he has also been the director/doctor of clinical hypnotherapy, Dynamic Hypnotherapy Associates, Inc., New Jersey. He is a certified/registered doctor of clinical hypnotherapy with the American Board of Hypnotherapy, National Guild of Hypnotists, International Association of Counselors and Therapists, American Institute of Hypnotherapy, and International Medical and Dental Hypnotherapy Association. Dr. Feldman has been featured on The Montel Williams Show on three separate occasions.

In the early afternoon of October 21, 2008, I picked up Dennis at the Philadelphia International Airport. We had a couple of hours before our appointment with Dr. Feldman, so Dennis's sister, Rita Knapp, and her daughter, Amy Knapp, met us for lunch. Of course, conversation centered around Dennis's hypnosis session. Both Rita and Amy approved the choice, and Amy, who is a senior attorney at a Moorestown, New Jersey, firm, told us, “Remember one important thing, both of you: truth is its own defense.”

Dr. Feldman began the session by explaining the basics of hypnosis. Then we explained to Dr. Feldman the essentials of Dennis's story and our reason for being there: to see if Dennis could recall anything more through hypnosis. Dennis told Dr. Feldman all that he recalled about Natalie's final weekend.

Dr. Feldman performed a few tests with Dennis to see if Dennis was a “willing participant.” He explained that the pre-session tests prove whether or not a patient is unknowingly adverse to suggestion. Dennis was not. Dr. Feldman was satisfied with the results of the pretesting.

We went into a dim room with two comfortable recliner chairs. I sat in one and Dennis in the other. Dr. Feldman reclined our chairs (he said I should be comfortable, too). Dr. Feldman sat near Dennis, and I sat to the side to watch and listen (with a notebook in my lap). Dennis stared at a moving spiral until his eyes became heavy and he was asked to close them. The doctor spoke his techniques into a microphone as Dennis closed his eyes and listened. About 15 minutes into the session, Dr. Feldman asked Dennis to open his eyes after suggesting that he wouldn’t be able to do so. I saw Dennis struggling to open his eyes, but he couldn’t. Dr. Feldman took Dennis “deeper” into the hypnosis, then began asking questions.

Dr. Feldman in no way suggested anything to Dennis but instead guided him to what he referred to as “significant events.” The first event began with the Wagner party of four leaving Doug’s restaurant on the night of November 28, 1981. Dennis talked about how drunk everyone was, including himself, as they boarded the dinghy to travel back to *Splendour*.

The next significant event took Dennis to the main salon. Dennis said there was laughter—Natalie was laughing at something Chris said. “Then there was anger.” He recalled words but didn’t want to talk about them because of what happened next.

The bottle smashing. Dennis said Wagner yelled out, “Do you want to fuck my wife, is that what you want?” He described the wine bottle shattering into pieces after Wagner slammed it on the coffee table. Dennis recalled the rage on Wagner’s face. Natalie said, “This is absurd!” She wouldn’t tolerate Wagner’s outburst and went to her room—alone.

The next significant event went to the argument in the Wagner stateroom. Dennis heard the bumps and the yelling and the curse words. He appeared to be disturbed at this point, and said, “There’s fighting, physically and yelling, and things being knocked over.” Dennis hesitated, then added, “I knocked on the door to ask, ‘Is all okay?’”

“And what happened?” Dr. Feldman asked.

Dennis’s face took on a miserable expression, and he said, loudly, “I don’t want you here.”

“Who said that?” the doctor asked.

“R.J. He asked me to leave.”

Dr. Feldman repeatedly asked Dennis to forward to the next significant event, but Dennis stayed quiet. “What’s the next event, Dennis?” the doctor asked again and again.

Dennis finally said, “I looked out the window and saw Natalie on the deck in her nightgown.”

“What happened next, Dennis?” the doctor asked.

Dennis’s hands shot up and his face twisted. This was intense to watch, but he said nothing. I wondered if all of his years of suppressing that horrible night, not being able to talk about it without being condemned, worked on his mind at this point. Something was working his mind, and he wouldn’t utter another word. I thought about

what Paul Davern had said to me in the hotel room, two decades ago, “Den will take a lot to his grave with him.”

Suddenly, Dennis blurted, “There was fighting and arguing and loud voices.”

“What then, Dennis?” Dr. Feldman repeated.

“Natalie was gone,” Dennis answered.

“And the next event?”

Dennis was getting disturbed and I began to worry, but I trusted Dr. Feldman. “I checked the boat like R.J. asked. There was something bad but I wasn’t thinking. I did as told. I wanted to call for help, but R.J. said No! It was bad, but he waited a long time to call for help. I knew something was wrong, but he was stalling. He wanted to keep the help away.”

Dr. Feldman turned at this point to look at me. He shook his head. Then he asked Dennis to forward to the next significant event and asked him, “Did you ask R.J. about Natalie.”

“Yes, she was missing. Like R.J. said.”

“Did you feel that R.J. was being truthful?”

“No. He was hiding something. Not truthful. I wanted to call for help. I can see them, see the picture. Natalie was yelling. It was physical.”

“Where do you see Natalie?”

“On the deck, in her nightgown. Don’t see her jacket. I see the front part of her nightgown. I went away for a minute. All gone. She’s gone. I went down. I looked on the boat for her. No dinghy. I just sat there.”

“And next?”

“It was daylight and other people around. A lot of people started coming on board. They got together with R.J. Natalie was dead.”

Dr. Feldman looked at me and whispered, “I think this is enough.” It was clear that Dennis should be “awakened.” He did not appear relaxed. His demeanor was troubled, and when Dr. Feldman asked me if he should go on, I shook my head.

Dennis awakened and said he felt okay. We thanked Dr. Feldman, and assured him we were thoroughly pleased with his efforts during the session. But our day was not done. We left the doctor’s satellite office in Moorestown, New Jersey, and drove straight to Richboro, Pennsylvania, where Howard Temple was waiting to hook Dennis up to his polygraph machine again. We had a couple of things to confirm in light of Wagner’s new version of what was said when he broke the wine bottle.

On the drive to Temple’s, I asked Dennis about seeing Natalie on the deck during the fight.

“Marti, when I saw Natalie on the deck during the session, which I always knew I had, I saw her in her nightgown, standing starboard. She was scared. She must have known it wasn’t a good place to be because of how crazy R.J. was.”

“Meaning she was as far away from the swim step as possible, right?”

“Yes. I think he went for her coat right after that last glance of mine. That’s what came into my head when the doctor just had me under.”

“Why didn’t you say it?”

“Because I didn’t see it, but I believe he got her coat and then helped her or saw her go overboard at that very minute, just after eleven. He knew she was in the water. I have no doubt about that now.”

Howard seemed pleased to see us again but got down to serious business immediately. We explained about the hypnosis session and about how Wagner’s account of breaking the wine bottle differed from Dennis’s. I asked Howard if he could also ask Dennis about seeing Natalie on the deck in her nightgown. Howard attached the machine apparatus to Dennis, and I left the room.

Question 1: On the night of November 28, 1981, in the main salon where Wagner, Walken, Wood, and you gathered, did Robert Wagner scream, “Do you want to fuck my wife, is that what you want?” when he smashed the wine bottle?

Dennis answered yes. And passed.

Question 2: On the night of November 28, 1981, after the argument between Natalie Wood and Robert Wagner carried out to the deck, did you see Natalie on deck wearing her nightgown?

Dennis answered yes. And passed.

When I returned to the room, Howard told me that he had asked the two questions in three different formats, and Dennis had passed all three versions.

After this full day, I thought back to Dennis’s middle-of-the-night phone call in 1983. Not once since then had I doubted my friend’s honesty, but only now did all of his truths converge with the conviction that I had done my utmost to tell this story. I had patiently learned details from a man whose emotions choked him every time he spoke of the tragedy. I had scrutinized every bit of information Dennis revealed, looking objectively to corroborate or disprove it. I had read hundreds of reports and articles, listened to interviews, considered rumors and opinions, identified discrepancies and contradictions in the accounts of Wagner and others, and carried out my own investigative experiments. The polygraph felt like the final step. I was done.

I carry a terrible image in my mind of Natalie, struggling in the unforgiving sea. Her eyes are wide and pleading: *Don’t let me die like this!* And the only thing I can offer her, through Dennis Davern, is this book: her voice, her truth.