

'Greyhound' looks at murder of fascinating woman with BG ties

With less than two hours left to live, Hilda Reynolds Krause slumbered peacefully in the condo's master bedroom. She had not awakened as her husband, Marvin, prepared to drive to Caesars Palace.

So begins "Greyhound to Vegas: The Odyssey of Hilda Reynolds Krause," the latest foray into nonfiction by Robert Dickey, one of the most influential Kentucky writers currently on the literary scene. Krause was murdered in Las Vegas on Jan. 14, 1974 — the day after Super Bowl VIII. And although Dickey's prowess as an investigative journalist is undeniable, his book is about much more than the death of a fascinating and colorful character with local roots — it is really about the exciting and almost mesmerizing life she had led up to that point.

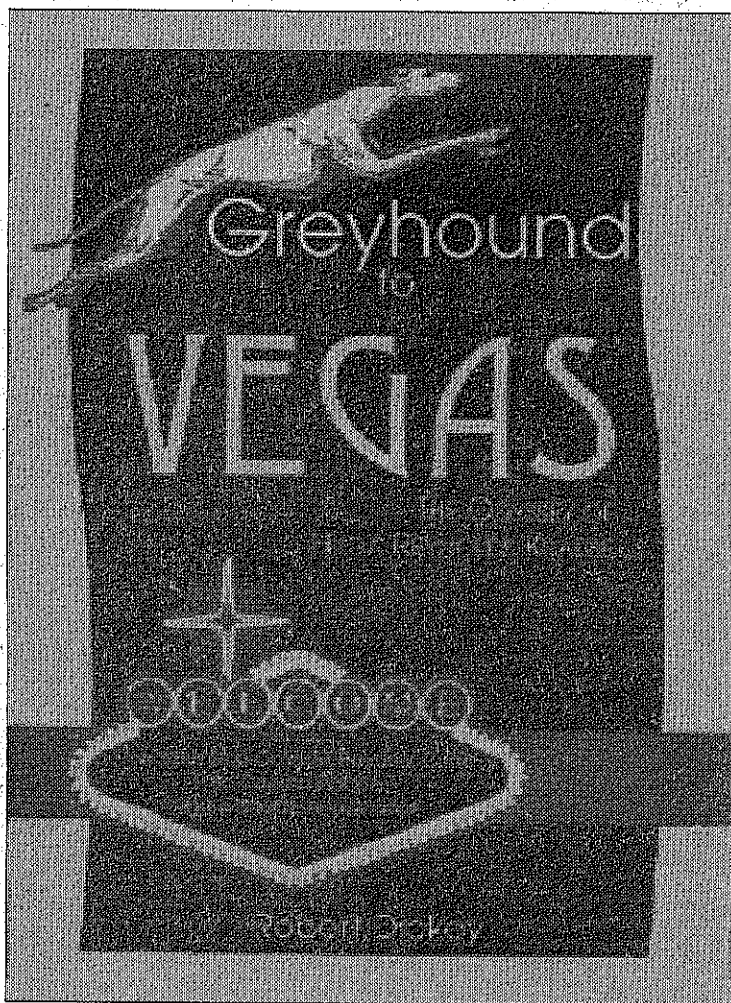
For the record, Dickey practiced law in Kentucky for four decades. He attended Western Kentucky University and is a graduate of Centre College as well as Vanderbilt University Law School. He served in the Marine Corps and was a reporter and local news editor for the Park City Daily News. His previous books include "Dynasty of Dimes: Eccentric Entrepreneur Engineers Empire," about the life and career of Charles Garvin, and "Near Misses: Growing Up in Bowling Green with World War 2, Fledging Femme Fatales and Fallible Football Fortunes," a personal narrative about coming-of-age in southcentral Kentucky during the 1940s.

Dickey's account of the murder, investigation, trial and ultimate conviction of those responsible for Krause's death is as captivating as anything that might be culled from today's headlines. "A straightforward contract killing is difficult to disguise. And that is exactly what it was, nothing more, nothing less. Hilda Reynolds Krause had been ticketed to die," Dickey asserts. "The results of the second trial were precisely the same for LaPena — guilty as charged. A jury of his peers had heard the evidence in the case and once again concluded that Frank LaPena had hired the killer of Hilda Krause."

"Hilda never apologized for a life lived in or within close proximity of a shadowy and volatile environment which, on occasion, could turn violent," Dickey laments.

Even though Krause's murder is integral to the book's appeal, "Greyhound to Vegas" is just as much a love story, an adventure yarn, a refreshingly seductive slice of Americana — in short, an immensely entertaining saga that takes the reader from West Virginia to Hopkinsville to Bowling Green to Cave City to Havana and eventually to Las Vegas. Dickey's prose constitutes a nostalgic trek down memory lane for local residents who lived through the era as well as an invaluable history lesson for those too young to relate to the places and events mentioned in his book.

The book is exceptionally well-researched. One of its more appealing features is the inclusion of a 16-page "Photo Album" in the middle of chapter 13, "Cave City, Kentucky: Marvin and the Grandsons." The various pictures and documents in this section help to bring the story to life in a way that would not be possible otherwise. I was particularly impressed by the letters Dickey sent to Fidel Castro in a vain attempt to gain additional insight into the nature of the business relationship



"Greyhound to Vegas: The Odyssey of Hilda Reynolds Krause" by Robert Dickey. St. Augustine, FL: St. Margaret Publishers, 2011. 229 pages. \$19.95.

Krause had with the dictator. Prior to the Cuban insurrection, Hilda and Marvin Krause had a significant stake in Hotel and Casino de Capri, which opened for business in Havana in 1957.

"With Hilda in charge of Hotel de Capri's kitchen and dining facilities and Marvin overseeing the casino scene, it didn't take the native born blackjack dealers long to learn the trade," Dickey explains. "But for Fidel Castro and his revolution, Hilda Reynolds Krause might never have left Havana except to visit her son and her grandchildren back in Bowling Green."

Chapter 9, "Hopkinsville, Kentucky: Love at a Bus Station," is one of my favorites. This is where Dickey describes how Hilda Reynolds met her future husband, Marvin Krause.

"He paid his bill and ordered a fresh cup because, he explained, it would be another half hour before his bus would arrive to begin a trip home to Pittsburgh," Dickey writes. "By this time, Hilda was listening to this intense and garrulous personality which Army uniformity could not quite mask."

"To a great extent, it was an attraction of opposites with a vast gulf of cultural, religious and personal differences between them," the author continues. "Marvin Krause was Jewish, and Mrs. Hilda Reynolds had presented Charles to be baptized at Bowling Green's First Baptist Church. While Hilda Reynolds was a seasoned decision maker, completely comfortable with the burdens of command, Krause was brash — loud to a fault."

Local history buffs will no doubt consider "Greyhound to Vegas" to be a goldmine as Dickey magically transports the reader to a bygone era. For instance, a pivotal moment in Krause's life occurred when Greyhound decided to change its regular meal stop from Bowling Green to Cave City, which is closer to the halfway point between Louisville and Nashville. "According to a pre-opening newspaper story, the cost of constructing the bus terminal

and cafeteria was estimated at approximately \$100,000 by its owner, Hilda Krause," Dickey writes. "She said it was not intended to be a run-of-the-mill bus stop, and it wasn't. Rather than being a drab box of a structure, Cave Acres would bring some style to the cave country."

Dickey even delves into Krause's embrace of the social and cultural changes that were beginning to manifest themselves all across America during the 1950s. "Cave Acres was at the vanguard of Kentucky's larger and more conspicuous public eating establishments to integrate," Dickey notes. "Ever the pragmatist, Hilda seized the opportunity to do the right thing, which, incidentally, streamlined her food service by eliminating the previously separate dining rooms."

Cave Acres was enormously successful. Hilda used the money she made there to finance other, more ambitious ventures — first in Havana, and later in Las Vegas. "Less than two years after Hilda Reynolds Krause's enforced departure from Cuba, Jay Sarno, a Las Vegas motel owner, along with a small group of investors, launched plans for what would become the most recognizable and opulent symbol of The Las Vegas Strip — Caesars Palace," Dickey explains. "Hilda Reynolds Krause was one of those original investors."

Be forewarned. "Greyhound to Vegas" is exceedingly hard to put down. There were a couple of evenings I found myself so anxious to find out what happens next that I didn't turn the lights out until well past midnight. My guess is you will have the same experience.

You can find additional information about "Greyhound to Vegas" — including how to order your own copy signed by the author — at RobertDickey.org.

—Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.