



The Shooting of the Century

By Bill Dougherty

Oyster Bay New York was on the right side of Long Island. People who lived on the north shore had sail boats. People who lived on the South Shore drove motor boats. You get the picture? Up until that Indian summer of 1955, most people who read the news really didn't even know the waspy estate enclave existed. That was until wealthy socialite Ann Woodward put several shot gun blasts into her husband's chest. The rest they say is hushed high society history. But not exactly.

Ann Woodward was not as she appeared. She was from very humble Mid-West beginnings. Her original name was Angeline Crowell. She bought a bus ticket to New York, changed her name to Ann Eden and became a Powers Model in no time; due to her amazing looks. By



Ann Woodward June 1955



Ann and Billy Woodward dance at the Stork Club 1954

the early 1950s, she found herself splashed across the front pages of Café Society publications. She had quickly become a stage and radio actress and a showgirl in the most elite clubs in Manhattan. It was there that she caught the eye of one William Woodward of the Hanover National Bank fortune. It's been said the two immediately began an affair and when it was over, William Sr. passed Ann to his unsuspecting and virginal son Billy. William Woodward Jr. was tall, extremely handsome and charming. He was considered the most eligible bachelor in the world, after the war, if not the richest. But he, like his future wife, had plenty of skeletons in the closet too.



The Woodward's, other luminaries and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor May 1955



Ann and Elsie Woodward outside a New York courtroom after Billy's murder November 1955

The two married and quickly became the toast of New York. They had two sons and purchased a magnificent estate on the North Shore of Long Island. Everyone adored them. Everyone but Billy's mother Elsie, who took an instant dislike to Ann. But there was trouble in paradise from the inception of their union. Billy often enjoyed the company of both women and men, something Ann was well aware of. The couple chain-smoked, drank heavily and toward the end of the marriage quarreled in public, even at some of the most opulent parties in the world. Ann began to abuse prescription drugs and they totally ignored their children.

By the fall of 1955, the couple; both well skilled in shooting; began to sleep with loaded shot guns. A prowler had canvased Oyster Bay and like their neighbors, the Woodward's were on edge. Returning from a party for the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, where they fought and Ann spoke of nothing but the Oyster Bay Prowler, the couple continued to drink and smoke; eventually retiring to their now separate bedrooms. Around 2 am, Ann was awakened by a noise on the roof. Grabbing her shot gun, she saw a shadowy figure down the hall. She shot several times killing her husband instantly. Several hours later the police did indeed apprehend a prowler. However the man said he'd fled the estate's grounds when he heard gun shots.



The Woodward's at Saratoga 1954



The Woodward's Oyster Bay Estate the day after the murder November 1955

A grand jury would eventually find Ann Woodward not guilty of her husband's murder. The prowler also changed his story and said he was indeed trying to break into the Woodward estate that fateful night ... Many in Café Society believed Elsie Woodward convinced of Ann's intention, paid off everyone from the police to the prowler to exonerate her daughter-in-law and avoid further family sandal.

Ann Woodward would spend the rest of her life in a bizarre and almost nomadic existence. Her sons were sent to Swiss boarding schools. She lived in Europe for a while cavorting with much younger men and was often very drunk in public. Eventually she returned to New York, where she was basically held hostage by her mother-in-law, having been abandoned by her high society friends.

Most had forgotten about Ann Woodward until 1975 when Truman Capote, her arch enemy, released an scathing excerpt from his not yet finished novel *Answered Prayers* in *Esquire Magazine*. The next day Ann committed suicide. But things didn't stop there. Several years later both of her Harvard educated sons took their lives as well. Sadly, Elsie Woodward, the family matriarch who had done so much damage control decades earlier, would be the last man standing. In recent years, much speculation has arisen regarding Elsie Woodward. Much internet discussion has centered around what many now claim was her questionable upbringing. Was she really the person she claimed to be and from all that old money or was she herself a total fraud, just like her daughter-in-law. The world may never know.