Media Release

Publication date: May 2010

Murdering Stepmothers
The Execution of Martha Rendell

By Anna Haebich

Sensational rumours of the murder of three small children by their stepmother ignite the passions of Perth citizens in 1909. Shocked by horrific descriptions of how she poisoned the children, they demand her execution as one voice. But did she do it? Or was she a victim of the prejudices of her persecutors?

Based on a true story and meticulously researched, this compelling new release from UWA Publishing is driven by passion, imagination and an eerie conjuring up of the past.

Inspired by her shared experiences as a stepmother, Anna Haebich brings to life the people of Perth through the perspective of five different characters - the doctor, the priest, the photographer, the researcher and the detective - creating a fresh, vivid, fusion of factual history and insightful imagining.

We see the accused woman’s downward spiral from her dreams of a new beginning with her lover to a life of domestic drudgery and deceits; then her final days on the edge of the abyss – becoming the last woman in the state to be hanged.

Murdering Stepmothers tackles the very serious, and still relevant, questions of conviction, evidence, legal processes and right to re-trial against the backdrop of contemporary issues surrounding de facto living, step mothering, child neglect and abuse.

Murdering Stepmothers is published under UWA Publishing’s new imprint UWAP and is now available in all good bookstores. As a division of The University of Western Australia, UWAP aims to expand the boundaries of academic publishing, striving for social, cultural and intellectual renewal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Haebich is a multi-award winning author who writes about most aspects of Australia’s past from her own fresh perspectives. Anna likes to explore life on the margins. Born into a German Lutheran family she grew up in a large migrant community in Wollongong, lived for two years in Paris and spent many years working with Aboriginal people in Western Australia. She is part of a large Nyungar family through marriage and commutes between her home in Perth and her job as a research professor at Griffith University in Brisbane.

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ISBN 9781921401459 $26.95 pb