



# Are You There Alone?: The Unspeakable Crime of Andrea Yates

By Suzanne O'Malley

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**Are You There Alone?: The Unspeakable Crime of Andrea Yates** By Suzanne O'Malley

In the tradition of *In Cold Blood*, *The Executioner's Song*, and *A Civil Action*, Suzanne O'Malley exposes the human mystery of the most horrifying crime in recent history and the legal drama surrounding it.

As a journalist, Suzanne O'Malley began covering the murders of Noah, John, Paul, Luke, and Mary Yates hours after their mother, Andrea Yates, drowned them in their suburban Houston home in June 2001. Over twenty-four months, O'Malley interviewed or witnessed the sworn testimony of more than a hundred participants in this drama, including Yates herself; her husband, Rusty Yates; their families; attorneys; the personnel of the Harris County district attorney's and sheriff's offices; medical staff; friends; acquaintances; and expert witnesses.

O'Malley argues persuasively that under less extraordinary circumstances, a mentally ill woman would have been quietly offered a plea bargain and sent to an institution under court supervision. But on March 12, 2002, Andrea Yates was found guilty of the murders of three of her five children. She is currently serving a life sentence and will not be eligible for parole until 2041.

O'Malley's exclusive personal communications with Andrea Yates and her interviews with Rusty Yates allow her to offer fully realized portrayals of people at the center of this horrifying case.

In *"Are You There Alone?"* O'Malley makes a critical contribution to our understanding of mental health issues within the criminal justice system.

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- Sales Rank: #67663 in Audible
- Published on: 2004-05-12
- Format: Abridged
- Original language: English
- Running time: 423 minutes

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Andrea Yates's horrific murders of her five small children-drowning them one by one in their bathtub-remains one of the most shocking crimes of recent years. In this overly detailed retelling, investigative journalist O'Malley has transformed herself in the popular current style from observer into participant, albeit with ample justification. O'Malley, who had written for TV's *Law and Order*, was suspicious when a prosecution witness, attempting to establish that Yates acted with premeditation, testified that the television show had recently aired an episode in which a mother killed her children and then escaped punishment by asserting a postpartum depression defense. Sure enough, no such episode was ever made, and O'Malley led the Yates defense team to rebuttal evidence that came too late to affect the guilty verdict. The author asserts that Yates was never properly diagnosed and relies on psychiatric opinions that claim, tragically, that a different diagnosis and appropriate treatment could have prevented her devastating actions. The writing sometimes jars ("To say this day sucked didn't begin to cover it," O'Malley says of the fatal day), but some new information and heartbreaking extracts from correspondence the author received from Yates add interest. More analysis would have been welcome, even if the nature of the murders seems to necessarily render a satisfactory understanding forever beyond human capacity.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

O'Malley brings dignity to the true crime genre with *Are You There Alone?*. Through her in-depth research, interviews, and personal correspondence, O'Malley exposes the history of Yates's mental illness, attempted suicides, and the medical system that failed her. She asserts that if Yates had received a proper diagnosis and appropriate medical treatment, her children might still be alive today. While some critics found O'Malley's writing tedious, most were impressed with her exhaustive details, analysis of Yates's medical condition, and corrective to the media's story. Indeed, her attention to detail contributed to the discovery of a major flaw in the prosecution's case. Unfortunately, it came too late to reverse the jury's guilty plea, but influenced Yates's sentence of life in prison, rather than death, sentence. Overall, this book offers compelling insight into mental illness, healthcare, childcare, and the legal system.

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Review

*USA Today* The true crime genre often has the repellant odor of a writer cashing in on other human beings' tragedies, crimes or mental illness. Suzanne O'Malley's *"Are You There Alone?": The Unspeakable Crime of Andrea Yates* has nothing in common with that kind of trash...Without pathos or overwrought prose, O'Malley details Yates' serious mental illnesses, including psychotic postpartum depression and probable bipolar mood disorder...O'Malley is that rare writer who grasps that the most you can expect of people is that they try their best...This riveting book puts a human face on a larger social issue. What happens when the violent actions of an improperly medicated mentally ill person intersect with the legal system? Who bears the responsibility? --suzanne omalley

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