

The Godmother



By R. Marc Kantrowitz

Her story of cruelty, inhumanity, murder, torture and robbery paints a person so perverse as to seem unreal.

But Griselda Blanco was no fictional character. Rather, she was a force of nature, a combination of those depicted in "The Godfather," "Scarface," "Wiseguys" and "Catch Me If You Can."

Perhaps the stories told of her are apocryphal; perhaps the truth has been stretched. What is clear is that she was born in 1943 in the slums of Colombia and rose to become a drug trafficker on a level inhabited only by her.

She committed her first murder at 11, a year after running away from home and becoming a prostitute; her kidnap victim whose affluent family would not come up with the ransom was her age.

Two decades later, in the mid-1970s, she immigrated to America, which was in its infant stages of its growing drug obsession. Starting as a simple worker, she quickly climbed the drug ladder. Her creativity, ingenuity and thirst for blood allowed her to rein in a predominantly patriarchal society, where women were used as mules, sex slaves and disposable property.

Using multiple sources of supply, her cocaine pipe was always full. She pooled shipments and consolidated loads, thus allowing her to cut costs by sharing distributors. Her business motto was a simple one: Kill all who failed to pay and all to whom money was owed.

Over a 10-year period, Blanco fueled the cocaine wars and painted the Miami streets with the blood of her enemies. If innocent bystanders got in the way, that was their misfortune. It is estimated that she was responsible for the murders of 200 people.

Her personal life was no less tumultuous. She murdered her two husbands as well as various lovers. Of her four sons, three entered the family business and met violent ends. Her youngest reflected one of her heroes: She named him Michael Corleone. Their dog was "Hitler."

Her downfall came when she began using her own product. She became paranoid, gained weight and maintained a lifestyle worthy of her reputation. For those disinclined to engage in her bisexual orgies, she used a gun as encouragement.



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OPINION

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Needless to say, she was known to, and pursued by, law enforcement. Her nemesis was DEA agent Robert Palombo, who spent more than a decade trying to nab her. A master of disguises, she avoided him as she moved from New York to Miami to Colombia to Los Angeles.

In 1985, his determination paid off. She was arrested and convicted.

In jail, she wore silk suits in contrast to the prison garb of her fellow prisoners. While others were limited in their visitation rights, Blanco had the privacy to engage in sex with her new boyfriend, Charles Cosby.

Cosby also ran her drug empire, which netted several million dollars a month. When he unwisely decided to share his company with other females, Blanco had him shot, although not fatally.

In a phone call to him from prison, Blanco discussed his lack of wisdom in dating. She told him to look outside. There, in front of his house, four men sat in a car. He looked at them. They slowly drove away. Next time they wouldn't. Cosby got the message.

Anxious for parole, Blanco was stunned to hear that the Miami DA's Office was assembling multiple murder cases against her. One of the counts involved the murder of a 2-year-old, the son of an intended victim. Learning that some close to her were cooperating with the prosecution, she schemed to find a way out. The audacious plan she concocted involved the kidnapping of an American icon. To release him, she'd bargain her own release.

Assembling a team of kidnappers, some imported from Colombia, they set upon their prey. As John F. Kennedy Jr. left his apartment to walk his dog, one of the conspirators moved in, getting so close to him that his dog actually sniffed her pants. Just then a police car drove by. Spooked, the team retreated, set to move in another day.

A phone call to the prison updating Blanco alerted the authorities.

She was trapped, or so everyone thought. Once again, in a scene not worthy of belief, secretaries from the DA's Office engaged in illicit sex with some of the main witnesses, compromising the case. She ultimately pleaded to a reduced charge.

In 2004, she was released from prison and deported to Colombia where she is purported to be living a comfortable and peaceful life.

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Judge R. Marc Kantrowitz sits on the Appeals Court. He thanks Gina Plata-Nino, an intern from Northeastern University School of Law, for her background research in this column, which is based, in large part, on the documentary "Cocaine Cowboys II" and various Florida newspaper accounts. Kantrowitz can be reached at rmarckantrowitz@comcast.net.