

Close encounters of the weird kind with former members of the Boston Globe Spotlight Team

by Kerry Joyce June 11, 2026

Chapter One

A Show About Nothing

"The Gardner case followed none of the conventions and protocols of a typical investigation."

—Geoff Kelly, FBI Gardner heist lead investigator (now retired) January 28, 2026



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Our Staff



Walter V. Robinson, Director
Walter V. Robinson is Distinguished Professor of Journalism at Northeastern University, where students in his popular seminar have produced 26 [page one investigative stories](#) for The Boston Globe since 2007. In the 33 years before that, his byline appeared on the Globe's front page more than 1,000 times, atop local, national and foreign stories that often uncovered news that had been hidden from public view.

Robby reported for the Globe from 48 states and more than 30 foreign countries. He was a lead reporter for four presidential elections. He covered the White House during two presidencies. He was the Globe's Middle East bureau chief during the first Persian Gulf war. And he was the Globe's assistant managing editor for local news – metro editor – during the 1990s.

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Reformatted information from the WatchDog New England *Our Staff* page, saved by the Internet Archive on September 25, 2014

I don't know if I will ever write a screenplay about the strange experience I had in August of 2014, with two former members of the Boston Globe Spotlight Team. At least I have the title all picked out. I'm going to call it "Gaslight."

But as I have come to understand, to borrow a Stephen Kurkjian trope, when it comes to the Gardner heist investigation, gaslight is mostly the only light there is. You either navigate your way through this sometimes blinding,

mostly gloomy netherworld, to sift through the wreckage made of reality for a few slender strands of historical fact with which you can pull your way forward, or you can allow yourself to be overwhelmed, and let the liars win.

The year 2014 was a singularly meager one for Gardner heist news coverage. There was no mention of it around the time of the anniversary of the historic robbery in the Boston Globe that year, or anywhere, as had been the case for decades.

The lack of any media spectacle was especially surprising since the previous year on the 23rd anniversary, the FBI had held a nationally covered press conference announcing that "Information is being sought from those who possess or know the whereabouts of the 13 stolen works of art by publicizing new details about the case and continuing to highlight the \$5 million reward."

According to Stephen Kurkjian in his book on the Gardner heist case, "Master Thieves," "The purpose of the March 18, 2013 press conference and DesLauriers' sensational if unspecific, assertions were to draw maximum public attention to **the special website** the FBI had established to show what the thirteen stolen pieces looked like."

Sensational-ized was more like it. Sensationalized by a press corps that was expecting a big story out of the FBI. But like the villagers in that folk tale about *stone soup*, the reporters present were counted on to come up with the nourishing bits for themselves. And like the villagers in the story, the news media came through.

The "new details" were these: "The FBI *believes it has determined* where the stolen art was transported in the years after the theft and also knows the identity of the thieves." They do not, however, intend to make the identities of the thieves public.

Richard DesLauriers, the FBI's special agent in charge of the FBI's Boston office was pressed hard for an explanation as to why the names of the

thieves were not being released, by Emily Rooney in a WGBH television interview the day after the press conference.

"We're not in a position to identify those responsible," DesLaurier said because it would hinder our ongoing investigation and it would hinder our ability to vet new information and to analyze new information as it is coming in," he said, the day after the press conference.

DesLauriers also told the New York Times the FBI would be "starting a publicity campaign to focus attention on the paintings in the hopes of garnering leads from the public and possibly from acquaintances of the thieves, anyone who may have glimpsed one of the paintings over a mantel, say, or in an attic."

For all the big talk though, in the months that followed there was little sign, and barely even the show of a start to that effort. It was a much more modest effort than the publicity campaign, which led to the capture of gangland fugitive James "Whitey" Bulger in 2011, after his 17 years on the run. A few FBI Gardner heist billboards were taken out of moth balls and put up along highways in Pennsylvania.



Gardner heist digital billboard alongside I-76 (The Pennsylvania Turnpike) in King of Prussia, PA, 15 miles outside Philadelphia (left) Same billboard used in Boston five years earlier (right)

Consistent with the ineffectual-by-design nature of the FBI's investigation from the outset, the billboards the FBI put up directed visitors to the home page of the Gardner Museum website, **not to any FBI website**. And the Gardner Museum at that time had **nothing** about the historic theft in any way, not even in the site navigation tabs of their homepage.



FBI billboards direct people to the Gardner Museum website not to an FBI information page with nothing about the Gardner heist readily available.

Only a columnist for a small, south of Boston suburban daily newspaper, The Patriot Ledger, however, expressed any skepticism about the press conference in the news media.

Matt Connolly, a retired career prosecutor and former Norfolk County assistant district attorney wrote, "I happen to think that the FBI is blowing a lot of smoke."

In May of the following year, just a few months before I contacted *Watchdog New England* with my information about the Gardner heist, Connolly, in a column called "Holy Caramba The FBI's Gardner Museum Hoax Continues," again challenged the credibility of the FBI, as well as the Boston news media:

"Obtuse in the sense of slow witted probably best describes Boston media when it comes to the FBI," he wrote. Connolly also accused Geoff Kelly, the FBI's Gardner heist lead investigator, of perpetuating "a hoax on the public."

"Agent Kelly has been on the case for many [at that point 12] years; it's time the FBI put someone else on it to give it a fresh look."

Kelly, however, would serve as the lead investigator on the case for an additional 10 years, twenty two years in all, before retiring. It was a tenure, Kelly himself said, was unprecedented, to the best of his knowledge in the

history of the FBI. If the Bureau wanted anything more (or less) from him than what they were getting, they could have easily replaced him as lead investigator without the need for much of an explanation.

Most likely earning little as a columnist for the Patriot Ledger, Connolly posted his columns on his own website *Trekking Toward The Truth*, as well. In 2021, Matt Connolly died, but family members have preserved his website, keeping it active, while making only an occasional change or update.

Not one given to hyperbole or extremism, Connolly had already enjoyed a long and successful professional life. In retirement, he had an independence as a news columnist that few in the media could match. It was this man alone, a former Marine Corps officer and Viet Nam veteran, who on his website, consistently challenged the FBI's narrative, at one point referring to the FBI's claims in their press conference as "its silly story."

Connolly's assertions about the FBI's Gardner investigation left little middle ground. The Gardner heist investigation was either in some sense "a hoax" as Connolly had asserted, or it was, what the FBI said it was: The pursuit of art stolen by "members of a criminal organization with a base in the Mid-Atlantic states and New England," an area encompassing where twenty percent of the U.S. population then resided.

Connolly did not base his conclusion on any inside information or original reporting. The FBI's Gardner heist investigation narrative was a hoax on its face, he believed. For example, a couple of weeks after the FBI's press conference he observed in his column that "FBI Agent Geoffrey Kelly said that because the paintings were sliced out of the frame 'that's indicative of a rank amateur when it comes to art theft.' How does that square with knowing the identity of the thieves? If you know who the thieves are, you know whether they are amateurs or not." But the hoax called out by Connolly was one no other news media outlet was willing to notice or report.

The FBI public statements were steeped in the kind of equivocating language most commonly associated with politicians on the campaign stump. But these were not politicians, these were FBI agents speaking about a criminal investigation. No one was pressuring them to come forward, they were doing this on their own initiative.

Owing to the actions of some of the people close to the investigation, or at least the public version of it, I began to suspect that Connolly was right. Kelly and the FBI were perpetuating a hoax on the public, and members of the news media were in some cases helping them do it.

Chapter Two:

The Movie Rights and Wrongs

I contacted *Watchdog New England*, as just a concerned citizen with **no direct personal knowledge** of the Gardner heist case. I was someone without any government, law enforcement, media, or criminal underworld affiliations; a guy with a wife and children, one about to start the third grade, who perhaps saw something, said something and asked for nothing in return then **or ever**, except for one thing: to be **treated as "a confidential source."**

I didn't get it.

I sent my email around 11:30 in the morning of August 27th, 2014. It was addressed to Walter Robinson the former Boston Globe editor, and Globe *Spotlight Team* head, who at that time was a Distinguished Professor of Journalism at Northeastern University, and the head of *Watchdog New England*, (It's actual, formal name was: the "Initiative for Investigative Reporting at Northeastern University")

“The ultimate goal of this initiative was to make it possible for smaller community news organizations—which do not have substantial resources—to do serious watchdog and investigative reporting,” Robinson told the Columbia Journalism Review in 2011.

The accelerating pace of information technology likely rendered the *Watchdog New England* mission obsolete. It was no longer taking substantial resources to do "serious watchdog and investigative reporting."

What it did take was the willingness, the gumption, and the determination to do it. Those *human* resources were lacking at *WatchDog New England*, and most everywhere, seemingly.

Robinson had famously led the Globe's *Spotlight Team* during its coverage of the Roman Catholic clergy sexual abuse scandal. Kurkjian was also a *Spotlight Team* member during that time, and the two former colleagues, along with other *Spotlight Team* members won a 2003 Pulitzer Prize for public service, for their coverage of the scandal. The impact of the series was felt throughout the country and the world.

I did associate Robinson's name with the Boston Globe but my interest in sharing information with him had to do with his current position with *Watchdog New England*, not his past associations with the Boston Globe.

My email to Robinson began as follows:

*"Dear Mr. Robinson,
1. Please treat me as a confidential source. I'm entrusting you with this information in the hopes that you will respect my privacy and confidentiality."*

What followed was about 13 pages of information about three possible culprits in the Gardner heist case.

Robinson quickly forwarded my email, 30 minutes later, to his former colleague at the Boston Globe as well at *Watchdog New England*, Stephen Kurkjian, who had left *Watchdog New England* the previous year.

The body of Robinson's email to Kurkjian began and ended:

"Not sure of authenticity."

Robinson was one and done. He never replied to my email, or subsequent follow-up emails, or acknowledged receipt of it to me in any way. He had forwarded my email over to "the expert," a trusted (by him) former colleague.

Butt covered.

In contacting me that same day, Kurkjian began:

"Dear Kerry: Mr. Robinson (Robby) passed on your email that you'd sent to him." Kurkjian included my email to Robinson; as proof, I guess.

Why did Kurkjian assume that Robinson had not informed me that he was sending my information to him? Was this standard operating procedure for how they take care of "the little guy," as Kurkjian claimed to do? Or was this particular "little guy" (me) being treated differently because I was reaching out about the Gardner heist in a potentially problematic way?

Interview | March 14, 2016 09:03 20115 views

Stephen Kurkjian: "Spotlight" is taking care of the little guy



[Share](#)

"Spotlight" movie won the 2016 Oscar for Best Picture. It is based on a true story and tells about the work done by investigative journalists from The Boston Globe, who revealed scandalous cases of pedophilia in Catholic Church.

Soon after the Oscars ceremony my friend Artur Martirosyan, who lives in Boston, told me that Stephen Kurkjian was one of the members of the investigative team. I was in Boston within Momentum program in 2001, and Artur took us to the Boston Globe editorial office to meet Stephen, then two-time Pulitzer Prize winner.

This time, again through Artur's "mediation", I managed to speak with the three-time winner of the most prestigious U.S. journalistic award.

Stephen Kurkjian
Photo: Buzak

"Taking care of the little guy," if by little guy you mean the FBI, the Boston Globe, WBUR, and the Gardner Museum

I believe, that what would have been the professional, and courteous, the decent way for Robinson to handle my correspondence, given my request "to treat me as a confidential source," would have been for him to include me in the decision to forward my email to Kurkjian, or at the very least to inform me of what he was doing it, or maybe to just reply to my email, or one of my subsequent emails, or *something*.

Robinson never did any of that.

On Wed, Aug 27, 2014 at 1:48 PM, Stephen Kurkjian <stephenkurkjian@gmail.com> wrote:
Thanks pal. I think!

Sent from my iPhone

On Aug 27, 2014, at 12:01 PM, "Robinson, Walter" <W.Robinson@neu.edu> wrote:

Not sure of authenticity.

Walter V Robinson

NEW EMAIL ADDRESS: walter.robinson@globe.com

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Kerry Joyce" <kerryjemail@gmail.com>
To: "watchdognewengland@gmail.com" <watchdognewengland@gmail.com>
Subject: Gardner Heist Info

Dear Mr. Robinson,

1. Please treat me as a confidential source. I'm entrusting you with this information in the hopes that you will respect my privacy and confidentiality.

Portion of an email thread forwarded to me by Stephen Kurkjian

Gardner Heist Info ⌵ ⌵ ⌵

Kerry Joyce
Dear Mr. Robinson, 1. Please treat me as a confidential source. I'm entrusting you with this information in the hopes that you will respect my privacy and conf
Wed, Aug 27, 2014, 11:28 AM ☆

Stephen Kurkjian <stephenkurkjian@gmail.com>
to Walter, me
Wed, Aug 27, 2014, 3:29 PM ☆ ⌵ ⌵ ⌵

Dear Kerry: Mr. Robinson (Robby) passed on your email that you'd sent to him. I worked for him at the Northeastern Initiative and I am pursuing a book on the Gardner theft. I've read your message here, and had some questions. You able to talk about some of the details later today, maybe around 7:30 tonight or tomorrow night?

Thanks, Steve Kurkjian

Portion of an email sent to me by Stephen Kurkjian

On March 4, of 2026, for example, I sent an email to a Boston Globe reporter, Amanda Milkovitz, about a new \$2530 annual fee, not covered by insurance, that my primary care physician was about to begin charging all of his patients, if they wished to stay with his practice. He was joining up with an outfit called MDVIP, which "supports affiliated physicians in delivering personalized, preventive care."

At that moment, Milkovits was the Globe reporter covering a closely watched and "contentious grandparents visitation rights trial in the Kent County [Rhode Island] family court." Milkovitz, reporting from the courtroom, had a story in that day's newspaper based on her coverage of the testimony from the day before, as well as another story about additional

trial testimony in the Boston Globe the following day. I think it is fair to say Milkovits was as busy as any other Boston Globe reporter on the day and at the time I contacted her.

I had not asked to be a confidential source as I had done with Robinson, nor had I asked for any special treatment or consideration in any way. Yet, Milkovits managed to reply to me the same day:

"Hello Kerry, Thank you for your email. I'm unfortunately tied up, but I've forwarded your email to my editors, so they can look at your concerns."

Pretty standard stuff, except when the topic is the Gardner heist or maybe some other off-limits subject areas, apparently.

Kurkjian, one of the original members of the Boston Globe Spotlight Team, had been the Globe's Washington Bureau Chief from 1986-1991, at the time of the Gardner heist.

His own reporting had most notably focused on a personal scandal involving Congressman Barney Frank, a leading liberal voice in the U.S. House of Representatives at that time. Frank survived the scandal, and went on to be one of the principal authors of the Wall Street reform legislation, *Dodd-Frank*, enacted in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

Far from the scene of the crime, Kurkjian was nonetheless close to the scene (Washington DC) where the Gardner heist investigation was being directed. He did report on some somewhat local stories on occasion, for the Boston Globe, like one in August of 1989 (eight months before the Gardner heist) called "Restraining the media at the CIA", which perhaps should have been called "Retraining the media at the CIA," about a talk given at Harvard University, by William M. Baker, a former public information officer for the then head of the CIA William H. Webster.

Baker's lecture concerned the brave new world of horse trading between journalists and the American intelligence community. "On one occasion, Baker asked a reporter to withhold publication, and in return offered to give

the reporter the *entire story* once an arrest was made. 'Obviously, this assurance of a scoop was a critical factor in his -- and his editors' -- response,' Baker said in explaining why the [New York] Times decided to hold the story."



Pictures of Gardner heist eve video visitor March 17, 1990 (left) and Rod Ramsay in Tampa, FL after his arrest on espionage charges on June 7, 1990 (right)

The example referenced in Kurkjian's story involved Clyde Lee Conrad, the convicted spy who had recruited Roderick James Ramsay into espionage. With Ramsay's help, Conrad earned millions of dollars passing a "motherlode" of classified documents to the intelligence services of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, two members of the Warsaw Pact then dominated by the Soviet Union.

Like Ramsay, Conrad was involved in other forms of criminality in addition to espionage, *including art theft*. "I've been a bad boy," Conrad told an Army Intelligence Master Sergeant named Danny Williams, who at that

moment was working undercover to bring Conrad and his espionage operation down. Williams wrote a book about his experience investigating Conrad called "Damian and Mongoose."

"I mean a really bad boy," Conrad continued, "I've put buyers in touch with bank robbers who needed to get rid of some money," said the man who recruited Ramsay, who admitted to being a bank robber, prior to joining the Army. I've arranged buyers for stolen art. I have some of that [stolen art] on my wall right now," he said.

In the case of the Gardner heist, the "*entire story*," that a journalist, who won the FBI's favor might look forward to receiving, could be one about the recovery of the stolen Gardner art, which the FBI in their 2013 press conference implied was imminent.

"With today's announcement we **begin the final chapter**," DesLauriers stated in the FBI's press conference. Six months later, Anthony Amore, the Gardner Museum Director of Security, told a packed room, which included about a 100 senior citizens at the Milton Public Library, that the stolen Gardner art would be returned in their lifetimes. By that time DesLauriers was gone. He retired from the FBI four months after the March 18, 2013 press conference.

An itinerant ex-fed, whose last port of call within the federal law enforcement bureaucracy had been the Department of Homeland Security, Amore was designated an FBI partner in the investigation, by the FBI's Kelly, (*commissar* would be a more fitting title) while the city and state police and every other law enforcement agency remained excluded from the investigation, as they have been from the outset.

Twelve years later, in 2025, Amore was still assuring the two most helpful reporters in disseminating the FBI's dubious and self contradictory Gardner heist claims and narratives, that they would be his first call if, (*when*), he recovers the Gardner art.

"You and Shelley Murphy both say the same thing to me all the time. 'Hey, I'm going to be your first call, aren't I?' and you would be because the both of you are the best crime reporters in the city without a doubt."

The FBI was claiming to have information, the names of the thieves, that every reporter at the 2013 press conference was vitally interested in having, but not getting, at least not yet. It was quite possible that the FBI was withholding the names of the thieves, only *temporarily*. The identity of the thieves, therefore, was another potential "entire story" that could be shared with some deserving journalist at some later point.

There would seem to be little reason for keeping the names of these mere robbers secret, especially if they were dead, unless the names were classified because one or more of the thieves were more than just robbers.

In February of 2021, a report by the office of the US director of national intelligence announced, "We assess that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman approved an operation in Istanbul to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi."

So the United States government could publicly accuse one of the richest and most powerful heads of state in the world, of butchering a Washington Post columnist, less than three years after the fact, yet they would not reveal the names of the the Gardner heist thieves, the "burglars," according to Kelly, who "would have just as easily stolen a car or somebody's TV, and didn't know what they were doing," over 30 years later.

And *nobody* challenged it.

That was the state of America's free press *before* Trump's second term. The levers of autocracy were already in place. Trump was merely the first one to really take them out for more than a test drive.

By 2023, however, the FBI was no longer making promises. Instead they were making excuses. Geoff Kelly was prepping for his post-retirement 2026 book on the case. "We're really looking for, what I call *13 perfect*

fugitives," (the exact title of his 2026 book) Kelly said in an official FBI podcast. Because they are the perfect fugitives. They don't get sick. They don't have to go to the dentist with a toothache. They don't have to get a driver's license." Right. Because like all inanimate stolen property, they're *not* fugitives.

In the prologue of his book Kelly wrote "I chose to take a more unorthodox approach to recovering the lost artwork, and instead of working it as a traditional stolen property case, I worked it as a fugitive investigation. He never explains how this helps with the investigation except for giving him a way to personify the stolen works, and giving himself and his cohorts an alibi for not finding any of the missing art or accomplishing **anything**, in the FBI's thoroughly unsuccessful investigation

The FBI went from "we begin the final chapter," in 2013, to saying ten years later, final chapters are *harrrrrd*, when they involve finding missing stolen art, **suckers**.

When Kurkjian retired after almost 40 years with the Boston Globe in 2007, he continued on as a freelance contributor, writing mostly about the Gardner heist.

Less than two hours after I had emailed Robinson, Kurkjian, who shared the emails referenced here with me, wrote back to Robinson:

"Thanks pal. I think!"

Kurkjian's response, it is fair to say, suggests some ambivalence about his having received the information I shared with Robinson.

Is this the spirit of inquiry that investigative journalists generally bring to their job? Apparently, when the inquiry has to do with the Gardner heist it is.

Here you have one Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, who can't forward my email along fast enough, over to another Pulitzer prize winning journalist

who seemed a bit put out at having received it at all, but who then still wanted to interview me that very night.

At least Kurkjian's pointed reply to Robinson could have offered me a little advance notice that his spirit of inquiry about the Gardner heist case would not necessarily include my efforts, but I did not notice his reply until days later, maybe longer.

The Gardner heist is a historic story with a significant level of public interest, especially in the greater Boston area. When the Boston media-watch program, *Beat The Press* celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2018, it ended the program with a review of a half dozen "Media Triumphs," the top news stories during the time of the show's first twenty years. The review ended with a short segment about the Gardner heist.

Unlike the other five stories mentioned, the Gardner robbery took place eight years before the first episode of *Beat The Press* even aired.

Brief as it was, it still seemed out of place, alongside the other big stories: the Whitey Bulger capture, the clergy abuse scandal, the 911 Terrorist attack, the Boston Marathon Bombing, and the Red Sox first World Series win in 86 years. Nonetheless attention given to it on this occasion illustrated that the Gardner heist remained a big story, "the great white whale of art crime," and how the story persists in news coverage.

There is little reason to think that Walter Robinson, of *WatchDog New England* had achieved the kind of professional success he has earned, and the high esteem of his colleagues, by treating potential sources in the way I was treated by him. It does, however, represent one more example of the strangeness on the part of journalists, when the subject is the Gardner heist and its investigation.

If Robinson's response to me was an outlier, for him personally and for his profession, then perhaps it was because the Gardner heist investigation itself, and its coverage in the news media is an outlier.

As Geoff Kelly wrote in his 2026 book on the robbery, "The Gardner case followed none of the conventions and protocols of a typical investigation." The length of time he had been assigned the case was "bizarre," he said. "I don't know of anybody that's had a case that's even close for that length of time."

The same could be said of the protocols followed by news organizations in their Gardner heist investigation coverage. They too were and remain bizarre.

In 2019, at a Brown University ACLU panel discussion, *What Press? Whose Truth?*, long time New York Times journalist C. J. Chivers said that 30 years ago (1989), the Times would limit reporters to a maximum term of seven years on any particular "beat," to help ensure the independence and objectivity of the newspaper's coverage. Chivers lamented the end of this practice.

That rule has certainly never been in force with Gardner heist news coverage. Formerly at the Boston Herald and now with the New York Times, Tom Mashberg has been covering the Gardner heist for 30 years.

Mashberg co-authored a book with Gardner Museum chief investigator Anthony Amore, and this year, made a personal appearance with Geoff Kelly on his book tour in Boston, on the same day he had an article about Kelly book published in the New York Times.

Shelley Murphy has been covering the Gardner heist for 33 years, at the Boston Globe, Bob Ward, now at Fox 25 News has been covering the Gardner heist since the it occurred 36 years ago, and Stephen Kurkjian's byline appeared in Boston Globe news stories about the case for 24 years from 1997, until his retirement in 2021.

News organizations are no longer willing to sacrifice a congenial relationship with a valuable source, authority or institution on the altar of objectivity.

Although not fully vetted at that time, my information was a strong break, that would represent a challenge to the official narrative the FBI was promoting, and seemingly, that was not something Robinson was interested in being a part of in any way.

Surely Robinson was aware of some of the doubts news reporters covering the 2013 press conference were having privately, which Kurkjian who was associated with *Watchdog New England* at the time of the press conference, detailed in his book:

“At the press conference the FBI had "sketched out a scenario in the vaguest of terms," Kurkjian wrote, adding that their theory of crime had "a number of holes in it."

The Boston Globe
TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2013

Art thieves known, FBI says

Names not divulged; trail of Gardner masterworks ended with a sale try a decade ago; investigators cite progress, seek help in cracking 1990 case

By Milton J. Valencia
GLOBE STAFF
and Stephen Kurkjian
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Federal investigators, in an unprecedented display of confidence that the most infamous art theft in history will soon be solved, said Monday that they know who is behind the Gardner Museum heist 23 years ago and that some of the priceless artwork was offered for sale on Philadelphia's black market as recently as a decade ago.

In the most extensive account to date of the investigation, Richard DesLauriers, the FBI special agent in charge of the Boston office, would not identify those involved in the heist, saying it would hinder the ongoing investigation. But he said that knowing the identity of the culprits has "been opening other doors" as federal agents continue their search for the missing artwork.

Though officials did not provide details about the thieves, or say how long they have known their identity, the disclosure seemed to confirm a line of inquiry that emerged last spring. That was when the FBI searched the Connecticut home of a Mafia figure with ties to Philadelphia organized crime.

The heist, in which 13 works of art were taken, was one of the largest property thefts in world history and one of the most sophisticated, a mystery that has become fodder for crime novels and movies.

DesLauriers said that the investigation into the heist has intensified since 2010 and that investigators have since been able to track the artworks from Boston as they changed hands through organized crime circles in Connecticut and Philadelphia, where several were offered for sale roughly 10 years ago. From there, however, the trail went cold.

Monday's announcement came on the 23rd anniversary of the heist as part of a broad public campaign the FBI is initiating to raise awareness about the crime, the artworks, and a \$5 million reward for their return, in hope of a new break in the

ART HEIST, Page A8



In 'The Storm on the Sea of Galilee,' the viewer finds 'the sheer heft and intensity of Rembrandt's brush strokes.'

Johannes Vermeer's 'The Concert' uses pigment and oil 'to achieve . . . weightless and immaterial effects.'

Globe art critic Sebastian Smee on what was lost 23 years ago. **A8.**

Boston Globe Front page on March 19, 2013, the day after the FBI's press conference

This is not, however, how Kurkjian reported about the press conference in the Boston Globe, how he described it in interviews, or how he lectured about it in dozens of libraries throughout New England.

Before contacting *Watchdog New England*, I had already been through what would turn out to be a similar rigamarole with Anthony Amore, the security director at the Gardner Museum, the previous year. He had exchanged emails with me for ten weeks, starting in August of 2013, as he worked to get as much information out of me while at the same time, not endorsing the conclusions I had drawn, except perhaps through his continued willingness to engage with me by email.

At one point, Amore said that he was going to share an article I had written about the case, Rod Ramsay's possible involvement, and why that scenario would be problematic for the FBI, to one of the federal prosecutors working the case, Brian T. Kelly, whom Amore described as a friend. I never heard back about Kelly's thoughts about it, or Amore's.

Brian T. Kelly left the U.S. Attorney's Office ten weeks later to go into private practice with Nixon & Peabody where he "defends corporations and executives in federal and state investigations of all sorts."

Three years after leaving the DOJ, Brian T. Kelly told the Boston Globe "he remains hopeful the masterpieces will be recovered. 'All it takes is a new lead that leads in a new direction and a lucky break or two,' Kelly said."

A new direction was what was sorely lacking, a new direction was what I was offering. Robinson wanted no part of it or me, while Kurkjian stayed in contact with me off and on for six years.

In the absence of FBI backing, I did not expect media outlets to report that convicted spy Rod Ramsay should be a suspect based solely on the information I provided. But it was an opportunity for the media to investigate further, to follow up on my information. I provided specific steps for doing so in my correspondence.

Unless it was disproven outright, my analysis could also be an opportunity for the media to at least reconsider the role it had assumed in their coverage, of taking whatever the FBI was saying at face value, and in the case of the Boston Globe and others, in the years since, going above and beyond to support the FBI's disinformation effort, by rewriting history in a way that has given the FBI's dubious and ever changing narrative an **authoritarian flex**, and a media supplied consistency that it continues to lack to this day.

The Boston Globe could have openly expressed some skepticism about the FBI's ever shifting claims, or at least point out the lack of consistency in what the FBI was telling the public. They could question FBI investigators and their surrogates more stringently and ask for corroboration of some of the FBI's more dubious unsupported assertions.

Instead the opposite has occurred. If the FBI was a friend in need, there were numerous journalists, and media outlets who were willing to serve in the capacity of friend indeed: Bob Ward, (Fox 25 News), Shelley Murphy (Boston Globe), Jared Bowen (WGBH) Kelly Horan (Globe and WBUR) Howie Carr (Boston Herald and WRKO), Stephen Kurkjian (Boston Globe), and Tom Mashberg (New York Times). Meanwhile, there were very few, and none locally, except the Patriot Ledger columnist, Matt Connolly, who were willing to push back against the FBI's tide of questionable claims. Nationally, the only exception was The Daily Beast.

In the Fall of 2013, Kelly did an interview in the Boston Public Gardens, with Alastair Sooke of the BBC, which aired in December of that year, to suggest that Sooke was skeptical is an understatement:

Sooke: To say things like “we're closer than we've ever been” and “the case is solved” sounds like **madness** if you don't know where the paintings are now and you don't know where they've been for twelve years.

Kelly: Absolutely but it's the ultimate whodunit.

Sooke: Not the least of which because it's the ultimate whodunit, but according to you, you know who did it, but it's still not solved.

Kelly: Well whodunit sounds better than where-is-it [ba-dum bump].



Geoff Kelly laughing at his own joke in a BBC interview in the BBC documentary "The World's Most Expensive Stolen Paintings"

No doubt, the American public could also enjoy some comic relief from the likes of Kelly, a former producer for Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*, if the American media would just follow the BBC's lead and stop being so timid.

A month after my interview with Kurkjian, filming of the "Best Picture" Academy Award winning, "Spotlight," about the Boston Globe's Spotlight Team and their investigation of the clergy sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic church, began at Fenway Park in Boston.



The journalists and actors during the shooting of "Spotlight." Front row: Ben Bradlee Jr., John Slattery, Steve Kurkjian, Gene Amoroso.

Back row: Walter Robinson, Brian d'Arcy James, Michael Rezendes, Mark Ruffalo, Sacha Pfeiffer, Rachel McAdams.

The film starred Michael Keaton ("Batman" 1989) as Robinson and Gene Amoroso as Kurkjian. A year later, around the time when the movie premiered at the Venice Film festival, Robinson introduced Kurkjian, who was giving a lecture, and discussing his book about the Gardner heist case at the public library in Plymouth, MA on October 7, 2015.

In one passage of his title in his title-be-damned book, "*Master Thieves*," Kurkjian wrote that, "Hardly **master thieves**, the intruders pulled the majestic Rembrandt from where it hung on the far wall of the gallery and threw it to the marbled floor, shattering the glass in the huge frame,"

Robinson was sure enough at least, and even publicly endorsed the *authenticity* of Kurkjian's "Master Thieves," which, according to its author, on page 49, was not really about master thieves.

To the saying "Don't judge a book by its cover," should perhaps be added, or from the support it receives from ex-colleagues of the author, like Walter Robinson.

Chapter Three

All Aboard the Fed Train!

When "Master Thieves" first came out in February of 2015, Kurkjian said in an interview with the Dorchester Reporter, that "Over 25 years, so many names have been thrown into this. I had to come up with an overview that worked and conveyed – *even if it wasn't absolutely true* – the latest and best idea of who was involved and how they did it."

The Gardner heist case, with all of its sensationalist baggage, seems to have demanded, according to Kurkjian, a new genre of writing, one that is neither fiction nor nonfiction. Thanks to the Gardner heist, what with all of the "names thrown into it," by the investigators, and then pushed out through a media-manned firehose of falsehood, there would now be written works that are nonfiction-ish. Books, like "Master Thieves," that are categorized as nonfiction, but are acknowledged to be not "absolutely true," even by their own authors.

The Dorchester Reporter article's headline was "Veteran reporter stays on scent of the Gardner heist," but those "so many names," in Kurkjian's book, did not include convicted spy and admitted bank robber Rod Ramsay, a Boston native, whom my research suggested could be involved. Ramsay had lived at Whittier Place in the Charles River Park luxury apartment complex, while attending Northeastern University, a short distance from the Gardner Museum, nine years before the heist, and after his enlistment in the Army, for a few years in the Brighton section of Boston until 1988.

Nor did his book include the names of the other individuals I had mentioned. If I was correct, Kurkjian was staying on a scent, of something, but barking up the wrong tree, albeit one with bushels of government supplied low hanging (wax) fruit for him to feast upon.

Neither did it include the name of Brian McDevitt, a Boston area native, from Swampscott, who resided just three miles from the Gardner Museum, at 69 Hancock Street, in Boston's Beacon Hill, when the Gardner heist occurred.

As one of the Gardner heist perpetrators, Rick Abath, observed twenty five years later: "It's easy for a reporter to get hooked on to one train of thought and ride it to its logical conclusion; even if it was a fantasy from the beginning." Easier still, when there is a whole cottage industry that has been built up in support of that train of thought.



***60 Minutes'* Morley Safer interviews a former neighbor of Brian McDevitt in the entrance to the apartment building where McDevitt lived at 69 Hancock St. three miles from the Gardner Museum where McDevitt lived when the Gardner heist occurred.**

In the months following the heist, the FBI's official narrative about their hunt for the thieves could be summed up as, "They're not around here." It was at a time when the FBI was seemingly looking everywhere, except locally, for the thieves.

Two months after the Gardner heist, a front page story headlined: "FBI Said To Have Suspects Worldwide In Gardner Theft" in the Boston Globe began:

"The FBI's investigation into the \$200 million art heist at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum has targeted about a dozen suspects scattered across the world, sources said yesterday."

The story also reported that "investigators are keeping a close eye on the suspects' movements, particularly if they travel in and out of Boston. Sources were divided as to whether any of the suspects were currently in Massachusetts, noting that they frequently traveled from city to city."

"A close eye." Why were they not questioning these suspects?

Two plus years later, in 1992, Brian McDevitt did a television interview on the top rated national news magazine program *60 Minutes* about his possible role in the heist. Denying any involvement, he acknowledged on camera that he had spent the night alone at his home, just a few miles from the museum. McDevitt had no alibi.

In 1993, McDevitt was brought before a grand jury about his possible knowledge of the Gardner heist case. But by that time the 1990 Boston resident was no longer local. He had moved to California.

In McDevitt's attempt to rob the Hyde Collection in Glen Falls, NY in 1980, a female delivery van driver went to pick up a package but was "confronted by a man with a gun who forced her back into the van." Forced to drive a short distance, she was then "handcuffed, her mouth and eyes were taped, and she was knocked out by an ether-soaked rag."

By the time the FBI began serving up their official narrative, about local toughs being the culprits, McDevitt had left the city, left the state, left the country, and was no longer alive. He died in Medellin, Colombia in 2004.

To the Boston Globe, McDevitt was never the convicted attempted Hyde Collection museum robber, who claimed to have spent the night at home alone, just three miles from the Gardner Museum alone, an ex-con, without an alibi on the night of the heist, a local thug capable of planning and carrying out violence against perfect strangers purely for monetary gain, to

fuel his grandiose dreams. Instead, McDevitt was a Hollywood screenplay writer, usually not even mentioned by name in news stories in the Boston Globe, when

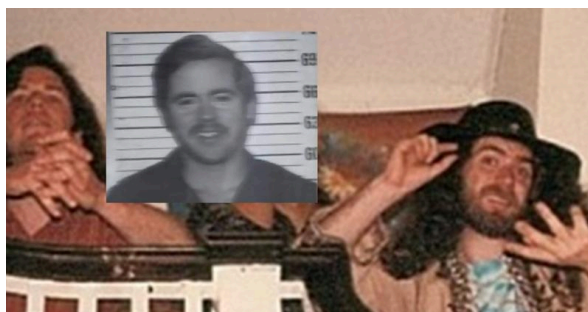
In fact, McDevitt had never been any more of a screen writer than he was Paul Stirling Vanderbilt, a scion of one of America's most famous Gilded Age families. Paul Stirling Vanderbilt was just a person McDevitt made up and pretended to be, as part of his plan to rob the Hyde Collection, in 1980.

Morley Safer on *60 Minutes* November 29, 1992: "McDevitt is now 32, living in Hollywood, where he says he went to reinvent himself, a new, clean McDevitt who would launch himself in a literary career or at least become a screenwriter." So he was going to *reinvent* himself perhaps as "a screenwriter. From the way Safer put it, the "screenwriter" job sounds like more of a backup plan, in case the whole being America's next Ernest Hemingway didn't pan out.

Morley Safer: Have you ever published anything anywhere?

Brian McDevitt: Nope, haven't.

The man that Shelley Murphy at the Globe has been calling a "California screenwriter," for over 30 years, was neither, nor had he ever been.



1981 mugshot of Brian McDevitt beside a photo of him with Rick Abath in a groupshot from Abath's soundcloud page

McDevitt was a thug, but not the kind of thug who quite fit the FBI's and Kurkjian's narratives. He was the kind of thug who was a college graduate,

an aspiring preppie, who favored Egyptian cotton Oxford shirts from Brooks Brothers.

Chapter Four

What's *'authenticity'* got to do with it?

Less than two hours after Kurkjian's reply to Robinson about my correspondence, Kurkjian emailed me:

"Mr. Robinson (Robby) passed on your email that you'd sent to him. I worked for him at the Northeastern Initiative [Watchdog New England] and I am pursuing a book on the Gardner theft. I've read your message here, and had some questions. You able to talk about some of the details later today, maybe around 7:30 tonight or tomorrow night?"

That email was the most normal and professional thing about my engagements with Kurkjian and Robinson.

Kurkjian and I spoke at 8 o'clock that night, just nine hours after my email to Watchdog New England. What I had sent Robinson was a five-thousand word document with 38 links to mainstream news sources, including the the New York Times, the Boston Globe, The Economist, and the Orlando Sentinel, as well as links to some primary source documents, which were available online, and in the public domain.

My emailed document to Robinson included several pictures of two of the three individuals, who were mentioned in it, alongside the Gardner heist police sketches, in most cases, for comparison.

My report also included two pages of specific suggestions on investigative areas that a reporter could look into to determine if the individuals I mentioned were indeed involved.

In my email, I made no claim to having any direct knowledge of the Gardner heist, or of ever having had any personal contact of any kind, with

any of the three people I discussed in my document. To this day, I have never met or communicated with any of the people I mentioned in the email.

The only information I shared about these individuals was taken from mainstream media news stories, and primary source documents found online, with the exception of information about them, and their alleged involvement in criminal activity, that had been shared with me several years before the Gardner heist occurred.

My germ of an idea, my hypothesis, originated with that information from years before the heist. And yet despite the modesty of my substantiated claims, Robinson was claiming to not be sure of the "authenticity" of my email.

My information was possibly authentic enough that Robinson shared it with Kurkjian. It was authentic enough that it gained the attention of two Pulitzer Prize winning journalists, one of whom, had written dozens of stories about the Gardner heist going back 17 years at that point, and who wanted to interview me that very night, a person whom neither of them knew or had ever heard of before, an individual who had no affiliation with the government, the media, law enforcement, or criminal gangs, and an individual who claimed no direct knowledge of the case.

I was open to sharing this information in further detail with Kurkjian since he had the institutional backing from the Boston Globe to handle whatever challenges that investigating the story might entail.

I was not looking for a byline, payment, or credit of any kind. But I also had no intention of just dropping my efforts, if Kurkjian was not interested, unless there was a solid reason for doing so.

Writing 12 years later, I continue to have two problems with Kurkjian's initial emails to me, in setting up the interview. I have myself conducted professional interviews, some with famous people, including "Weird Al" Yankovic and Bill Maher, as well as Mitt Romney, for the Worcester

Telegram and Gazette, when he first ran for the U.S. Senate against Ted Kennedy in 1994.

My first problem with Kurkjian was his informing me that he no longer worked with Robinson. Although Michael Keaton, and Gene Amoroso would light up the screen, playing Robinson and Kurkjian as colleagues, two years later, in the 2016 (Best Picture) Academy Award winning film *Spotlight*, as far as I was concerned Kurkjian was Robinson's *former* colleague, not a current one. He was someone Robinson used to work with, whom he had forwarded my confidential information to, without informing me of doing so. If he respected the material enough to share it with Kurkjian, he should have respected my concerns enough to let me know he was sharing it.

My expectation was that if Robinson shared my information with anyone, someone not formally affiliated with *Watchdog New England*, such as a freelance writer for the Boston Globe he used to work with, like Kurkjian, that he would ask my permission. That was the kind of consideration I expected when I prefaced my email with a request to be treated as "*a confidential source*." But he didn't tell me he was doing it.

Did Robinson think I didn't know who Kurkjian was? The document I sent specifically referenced a "Special Report," about the Gardner heist case written solely by Kurkjian, and I quoted from it.

Why would I contact *Watchdog New England* if I thought I could get satisfaction from Kurkjian or the Boston Globe?

I never heard from Robinson. My subsequent follow-up emails to him were ignored. Had I not heard from Kurkjian, I would not have known that he had opened my email.

This is how one of the country's most well-regarded investigative reporters treats people who contact him, concerning what is possibly significant information about a historic news story. A story he thought may warrant

further looking into by a fellow investigative reporter, a three-time Pulitzer Prize winner who had been covering the story for over a decade.

Perhaps this is indeed how Robinson generally treats potential sources, but his long and storied career suggests otherwise. Given all of the other strangeness about the Gardner heist investigation, and the news coverage of it, I believe there is something different, something peculiar about the Gardner heist and its investigation that makes even storied journalists behave in disappointingly unexpected ways.

The Boston Globe articles written by Kurkjian that were available online in 2014, included a Boston Globe email address for him. I had tried to email, at one point, and the email bounced back as undeliverable. The email address was a deactivated account, Kurkjian explained to me later.

Writing numerous editorials, including three in the Boston Globe, Kurkjian suggested it was so well established that the robbery had been committed by local toughs, it was only logical to conclude that there were local people who were not coming forward with what they knew. Investigators in the Gardner theft need to gain that sense of the collective loss among the Boston public to solve the case.

But Kurkjian, who claimed to be the Globe's "lead reporter" on the Gardner Heist case to Navarro in 2014, could not even be bothered including an email on his stories that was not broken, so that people could share what they knew with him.

During a lecture Kurkjian gave on the case at the Foxboro public library in 2017, I pointed out that there was an open pocket knife behind Abath in the crime scene photo he had of him in his slideshow. Kurkjian looked, his shoulders jumped up toward his ears, and he then said it would have to wait for another time.

In none of the subsequent lectures that Kurkjian has done, however, or in any of the documentaries he has been involved with, has the knife behind Abath in the crime scene photos ever been addressed.



Gardner heist basement crime scene photo of Rick Abath with an open pocket knife behind him

So who was holding back what they knew?

Prior to Kurkjian contacting me, I did not feel motivated to reach out to him. I had been researching the Gardner heist for a little over a year. I appreciated some of the information that had come to light thanks to his efforts. But my impression was that there was a distinct lack of openness about the Gardner heist case in the public sphere. There seemed to be little breathing room for fresh perspectives, and Kurkjian seemed to me to be one of those operating comfortably from within this Gardner heist bubble.

I found the FBI's widely disseminated official narrative about possible suspects, for example, flimsy, contradictory, and dubious. If Kurkjian shared my view, he had not expressed it in his writing on the case that I had seen.

Chapter Five

My Interview with Stephen Kurkjian

A problem I would come to have with Kurkjian's emailed introduction and proposal to interview me was his statement: "I am *pursuing* a book on the Gardner theft."

"*Pursuing*," to me suggested Kurkjian was in the early stages of writing a book, that he was at least still gathering information and that the book was still taking shape. But in fact, Kurkjian had already completed his book, by the time I spoke with him. It was available for sale just six months after his emails to me.

Typically a nonfiction book from an established publisher, like Public Affairs, which published "Master Thieves," is not available for purchase until 12-18 months after the final manuscript is completed. A work can be fast-tracked, as was the case with "Master Thieves," which was timed to come out for the 25th anniversary of the Gardner heist.

In one anecdote during a lecture Kurkjian was giving on the case at Southborough Library two years later, he mentioned in passing that he had been completing the last chapter of his book in May of 2014. That was three months prior to my interview with him.

As the author of the already completed book "Master Thieves," The Boston Gangsters Who Pulled Off the World's Greatest Art Heist," Kurkjian was not in a position to introduce any major revelations about the case, of the kind I was potentially introducing, about perpetrators, who were not the kind of Boston gangsters, the "hardly master thieves" ["Master Thieves" page 49] Kurkjian and the FBI were holding up as the suspects at that time and to this day.

My work fundamentally contradicted, and directly competed with the narratives in Kurjian's completed book on the case.

And since his book so neatly complemented the main tenets of the narrative put forth by the FBI's investigative team, (that the Gardner heist "was the handiwork of a bumbling confederation of Boston gangsters and out-of-state Mafia middlemen, (many now long dead,)" there was little reason, practically speaking, to make such an abrupt course correction.

If my information and analysis were correct, Kurkjian's book was obsolete before it was even released, and, if true, it debunked the FBI's latest *revised* claims about who the perpetrators were. That's likely why, one could surmise, Kurkjian replied to Robinson about my email: "Thanks pal I think."

In that Southborough Library presentation a few months before interviewing me, Kurkjian said that when talking to sources: "The way we work when you're in a very delicate, very tentative situation is, you build confidence, whatever they ask unless it involves a source. You chit chat, you show them your expertise, your seriousness and sobriety. You're not a wise guy, and they hear that."

In my own experience with Kurkjian, I did not "hear that." I experienced something quite different in Kurkjian's interview with me.

Mason University English professor Art Taylor wrote in his review of Kurkjian's book, in the Washington Post, that "Structural choices — and maybe bulldog competitiveness — further dull the storytelling in "Master Thieves."

The "bulldog competitiveness" was perhaps what was coming through in his interview with me. The experience felt more like being questioned as a hostile witness at a deposition by Kurkjian, who is a lawyer, in addition to being a journalist.

At one point early on in the interview, for example, I was going to tell Kurkjian something about why I had suspicions about Abath, something not

in the public domain, not in the document I sent, and that he couldn't possibly have known.

But before I could do so, Kurjian interrupted me and said sarcastically : "Oh, **you're** going to tell **me** about Rick Abath."

The reporter who spent close to two decades as Abath's defense attorney in the court of public opinion, despite direct evidence of his possible involvement, was not interested in hearing anything about why Abath could have been involved.

At that point I replied, "Listen, I didn't ask you for anything for doing this. If you can't at least be polite I'm going to hang up on you." We talked for about another half hour, about an hour in total with Kurkjian interrupting me occasionally to complain that I was straying from his questions. I was giving him too much information. My replies were venturing beyond the scope of his questions, and he let me know it was a problem for him.

This is the opposite of what an investigative reporter, or any investigator does when their objective is to uncover as much information as possible.

Kurkjian put me on speaker phone shortly after I called, which took a minute to set up with his tape recorder. He did nothing to put my mind at ease about sharing information about living suspects. I wondered if there was anyone else in the room with him, and who they might be.

We ended the call on friendly terms and Kurkjian told me he was going to try to follow up with the security guard Rick Abath about the individuals I mentioned.

About six hours later, in the early morning hours of August 28, 2014 at 2:44 a.m., **on Kurkjian's own BIRTHDAY**, the three-time Pulitzer Prize winner emailed former FBI agent, Joe Navarro, who in retirement had himself become a successful author and had established himself as a leading expert on *kinesics* (non-verbal body language).

It was Navarro, based out of Tampa, Florida where Ramsay had moved, who headed up the investigation of Roderick Ramsay's espionage activities, and his association with Clyde Lee Conrad. In the forty plus interviews of Ramsay between August of 1988 and his detainment in June of 1990, Navarro had been the agent in charge, and had been present for nearly all of those interviews.

The late-1980s investigation of Ramsay's espionage activities mostly covered his time in the Army, while stationed in Germany from 1983-1985, as well as at least some espionage activity he had been involved in when he lived in Boston shortly after he got out of the Army in 1985-1986.

In the interviews Navarro conducted of Ramsay, the former Boston resident confessed to passing highly classified documents to Hungarian Intelligence services, which resulted in his spending over 12 years in federal prison.

Ramsay, who prosecutors said had cooperated fully with investigators, was *detained* without being charged, twelve weeks after the Gardner heist. The admitted spy was then held in solitary confinement, while remaining uncharged with any crime for over a year, at the Hillsborough County jail, in Florida until his conviction and sentencing in 1992.

Kurkjian's email to Joe Navarro began: *"Hi Joe, I am a retired reporter for The Boston Globe who has been the paper's lead reporter for more than a decade on the Gardner Museum art heist. I received some information - well, more conjecturing [he's writing a retired FBI agent at 3 a.m. on his birthday about some "conjecturing."] - from a local individual who urges me to consider the possibility that Roderick Ramsay might have played some role in the Gardner heist."*

The 13 pages of meticulously sourced document I had shared was **not** conjecture. I did not conclude that Ramsay was guilty, I suggested that there was information that justified Ramsay being considered a suspect. And I didn't suggest he had "some role." I said he could possibly be the

man with the gold framed glasses who was one of the two men dressed as police officers who entered the museum that night, and did most of the talking, according to the security guard, Rick Abath, who let the thieves into the Museum.

Kurkjian continued: *"The heist took place on March 18, 1990, 12 weeks before Ramsay was arrested. There is no specific evidence that I know of him that ties him to it yet but as the individual says Ramsay and a roommate at Northeastern lived in the area in the early 1980s, went to high school with a fellow named [Name deleted], whose father was a local Boston bookie who might have rubbed elbows with those whose names have been tied to the case."*

Attorney Kurkjian says there is no *specific evidence* that he knows of that ties Ramsay to it. But, at that time, there was no specific evidence, in the public domain at least, linking **anyone** to the robbery.

Kurkjian seems to embrace the FBI's lack of enthusiasm for solving the whodunit aspect of the case. A couple of years later in October of 2016, for example, Kurkjian said on Emerson college radio, WERS, that Abath's "involvement with the bad guys has never been proven."

While it has never been proven Abath was involved, there was *evidence* pointing to his involvement, which came out in 2015. As Geoff Kelly said in 2015 on CBS Good Morning: "Someone went into the Blue Room that night, and the only one that went in that room that night was the security guard, according to the motion sensor printouts."

Eleven years later, in an interview with Forbes Magazine on March 10, 2026, Kelly said that Abath "took Manet's 'Chez Tortoni' off the wall, one of the pieces that was ultimately stolen."

Isn't taking a painting off the wall stealing it? This is the kind of equivocating language you might expect from a politician, not a former official who is engaging with the public about a criminal investigation he formerly headed up.

“If nothing else were stolen the night of the heist, we’d still be talking about one of the biggest art heists in history,” Anthony Amore said in 2016 of the theft of Chez Tortoni.

Clearly, there was evidence of Abath’s involvement, just as there was evidence of Rod Ramsay's involvement, which is not the same as proof of their involvement.

The number of people who make plans with others, days or more in advance, to enter a building as a team and engage in violence or threats of violence, as part of their plan, against complete strangers is extremely small.

According to federal crime statistics, the number of burglaries committed in 1990 was more than ten times that of the number of indoor robberies in commercial and business properties. Rod Ramsay had admitted to having engaged in this kind of criminal behavior when he was just nineteen years old. Brian McDevitt when he was only twenty.

While evidence can be weak, contradictory, and open to interpretation, it is data, information, or clues that can be used to support a scenario of what happened and who was responsible, or to eliminate one. Proof represents a sufficient amount of compelling evidence that establishes a fact or truth beyond any doubt. Not all evidence is legally admissible, but it can lead to evidence that is.

If there was no evidence of Ramsay's involvement, why did Kurkjian interview me? Why was he emailing a retired FBI agent in the middle of the night on his birthday less than five hours after interviewing me?

Kurkjian continued: *"And the two roommates [Name deleted] is the second man look somewhat like the sketches of the two thieves."* *"I realized [sic] it's a very long shot but no stone unturned in my business like yours as an agent."* So Kurkjian acknowledged in his email to Navarro that the individuals I shared **BOTH** look at least somewhat like the police sketches.

What are the odds?

And one of the "two roommates, is an admitted bank robber, and at the time of the Gardner heist, was the subject of an FBI investigation that led to his receiving a 36 year sentence, for espionage. In addition, the man who recruited him into espionage admitted to being involved in art crime.

Ramsay was potentially looking at life in prison for his crimes, as was his fellow spy Clyde Lee Conrad, who did in fact receive a life sentence, ten weeks after the Gardner heist.

In a 2026 interview in Forbes Magazine, Kelly said that the Gardner heist was "yet another example of Massachusetts thieves stealing Rembrandts because they figured they could use them at some point for leverage on pending criminal charges."

So who had pending criminal charges in 1990? Rod Ramsay, a Boston native and robber, who had moved to Florida a couple of years earlier, was also someone who at that time might potentially be looking for a get-out-of-jail-free card for himself and or his fellow spy Clyde Lee Conrad.

That had been the case the last time a Rembrandt was stolen in 1975, from Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. Ramsay, a Boston native, had a close friend and boarding school classmate from Milton, the hometown of Myles Connor. It was Connor who had negotiated a return of the stolen Rembrandt in exchange for a sentence reduction. Ramsay was likely to have known about that robbery and the deal made by Connor.

With the release of the Gardner heist eve video less than a year after my interview with Kurkjian, it would turn out that Ramsay also closely resembled the visitor who entered the Museum 24 hours before the heist as well.



Pictures of Gardner heist eve video visitor March 17, 1990 (left) and Rod Ramsay in Tampa, FL after his arrest on espionage charges on June 7, 1990 (right)

But already, Kurkjian "realizes" that it's "a very long shot."

Kurkjian concludes: *Thanks for letting me know if you had ever run across any Gardner connection with Ramsay, [name deleted] or [name deleted]* Best,
Steve Kurkjian

There are no question marks in Kurkjian's email to Navarro. because there are no questions. He doesn't directly ask Navarro anything. Perhaps that's how the pros handle it when they're "in a very delicate, very tentative situation," as Kurkjian described dealing with potential sources at the Southborough library, just not with potential *problem* sources like me.

"The most important thing is to keep [your] eye on the narrative." Kurkjian told an interviewer in December of 2015. My information could not be

shoehorned into Kurkjian's and the government's publicly disseminated narratives of the case. It was a narrative breaker.

If Navarro had ever run across any Gardner connection with Ramsay, the whole world would have known about it or the whole world was being kept in the dark about it. And if the whole world was being kept in the dark, Kurkjian provides no reason for Navarro to change course after 24 years, at least in the email he shared with me.

Also since the Gardner heist took place in the heat of a historic espionage investigation and trial, the details, including any possible involvement in the Gardner heist by Ramsay could be classified.

After his arrest, Ramsay waived his right to a speedy indictment and trial. He declined numerous requests for interviews. He was placed in solitary confinement in the Hillsborough County jail for 13 months, unsentenced, unindicted, and uncharged.

Ramsay was finally indicted in July of 1991, but the indictment was not unsealed for an additional two months and there was no announcement of the indictment. He signed a plea agreement in August, but that remained under seal until September as well.

Authorities gave no explanation for the secrecy or the unsealing of the case. He remained unsentenced and in solitary confinement for an additional 14 months, over two years in total.

"As part of a plea agreement, government censors must clear any of Ramsay's future writings about his espionage activity **or the investigation of it.**"

In addition, Ramsay agreed to give the government any future profits from the telling of his *spy* story." "As part of the agreement, Ramsay also said he would take periodic polygraph tests."

What information did Ramsay have that they were worried about him sharing? He had been out of the Army for nearly seven years? What profits did he stand to make from his "**spy**" story?

As part of his plea deal, if Ramsay were to share information with another person, related to his espionage or the investigation of his spying, and that person then turned that information into a book or movie, any money Ramsay received would belong to the government.

Making these unusual details of his plea deal **public** in the mass media, would serve to ward off any journalists or others who hoped to capitalize on the life and times of the "career criminal," and spy Rod Ramsay.

Before the Gardner heist, Ramsay was permitted to drive a cab in Orlando, FL with its numerous military training and other military facilities situated there at that time. But in his plea bargain he agreed to periodic lie detector tests, to make sure he was not passing along classified information, years later. If Ramsay's ability to pass along information as a prison inmate was a concern in 1992, it should have been a concern in 1989 and 1990, while he roamed free in a yellow cab.

Kurkjian does acknowledge that Ramsay and the other roommate "look somewhat like the sketches of the two thieves." But besides that, in his email to Navarro, he just offers that he has some conjecturing from a local individual (me), whom he falsely claims "urges him to consider that Roderick Ramsay might have played some role in the Gardner heist."

Despite what Kurkjian says in his email, I did not urge him to do **anything**. He asked me questions and I answered them.

He implied that his emailing Navarro had as much or more to do with my urging him, as with his having seen one or more details in the information I

sent, or something I had said, that had him looking into Ramsay's possible involvement.

The information I presented in my email to Robinson began: "Could a couple of former military boarding school classmates, Roderick Ramsay and [name deleted] be the culprits in the Gardner Museum Theft?" There was no urging, no call to action. I was just presenting the information for Robinson's consideration.

Kurkjian did not share the information I had sent with Navarro, to my knowledge, which could have caused him to think harder about the possibility that Ramsay was involved.

Not only does Kurkjian not ask Navarro a direct question, he does not even explicitly suggest that Navarro consider the possibility that Ramsay was involved. He just suggests that Navarro share it with him if he had "run across any Gardner connection with Ramsay."

Navarro replied to Kurkjian's 3 a.m. email at 7 p.m. that night.

Subject: Re: from Steve Kurkjian, Re: Roderick Ramsay

To: Stephen Kurkjian

"Stephen, interesting story," Navarro begins. What story? The story, as told by Kurkjian in 200 words, is that someone, who is "conjecturing" that Rod Ramsay was involved, and that Ramsay and his roommate, who both "look somewhat like the Gardner heist police sketches," in Kurkjian's own view, is urging him to consider Ramsay as a Gardner heist suspect, and so he, Stephen Kurkjian, a three time Pulitzer Prize winner and the lead reporter for the Boston Globe on the Gardner heist case, is just casually emailing Navarro at three o'clock in the morning, about whether he had ever run across any Gardner connection with Ramsay.

That is not a very interesting story, unless it is quite possibly true.

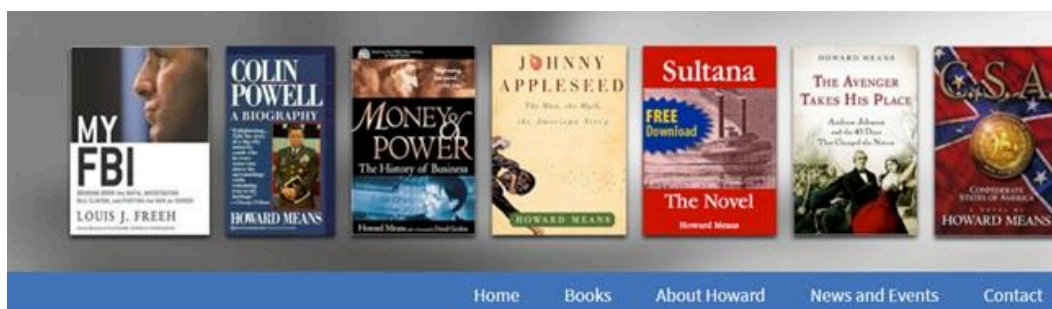
At no point in his reply does Navarro address the issue of whether he had "ever run across any Gardner connection with Ramsay." Instead Navarro explores the major question, not asked by Kurkjian, which is this:

Would it have been possible for Ramsay, seemingly scraping by as a cab driver, at Orlando International Airport, and possibly unemployed, to have robbed the Gardner Museum?

To that question Navarro offers nothing close to an iron-clad alibi, writing:

"For nearly 6 months, including the period you indicate, [What period exactly was that?] Ramsay was under surveillance and or meeting with me almost twice a week but at least once a week and at the time; also, sources close to his employer (cab company) showed him going to work every day. His phones were being monitored so I don't know how it would be possible. Do you have pictures of the bad guys?"

Navarro knows exactly when he met with Ramsay in March of 1990, and in every other month and year, or has an easily accessible record of his exchanges. Seven months after Kurkjian's email to him on April 15, 2015 it was announced that Navarro had sold the film rights to a book, which had **not yet been written**, about his investigation of Rod Ramsay, to George Clooney's Smokehouse Pictures. Later that same month TriStar announced they had bought the film rights to Kurkjian's just released "Master Thieves." Neither work has ever been made into a movie.



This book still needs to be written, but... - April 15, 2015

from the April 13, 2015, VARIETY: George Clooney and Grant Heslov's Smokehouse Pictures has picked up the film rights to Joe Navarro's "Three Minutes to Doomsday." The book follows the FBI's leading body language expert, ... [Read More](#) →

Background on "Sultana: The Novel" - March 10, 2015

Sultana: The Novel opens in early April 1865 inside the Confederate prison at Cahaba, Alabama. The central characters initially are four Union soldiers from Muncie, Indiana — two brothers, their uncle, and a best friend ... [Read More](#) →

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[This book still needs to be written, but...](#)

Announcement by author and ghost writer Howard Means that Joe Navarro had sold the film rights to his Rod Ramsay story to George Clooney's Smokehouse Pictures

Did Navarro suddenly decide 24 years after his last dealings with Ramsay, some hours, days or weeks after his email exchange with Kurkjian that it was an auspicious time to write the book about his investigation of Rod Ramsay? Or was it in some form of a planning phase already? Had the possibility of Ramsay being one of the Gardner heist thieves given Navarro the nudge he needed to pursue this idea for a book?

In his book on the case Navarro wrote: "My army sources tell me there are gaping holes in the prosecution's case against [spy Clyde Lee] Conrad, holes that **only** Rod Ramsay's story can fill. Since I'm going to be, in effect, **Ramsay's surrogate at the trial** [in a German court], that means me. For a solid week I sift through what are now thirty-six volumes of material and hundreds of pages from Ramsay, **getting names and dates right**, refreshing my memory for trial."

If Navarro had a meeting with Ramsay around the time of the Gardner heist he could have easily told Kurkjian. When his book came out, two and a half years *after* Kurkjian had emailed him, there was no mention in his book of a meeting, explicitly, or implied that took place between Navarro and Ramsay in March or April of 1990.

Half of the first 14 chapters after the chapter title, in Navarro's "Three Minutes To Doomsday" start with the date, like a diary entry, in the pre-1990 chapter headings. In the entire book, however, the term "1990," only appears twice, the year Ramsay was arrested in June.

One mention was for a meeting he had with Ramsay on February 12, 1990, in the chapter heading. But after that chapter, the book becomes oddly date-free. The only other time "1990" appears in the book, was a reference to the date of Conrad's conviction for treason in West Germany, "June 6, 1990," which was the day before Ramsay's arrest (*detainment*). The month of May is only referenced when Navarro wrote of "being ordered to go testify in Germany during the week of May 6 [1990]."

On the matter of the FBI's surveillance of Ramsay at the time of the Gardner heist, Navarro wrote:

"These days Rod is driving a cab—and not his own. Every day he picks up a vehicle that he may or may not ever have driven before and spends up to twelve hours or longer behind its wheel, much of that time at Orlando International Airport, waiting in a long queue to pick up whoever happens to be at the front of the line when he gets there."

"Once he has a fare in the backseat, Navarro continues, "he goes wherever the customer directs, in a yellow cab identical from the air or ground to perhaps two thousand other yellow cabs working the streets of Greater Orlando. Put a bug in Rod's cab? Which one? Make sure all his fares are our agents? Just imagine how many man-hours would be consumed standing in cab queues at the airport, not to mention the expense for the perpetual fares. And how would you ever time things so our agent was at the head of the line every time Rod's turn came up? (God forbid that one of the agents might need to take a piss and screw up the entire cab-rank rotation.)"

Ramsay had chosen one of the absolutely lowest paying jobs, that of cab driver, for someone just starting out. He had no salary, no hourly wage, and

no minimum wage. He rented the taxi and kept whatever was left over after paying the rental fee to Yellow cab. "It's a task tried by hundreds of people each year. Some make a career of it; others, like Ramsay, disappear."

Ramsay had only been in Florida for a couple of years, and had settled not in Orlando, but Tampa. Knowing he was under investigation for espionage, Ramsay started a job driving a cab, with no base pay, in an unfamiliar city.

The cab driving gig, however, did manage to be the most challenging job imaginable in terms of the FBI conducting surveillance on him. But if it ever occurred to Navarro or anyone else that Ramsay might have chosen to be a cab driver precisely *because* it would make surveillance difficult, he never shared those concerns in his book, or the difficulties of having him under surveillance, or in his email reply to Kurkjian.

An added challenge was that the FBI was trying to have Ramsay under surveillance without his knowing about it. "This isn't TV surveillance," Navarro continued. "This is the real thing. And you've got to be on your toes at all times because it's easy to detect surveillance if you know what you're doing."

"Screw up our surveillance, overplay our hand, spook Rod Ramsay too badly, and we'll end holding the same empty bag—with, to my mind, even bigger secrets unrevealed."

Later in the book, Navarro described one discussion with Ramsay, where he chose his words carefully to avoid "tipping Rod to the fact that we had a tail on him."

Orlando had a large military presence at that time. It included the Orlando Naval Training Center, the Orlando Recruit Training Command, as well as the Navy Nuclear Power Training Command. For the time Ramsay was working there, Orlando also had the potential to be the home of the Ramsay espionage operation from out of his rented cab.

"Thanks to Disney World, Epcot Center, SeaWorld, and a dozen other lesser tourist destinations, Orlando probably has as many for-hire car services per capita as any place in the United States," Navarro wrote.

Also at that time in Orlando, with family vacations as a cover, Orlando was known to be a hot spot for espionage activity.

It is unthinkable that given the legal peril Ramsay found himself in, as well as the immediate and continuing financial strain he was under, that the government was not keeping close tabs on him, unless they were convinced that any information he possessed was so compromised, outdated, adulterated, or otherwise obsolete, that there was no point in worrying about it. There was still the possibility, however, he could get involved with new espionage or other criminal projects.

By the time of the Gardner heist, Ramsay was cooperating fully and getting kid-gloves treatment in the hopes of his continued assistance. Six weeks before Ramsay's arrest, twenty months after Navarro's initial interview with him, he fretted over telling Ramsay that he was flying to West Germany to testify against Clyde Lee Conrad.

"I think long and hard about this, telling Rod what I'm doing. Is he more likely to bolt if he hears secondhand, through the press or maybe some buried contact, that I'm testifying at Clyde's trial or if I tell him myself?"

Navarro acknowledged in his book that Ramsay could have contacts in the espionage world a month before his arrest and a month after the Gardner heist.

"Either way," Navarro continues, "the risks are huge. Rod is fluent in German, Japanese, and Spanish; he could lose himself in any one of dozens of places, not excluding Russia itself. And of course, **he's inherently volatile with a proven track record of reckless behavior and rash decision-making.**"

Apparently Ramsay still had his passport, and if Navarro was worried about his leaving the country, there were few if any constraints on his travel. A passport photo of Ramsay appears near the end of Navarro's book. Was there anything preventing Ramsay from leaving town?

Since his level of cooperation would figure into what kind of a sentence he would receive for his admitted acts of espionage, Ramsay had a strong incentive to be helpful to Navarro and other investigators

At the same time the fact that he had cooperated so fully and still did not have a deal with the feds would likely have weighed on him. He was already commuting to Orlando airport. Maybe he just decides one day to get on a plane. There were no legal limitations on Ramsay's travel, and he can't be faulted for ducking surveillance by getting on a plane if he was not supposed to know he was under surveillance.

He certainly had ample opportunity to fly to Boston since he started each workday at Orlando airport. Another possibility is that the FBI had him under surveillance, was aware that he was getting on a plane, but chose not to impede him, and instead followed him, in the hopes of finding out more about his activities and those of his associates.

In addition Navarro says sources close to his employer, not his employer, but "sources **close** to his employer (cab company) showed him going to work every day." Nobody works every day. When someone says that somebody came to work every day that generally means they were reliable. They came on the days they were scheduled. They did not take a lot of unscheduled time off.

As it is generally understood this term does not mean literally that they came to work every single day. Ramsay sometimes worked as a cab driver at night too, according to Navarro's book. This is an example of the equivocating, imprecise language Navarro deployed in his reply to Kurkjian.

Cab drivers who rent their taxis like Ramsay, are not employees. They are independent contractors. With "the hours upon hours he spends waiting in line at Orlando International every day in a cab he can pay the rent on only if he gets more fares than time permits."

"Why don't you work the hotels, Rod," Navarro suggests at one point.

But Navarro writes that sources **showed** him working every day. This suggests some kind of a record, like a payroll record or cab rental record. If Ramsay was under surveillance, then the FBI would have logged the dates and times of his cab rentals. Surely in the "thirty-six volumes of material and hundreds of pages" about Ramsay there would be payroll records or cab rental ledgers showing the time and dates of his work.

Furthermore, after his arrest numerous news reports, with Navarro as their source described Ramsay as an *unemployed* cab driver: "Ramsay told the FBI he made \$20,000 for his spy work, but at the time of his arrest he was an unemployed cab driver so financially strapped he was living at his mother's tiny trailer in Tampa and sometimes slept in his car, Navarro said."

But Navarro, in his email to Kurkjian makes no reference to the fact that Ramsay was unemployed, starting around the time of the Gardner heist. "Officials at Yellow Cab Co., where Ramsay worked, could not be reached to confirm the dates of his employment, although he *appeared* to have worked there from last summer to this spring." the Orlando Sentinel reported on June 10, 1990, a few days after Ramsay's arrest.

"Spring" started on March 20th of that year, but Meteorologists and climatologists actually consider March 1 the beginning of spring in North America. The Gardner heist was on March 18. There is no precise time when Ramsay left his job, but it was around the time of the Gardner heist.

Navarro says Ramsay's phones were monitored, but according to a newspaper story from the time of his arrest, "a fellow cab driver who felt

sorry for Ramsay had let him stay with him at one point. But he was incensed by news of the arrest and headed to the FBI with phone bills detailing Ramsay's long-distance calls, drivers said Saturday."

Who was this "nice guy, kind of quiet, Ramsay, who found himself in such dire straits, calling long-distance at that time?

In 2000, there were 1100 pay phones at Atlanta's international airport, the busiest airport in the country, about twice as busy as Orlando. There were likely several hundred pay phones at Orlando airport alone, and payphones would be ubiquitous in a tourist destination, like Orlando, most particularly in the areas where a cab driver was likely to find themselves. There was no way to monitor Ramsay's use of telephones in a way that he could not thwart, with little effort.

In his email to Kurkjian, Navarro left the door open to further discussion on the question of Ramsay's possible involvement by ending it by asking "Do you have pictures of the bad guys?"

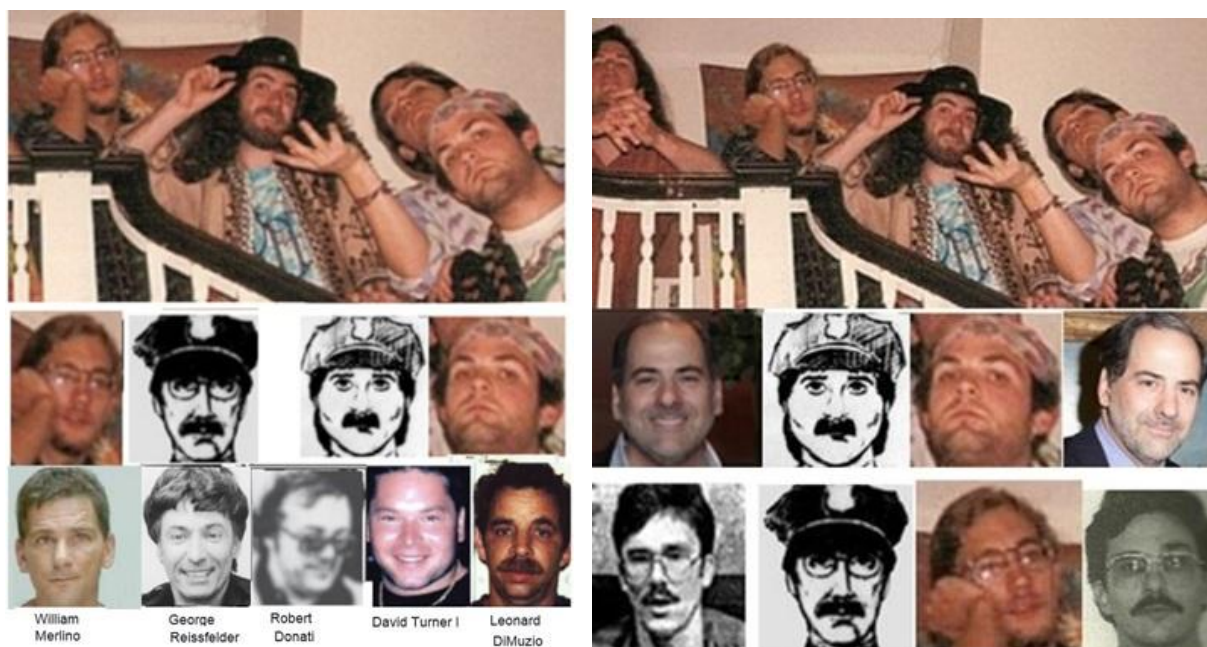
If Ramsay's alibi was a certainty, or he was suggesting it was, he would not have asked this question.

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If Ramsay's alibi was a certainty, or he was suggesting it was, he would not have asked this question.

Based on the information I had shared and Navarro's email response, Kurkjian told me he considered Ramsay's possible involvement in the Gardner heist "far-fetched." He did ask me about the other participants, who were involved with him in the Vermont bank robbery, which Ramsay had led and "plotted." But I did not have that information at that time.

A month after Kurkjian interviewed me, filming on location in Boston began on the Academy Award winning movie "Spotlight."



Comparing associates of Rick Abath (in black Stetson) with police sketches, FBI suspects, Rod Ramsay (mustache and glasses) and Ramsay's Boston roommate

In 2017, when Navarro's book "Three Minutes to Doomsday" came out, I told Kurkjian about it, at the Boyden Library in Foxboro, on April 6, 2017. "Is there anything about the Gardner heist in it?" Kurkjian asked me.

There was not. But if Kurkjian was asking, maybe the possibility did warrant further investigation, although Kurkjian and the Boston Globe were clearly not the people to do it, and seemed to be doing quite well for themselves, disseminating the FBI's disinformation talking points in their sensationalized stories.

The day after I spoke briefly with Kurkjian in Foxboro, I sent an email to him about the problem I had with the government blaming the heist on Leonard DiMuzio, an honorably discharged Viet Nam era Marine Corps NCO, and the victim of an unsolved homicide, and also George Reissfelder, a white collar criminal, who "spent half of his short adult life in prison for a crime he didn't commit."

Reissfelder died of an overdose, but now Geoffrey Kelly suggests that Reissfelder was actually murdered, which would make him, like DiMuzio, a victim of an unsolved homicide.

"There is zero possibility these guys did it and they[the FBI] know it," I wrote to Kurkjian in an email, after seeing him in Foxboro. "It is not their theory. And then the government does not even have the guts to come out and say that's who they think did it and accept the consequences of their lies. And yet they not only don't have the media challenging them or ignoring them, they have you putting it in the newspaper that that is who they think did it under your byline. I have said who I think did it and I have it as a pinned tweet on my Twitter page for over a year. And the people I'm talking about are alive."

"Kerry, let's not get too driven here," Kurkjian wrote in an email. the same Kurkjian who "dives deep into the underbelly of Boston's crime syndicates of the 1980s and 1990s," according to the Dorchester Reporter.

*"Let's remain friends," he continued, "but I'm not going to go down these rat holes [not rabbit holes, **rat holes**] with you as it doesn't do your mental health any good. Have your wife say it's ok and then I'll consider it. But let's talk of more interesting stuff like the Red Sox and the Pats until then.*

Only 15 months earlier Kurkjian had asked me three times to meet with him in my home state of Rhode Island. He proposed having lunch at an Irish pub not far from the Rhode Island Statehouse, Patrick's.

Kurkjian's proposal to meet with me came after I had sent him an email after attending a lecture of the Gardner heist case he gave at the Weston Public library on January 20, 2016. We exchanged small talk briefly, but nothing about the Gardner heist, and he was not aware that I was someone he had conducted a telephone interview with about the case a year and a half earlier.

I was leery of meeting with him after the past experience of our phone interview. I contacted Anthony Amore at the Gardner Museum, about the idea of meeting with Kurkjian. We had exchanged dozens of emails from August to October of 2013 about my thinking on the case and my belief that Ramsay was involved.

By that time too, I had a Twitter account with dozens of tweets examining the possibility that Ramsay should be a suspect. The information I shared with Amore the previous year was pretty much the same information which Kurkjian had seen.

Amore gave me reason to be mistrustful of Kurkjian. Amore: "Kurkjian throws whatever he can against the wall in hopes that it will stick. Just look at the book!!!" Amore wrote. As well as: "I think you have a good sense of how Kurkjian operates. For instance: that story about the shed is inaccurate. But then again, so are pages 1-300. Another example: I never, ever, gave anyone including Elene Guarente \$1, never mind \$1000. It's a complete falsehood. You seem like an extremely bright and savvy individual. You should follow your instincts on meeting with him. I'm a believer that our gut reactions occur for a reason."

Subsequent emails from Amore stated, *"Keep in mind that you owe him nothing; he's not anywhere close to getting to the bottom of this; and you have nothing to gain from it,"* and *"Beware of 'off the record' promises, Kerry."*

During the time that Kurkjian was trying to set up the interview with me, he sent me a couple of out-of-the-blue emails about matters related to the Gardner heist case, but which we had never discussed.

In one email, sent to me on January 21, 2016, Kurkjian wrote:

"I heard they were battling - [Robert] Fisher, the new prosecutor in the case, was frustrated by how little spadework had been done by the FBI. But

there's a major disconnect between what the US attorneys office wants to get done and the approach that the feds take in an investigation."

In the original information I had sent to Robinson that was forwarded to Kurkjian and was the basis of his interview with me, I had written about how the FBI might have been reluctant to prosecute Ramsay. And now here was Kurkjian, a year and a half later, supporting my contention that the FBI might have been reluctant to "solve" the Gardner heist case at the outset.

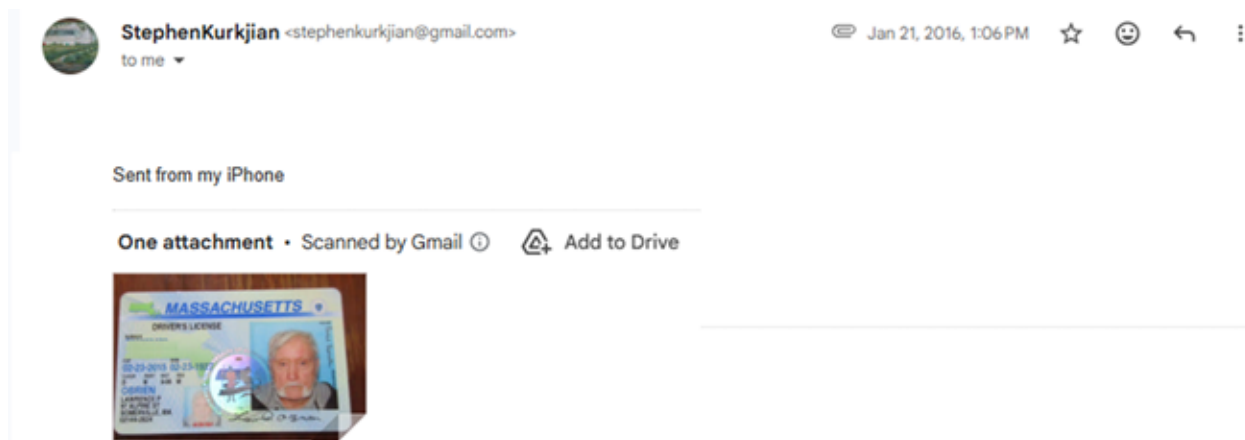
My 2014 document to Robinson at *Watchdog New England* stated that *"It would be embarrassing for law enforcement if Ramsay had done this crime since questions would arise as to why he had not been arrested earlier, as well as how did he get into the position of stealing classified documents in the first place."*

"Ramsay is an embarrassment to the government," I wrote. "How did this boarding school bank bandit, daily pot smoker from the age of 15 ever get a top secret security clearance, [ever] get entrusted with our nation's most vital secrets?" "How is [it] that this most dangerous of enlistees wound up working directly under the head guy in the longest running espionage conspiracy known in the history of the United States?"

To my knowledge, Kurkjian has never shared this information about the federal prosecutor's frustration with the FBI's "spadework," in any of his public writing about the case.

In fact, Kurkjian stated quite the opposite, the following year in a radio interview on WNPR he said that "It's known as the largest art heist in world history and for 28 years the FBI has labored diligently...and they have chased down every lead but come up with nothing."

Stranger still was an email I received hours earlier from Kurkjian that same day in January of 2016, with the subject line: "Obrien(sic) license." The email included no text, nor additional information, only an attached image-file. It was a photocopy of retired Army Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence O'Brien's driver's license.



Drivers License of Retired Army Lt. Colonel and Gardner Museum Supervisor Lawrence O'Brien who died in 2015 sent to me by Stephen Kurkjian

Fourteen months earlier, Kurkjian reported in the Boston Globe that four former guards told him that they are convinced it is he, including one who had a "vague memory" of O'Brien returning once after museum hours to retrieve a wallet he had left at work. The article also reported that "Two former guards who knew O'Brien well told the Globe they do not believe the man in the video was O'Brien. His brother also disputes the ID."

He was my next door neighbor for about a year, as I told Kurkjian after I received his email with the driver's license. Although I don't recall discussing the Gardner heist with him, we had spoken at length several times, and I remember he told me that he worked at the Museum in security.



Comparing Gardner Museum Security Supervisor Larry O'Brien with video still-shots of heist eve videos from Gardner security camera

I sent Kurkjian the image above, comparing the driver's license photo of O'Brien with images from the video, and said I was sure it was not O'Brien.

Kurkjian replied:

"Thanks Kerry. I always felt there has to be someone out there who knew Larry. He was good for me in an interview in the book. Could he have pulled off this theft - I don't think we have enough to ask that question yet. See you Monday at 1."

According to news reports, the head federal prosecutor started looking at the video in 2013, twenty-three years after the heist. O'Brien did not die until 2014. He was a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, Viet Nam combat veteran, a bronze medal recipient, and a solid dependable person.

There was no way that he would have not mentioned that he had been there the night before, never mind that he would have driven down Palace Road, in reverse, the wrong way on the one-way street with his headlights shut off, parked three feet from the curb near the employee entrance of the museum and left the outside door open, while he returned briefly to his car. O'Brien would have known he was being recorded by the outside security camera.

Over a decade after the video's release in his book on the case Geoff Kelly made the fraudulent claim that shortly after releasing the video, four people contacted the Amore at the Museum saying that it was O'Brien, and that "quickly found the 302 showing that O'Brien volunteered to the interviewing agents that just after midnight on Saturday, March 17, he was in the vicinity of the museum when he experienced car problems. In the days before cell phones, O'Brien stopped by the museum so he could call a mechanic."

O'Brien was THE Gardner heist first responder. From Kurkjian's book: "One of the reliefs ran to a nearby pay phone and she called Larry O'Brien, the museum's deputy director of security, at his home in nearby Somerville. O'Brien was there in ten minutes," Kurkjian wrote in his book. Kurkjian thanked O'Brien by name in the acknowledgements of his book.

I considered it an injustice that Kurkjian said he was going to persist in the claim that the visitor was O'Brien, in the face of strong exculpatory evidence, and to even suggest he could possibly have "pulled off this theft," was I believe inexcusable.

That Kurkjian would treat O'Brien with such a lack of respect and care by emailing out to a person he barely knew, the unredacted drivers license of someone who had treated him like a friend bothered me. The fact that I had known O'Brien made it especially troubling.

If Kurkjian would treat O'Brien this way, the prospect of his treating me any better seemed unlikely. I had already had one bad experience with Kurkjian back in 2014.

When I notified Kurkjian that I was no longer interested in meeting with him, he replied back: *"Kerry: I did review the various postings on your Facebook page and marveled at their serious reporting and analysis. There's only one other non-reporter whom I know who has shown such interest and analysis and have spoken/emailed with him for more than a year to know which areas he is strong in. I've been working hard on this case for more than a decade but have done that solely on my own. While I have my theories of the areas that need further reporting/analysis, I gain so much from the analysis and hypothesizing of others. Before you hang them up, grant me this one lunch so I can hear your latest best theories. You could see from our private chat last night, I'm not a know-it-all. I gain most from hearing what others think, and would value the lunch immensely."*

Nine months later, on October 24, 2016, I received another email from Kurkjian, trying to set up an interview with me.

"Hi Kerry: I see from a recent tweet forwarded to me today by my son-in-law that you remain interested in the Gardner case. It's been nearly a year since we spoke after you attended one of my talks on my book "Master Thieves." You able to talk the case over now?"

I shared the email with Amore who then emailed me, *"Another caveat: I meant to tell you: If you have "Master Thieves," you'll note that a woman named Donna is quoted regarding George Reissfelder. I know her well. She told me that she told Kurkjian she would only talk on the condition of anonymity. He agreed. Then he listed her name AND the town she lives in now."*

It had been over two years since Kurkjian had interviewed me and three years since I had shared pretty much the same ideas with Anthony Amore. Kurkjian was for the second time in ten months, trying to meet with me, and Anthony Amore was trying to dissuade me from doing so.

Both Stephen Kurkjian and Antony Amore must have thought there was something to the information I had shared with them, to take this kind of an interest in me. Why would Anthony Amore, a partner in the FBI's Gardner heist investigation, take an interest in whether or not I met with Stephen Kurkjian?

The last I heard from Stephen Kurkjian was on January 22, 2021, a couple of months before the release of the Netflix Documentary, "This Is A Robbery," about the Gardner heist case.

That year the Armenian Mirror Spectator published a story about Kurkjian, and his role in the Netflix Gardner heist documentary series.

"It is not often one gets to talk to the star of a Netflix series," the story began, "but Stephen Kurkjian is not a typical star." His "book, 'Master Thieves,' served as a starting point for the Netflix series and Kurkjian served as a production consultant."

I did not share the Armenian Mirror Spectator's enthusiasm for the documentary or Kurkjian's contributions to that effort. In the email he sent me, two months before the Netflix documentary came out he wrote:

"Hi Kerry: I happened upon your website for the Gardner theft, and was impressed with how factual and comprehensive it was. Congratulations. But I don't think you gave full enough attention to the reporting - and the speculation that I built on that reporting - on Donati-Ferrara account. Plus while I may have overlooked it, I didn't see anything on the connection between Donati and Robert Guarente that I had in "Master Thieves," the LAST SEEN podcast and The Globe, and how that friendship may provide an explanation of what happened to the paintings. Keep up the good work. It's good to see that you've put all that hard work you've spent on the case presented in an orderly, worthwhile fashion."

The reason I had not given any attention **"to the speculation"** Kurkjian "built on that reporting," was because it was based on fourth-hand

information. "The Donati-Ferrara account" was what Kurkjian wrote an anonymous source told him, Ferrara claimed Donati said 23 years after Donati died.

There are no additional sources to back up Donati's involvement in the Gardner heist, except for a similar claim by Myles Connor that Donati had committed the robbery to get him out of jail. This is likely why other news media, including the Boston Globe, never picked up on the story either.

In "Master Thieves," Kurkjian claims an unnamed source told him that a friend of Bobby Donati's named Donny "The Hat" Roquefort, like the cheese, saw him carrying two Boston Police uniforms, shortly before the Gardner heist, and that Roquefort ran a social club in Revere called "The Shack."

According to Vincent Ferrara's former attorney, Anthony Cardinale, Bobby Donati did have an associate, named Donald *Rochefort* (not Roquefort) a.k.a. "Donny *Shacks*." Rochefort was an ex-boxer who worked in the financial services sector, not the hospitality industry.

The very existence therefore of a social club *called* "The Shack" is questionable. And Kurkjian does not even claim he received this story directly from Rochefort, although Rochefort was still alive at the time.

Kurkjian's tale continues that shortly before the Gardner heist, a close friend of his noticed that Donati was carrying two Boston police uniforms, and so he "pressed a taser playfully into Donati's side and pulled the trigger," which "did quite a number on Donati."

Of this claim Cardinale told me, "There's no way anyone tased Donati and didn't wind up in an intensive care facility or underground."

So Kurkjian's uncorroborated, second-hand story about Donati and the police uniforms includes a misspelling of the witnesses surname, an incorrect nickname, an incorrect occupation, possibly a nonexistent social

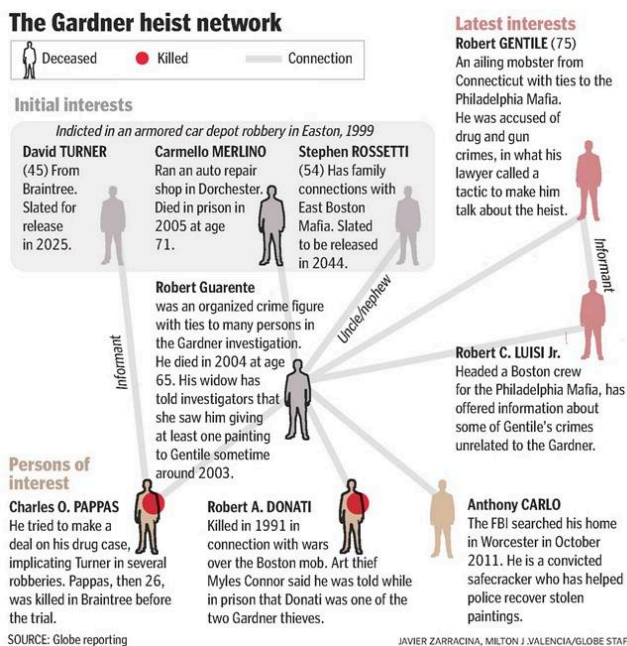
club, and a major element of the story is discounted as impossible, by a prominent criminal defense attorney, who knew Donati.

An uncorroborated story with this many holes in it, does not pass muster, which is why nothing about it can be found on my website, except maybe something about how dubious the story is.

Further, there is no discussion of any connection between Robert Guarente and Robert Donati in any way in *Last Seen Podcast*, as Kurkjian claimed in his email to me. Donati's name and Guarente's names are not even mentioned in any of the same episodes.

In a 2012 Boston Globe article, written by Kurkjian, it was reported that "Guarente knew Robert Donati, one of the first potential suspects named," in 2012. That is the entire extent of the Boston Globe ever linking Robert Donati to Robert Guarente in any way in a news story.

The only exception is a diagram in the print version of the Boston Globe, a couple of days after the FBI's 2013 press conference, but without any reference to their connection in the accompanying article.



The thin gray unsubstantiated and unexplained line linking Robert Guarente and Robert Donati in the Boston March 20, 2013 print edition

Who was it that first “named” Robert Donati as one of the Gardner heist suspects in Kurkjian's 2012 article? It was a four-time convicted felon named Rocco B. Ellis, then incarcerated for a violation of the Mann Act.

Ellis's information was second hand from his former cell mate Myles Connor, a notoriously unreliably Gardner heist con artist, according to Anthony Amore in 2013:

"Every single person who said they could get the paintings back, one of them is Myles Connor, who's come forward and said it, they're all charlatans...hucksters."

According to Ellis, [a friend of Myles Connor] David Houghton, who has since died, visited Connor in prison in Illinois three months before the theft and sought his advice, for robbing the Gardner Museum with Bobby Donati.

But Myles Connor in his memoir, “The Art of the Heist” and on *Last Seen Podcast* said it was *after* the heist that “David Houghton, who was longtime friend of mine,” Connor said on *Last Seen Podcast*, and flew all the way from Logan Airport to California just to tell me: ‘We've done with. We did it [the Gardner heist]. And we got a bunch paintings, and we're gonna use a couple of these paintings to bargain you into a reduced sentence.’”

Connor's co-author Jenny Siler said on the podcast *Empty Frames* that Connor has no corroboration, of any kind for his claim that Houghton confessed to having committed the Gardner heist with Donati to him, or of his having come to visit him in prison. "That's one of the things that only, you know Myles [Connor], says," Siler acknowledged.

There is no evidence supporting the various claims by Ellis and Connor linking Donati to the heist, and in 1997 the Boston Globe reported that, "The FBI says it has no evidence linking Donati to the crime," or even to

David Houghton. “Donati was connected to organized crime hoods; Houghton spent his time toiling under car hoods,” the Globe reported.

Kurkjian did make a weak attempt at establishing the existence of a connection between Donati and Guarente in a couple of *Last Seen Podcast* companion articles for the WBUR website, with the flimsiest of evidence to support his assertions, as the podcast’s episodes were being released each week in the fall of 2018.

In one article, Kurkjian tried to establish that Guarente might be involved, by reporting without any evidence, or sourcing, that after he got out of prison Guarente invited some of his friends up to his new home in Maine. “Among those he hosted was Robert Donati of Revere, and David Turner of Braintree, whose names have been associated for years with the Gardner theft.”

In another article just two weeks later, Kurkjian suggests Donati could be involved because “Donati was also a close friend of Robert “Bobby” Guarente, a former bank robber who has been *linked* to the Gardner crime.”

Combining the two Kurkjian WBUR news stories creates a *circular logic loop*. Guarente is a suspect because he was friends with Donati and Donati is a suspect because he was friends with Guarente. But the only thing he had connecting them to the crime in these stories is each other, and even that is unsourced and unsubstantiated.

The only other thing connecting Guarente and Donati, and not to the Gardner heist, just to each other is an unsourced claim that “in the time between Donati’s disappearance and the recovery of his body in 1991, a family member was calling Guarente’s home in central Maine asking if anyone there had seen Donati.”

Although Kurkjian interviewed Donati’s sister for his book four years earlier, and quoted her extensively, there is no mention of the family

reaching out to Guarente in “Master Thieves.” The story grew some additional dramatic details as well when Kurkjian told it again on Netflix “This Is A Robbery” three years later.

This second article included a mugshot photo of Donati from 1961, 29 years before the Gardner heist. Kurkjian's own book has two photos of Donati taken decades later, the more recent one, show him looking like someone far less capable of robbing the Gardner Museum than he did in his mugshot decades earlier.



Mugshot photo taken of Robert Donati 29 years before the Gardner heist used on Wikipedia, and "Last Seen Podcast" and Netflix' "This Is A Robbery" (right).
Much more recent photo of Donati in Kurkjian's book "*Master Thieves*" (left)

Kurkjian said that Donati and Guarente were “great friends” in Netflix’s *This Is A Robbery*. He said Donati also was great friends with Myles Connor in the same segment, episode 3, of the Netflix series. Shortly after his release from prison in 1986, Connor moved to Kentucky three and a half years before the Gardner heist, and was in jail awaiting sentencing for over a year before the Gardner heist, but Connor somehow managed to keep up an active social life with his fellow criminals. It is said that there is no honor among thieves, but there are, according to Kurkjian, deep and abiding friendships.

Chapter Six

Bobby Donati Gardner Heist Mastermind Or 'Rat Bast'd'?

It seems Bobby Donati was very popular. But he was also potentially very unpopular. Every time Myles Connor hooked up with his pal Donati, trouble followed:

"When he [Donati] told me he found a buyer for the Wyeths, [from the 1974 Woolworth estate burglary] I made certain assumptions," Connor wrote in his memoir.

"We can trust this guy, right?" I asked."

"Bobby nodded. 'Absolutely'"

"You're Bobby's friend, right?" Connor wrote that the FBI undercover agent asked him, as he approached the agent in a rented U-Haul truck full of stolen art, from the Woolworth estate burglary.

The deal was supposed to take place at a Cape Cod shopping plaza just South of the Mashpee Rotary on Route 28. But Connor was quickly arrested and charged with "receiving merchandise which was stolen and transported in interstate commerce."

On the run, a year later after skipping out on his trial, and after cautiously hiding out in Cohasset, MA for months, Connor grew more and more restless as well as reckless, he wrote. He began heading up to Boston to see friends, including Bobby Donati.

A short time later Connor was arrested a 100 miles away from Boston in South Hadley, MA. A team of FBI agents, "at least a dozen of them" according to Connor, confronted him in the parking lot of his favorite restaurant in the area. On parole for shooting and wounding a state police trooper, Connor was armed with an automatic pistol, when he was arrested.

“Agents said they had been keeping the South Haley home of a friend of Connor under surveillance since learning the suspect had recently been in Canada and planned to stop there,” according to the Boston Globe.

Only days before the Woolworth estate burglary, in May of 1974, Donati was sentenced to 4-6 years in prison for arson, making it impossible for him to have burglarized the Woolworth Estate with Connor as he claimed.

Two weeks after Connor’s arrest with the stolen Wyeths from the Woolworth estate, in July of 1974, Donati was also sentenced to ten years in prison (to be served concurrently) on federal charges involving stolen securities.

Under the law, since Donati was on parole for armed robbery at the time of the arson his sentence would only begin after he served a portion of his time owed for the robbery he was on parole for. But the federal judge dropped that requirement.

If Donati were an informant, it could explain the special treatment he was getting within the criminal justice system, despite his many criminal convictions, which was a front page Boston Globe news story in 1977.

Parole-violating gang boss back on old Medford job

By Richard J. Connolly
Globe Staff

A Boston organized crime figure, who committed arson while on parole, got involved in a \$515,000 stolen notes scheme while free on bail and awaiting trial and then was arrested in a \$140,000 bond theft case while on work release, is back on his old job with a Medford carpet firm.

The State Correction Department will not discuss the case of Robert A. (Bobby) Donati, 37, of East Boston as part of their privacy protection policy. But sources reported that Donati is assigned to the Norfolk Pre-Release Center and is allowed out between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. on weekdays and from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturdays so he can work.

Emanuel Venuti, president and treasurer of Warehouse Carpet Sales Inc., 4060 Mystic Valley Parkway, Medford,


confirmed that Donati is a full-time employee. He was on a work release program at the Deer Island House of Correction and working at the same Medford firm 16 months ago when he was arrested in connection with the theft of government bonds from the Boston Stock Exchange.

Donati pleaded guilty and was given a two-and-one-half-to-three-year suspended prison sentence, placed on probation for three years and was returned to the Norfolk correctional facility to continue serving previous sentences. He remained there until last Aug. 10 when he was transferred to the pre-release facility.

He was convicted in a \$41,000 Back Bay for robbery in 1963, given a 12-20-year sentence and subsequently was placed on parole. While free, he was ar-

ROBERT A. DONATI
... privacy guarded

DONATI, Page 8



Boston Globe 11/10/77 Donati's continued participation in the work release program was called an “outrage and a disgrace” by Suffolk District Attorney Garrett H. Byrne, “incredible,” by the head of the DOJ's Organized Crime Task Force, and “a joke” by another DOJ lawyer assigned to the strike force.

At the time that Donati was slain in 1991, "he was said to be making collections from bookmakers and loansharks on behalf of Vincent Ferrara, who was then awaiting trial on federal racketeering charges with Raymond (Junior) Patriarca," the Boston Globe reported.

Then six years after he died, the question of whether or not Donati had been an informant became an issue in the high profile trial of Mafia boss Frank Salemme, in federal court.

On June 13, 1997 the Boston Globe reported that acting Assistant Attorney General Seth Waxman was threatened with contempt by US District Judge Mark L. Wolf, for refusing to disclose whether or not Donati and three other men were informants.

The Globe reported a week later that Waxman, who had been threatened with jail time, submitted an affidavit that Donati had not been a *federal* informant.

Three days later, however, "Anthony M. Cardinale, the lawyer for indicted New England Mafia boss Francis P. "Cadillac Frank Salemme and codefendant Robert DeLuca said the defense had just learned that Donati "may have been the unnamed informant who wore a hidden device to record conversations of convicted Mafia captain [his boss] Vincent Ferrara," the ex-Mafioso and gang leader, who according to Kurkjian, claimed Donati stole the Gardner art to get him out of prison.

"Lawyers for five alleged organized crime figures argued yesterday that Donati was actually an informant for the *State* Police," the Globe reported.

Whether Donati was a state or federal informant was a distinction that presumably would be a good deal less important to Mafia bosses, like Vincent Ferrara, who Donati was said to have informed on, than it was for the federal judge deciding on the admissibility of some evidence in the trial of Salemme and the other organized crime higher-ups on trial.

Donati's body was found bludgeoned and stabbed twenty-one times, in the trunk of his Cadillac, a short distance from his home. In appearance, it would seem to be consistent with a mob hit, but one more in line with that on a snitch, than that of an opposing soldier in a gang war.

But in his book, while Kurkjian's offers a few theories about the reason for Donati's murder: It was possibly because he owed money, or he was "possibly a victim of the Boston gang war raging at the time," (a gang war that in 1991 was "raging" only on the pages of *copy* written by Stephen Kurkjian) or something to do with the Gardner heist." "One bullet could have accomplished what they were looking to do," Robert Donati's sister, Lorraine Donati, says ruefully of her brother's execution. While the murder of Donati was brutal, no one has suggested there was evidence of torture to extract information about the Gardner heist or some other crime.

The heavily reported on question of whether or not Donati was an informant, however, which arose in a federal courtroom six years after Donat's death, and was consistent with the manner of his execution, is never raised as a possibility by Kurkjian. Nor is it mentioned in Geoff Kelly's 2026 book about the case, which also suggests that Donati's murder may have been related to the Gardner heist.

Attorney Cardinale, in twitter direct messages exchanged with me, dismissed the possibility of Donati having been one of the Gardner heist culprits, writing:

"Bobby Donati was a knock around guy who was essentially Vin Ferrara's 'driver' (who I was then representing). When I met him [Donati], circa 1988-9, he was, in my humble opinion, not in any way involved [in the Gardner heist], just not what he would have been doing at the time."

In Netflix's "This Is A Robbery," Kurkjian states that "the day after Bobby Donati went missing, his son picked up the phone. Whom did he call looking for his father? He called Bobby Guarente. Donati...and Bobby Guarente were great friends. These guys grew up together in the East Boston neighborhood. They knew each other."

If Donati's son did call Guarente, (Kurkjian's claim was unsourced), it was most likely because he was someone who might know what happened to his father, if it had been a gang war hit, and not because he was someone who was a close family friend.

If Donati's son spoke or met with Guarente after they found Donat's body, that would indicate a personal connection, but even then it still would not be much in the way of proof that they had worked together on the Gardner heist or any other crime.

Martin Leppo, an attorney who once represented Robert Guarente, said in the same episode of *This Is A Robbery*, that "Bobby Guarente was somebody who was very personable, and was not ashamed to have his name be associated with a lot of tough people."

As a member of the Salemme gang, Guarente was someone who would possibly know if Donati, who worked for Ferrara, had been targeted by the Salemme gang, who were Ferrara's sworn enemies.

As mentioned earlier this is an example of how Kurkjian's stories continue to gather detail over time. Another example, in the CNN Gardner heist documentary "The Gardner Heist Stealing Beauty" on *How It Really Happened* in May of 2024, Kurkjian went so far as to say that "Bobby Donati gave the art to his great friend, Bobby Guarente."

Taking Kurkjian up on his suggestion, I did look in "Master Thieves" to learn about the "the connection between Donati and Robert Guarente." I did not, however, find a "connection," except for two unsubstantiated claims by two unreliable sources that Guarente and Donati were in some way associates.

One was Elene Guarente, who also "told the Globe that her recollection of the painting [she saw her husband give to Gentile] did not match any of the paintings and sketches authorities showed her," which Kurkjian himself had reported in the Boston Globe. If Elene Guarente is credible, then whether or not her claim that Donati and Guarente knew each other is moot since she says she did not see her husband with any stolen Gardner art anyway.

Minus Elene Guarente's alleged claims there is nothing connecting Robert Guarente to the stolen Gardner art.

The other person who claimed Donati and Guarente were friends, according to Kurkjian in "Master Thieves" was Earl Berghman, who had teamed up with Jeanine Guarente, Guarente's daughter from a previous marriage, after she told him that she had seen Rembrandt's "Storm on the Sea of Galilee," in her father's home.

"Twice in a matter of months Jeanine produced what she claimed were chips she had collected from paintings her late father kept at their home in Madison, Maine. Twice, an attorney Berghman and Guarente had hired, Bernard Grossberg, presented them to Arnold Hiatt, a trustee for the Gardner Museum. "But on both occasions the chips turned out to be fakes. In fact, the second batch turned out to have come from the edges of a magazine that someone had snipped off," Kurkjian wrote in "Master Thieves."

The fact that one criminal knew another criminal, by itself, is not any kind of proof or evidence that they were involved together in any particular crime.

In total, as far as the evidence presented by Kurkjian in his book and various news media venues, you have weakly established information linking Donati to the theft, weakly established information linking Guarente to the stolen art, and weakly established information linking Guarente and Donati to each other in any criminal enterprise, and as associates.

Both Myles Connor and Vincent Ferrara claim that Donati told them that he took the art to bust them out of prison. The only connection between the two of them is that there is strong reason to believe he informed on both of them.

What I did find in Kurkjian's "Master Thieves" was not a connection, but the opposite of a connection. I found a **disconnection**, and a potentially fatal one if not respected. What I discovered was the impossibility of Donati and Guarente working together on the Gardner heist.

In his book, Kurkjian writes that Donati was a "confidante of and driver for Boston mob leader Vincent Ferrara who reportedly told Ferrara that he had pulled off the Gardner robbery to try to gain Ferrara's release from prison."

On the same page Kurkjian writes that "Vinnie Ferrara was co-leader of the renegade Boston mob group that **fought** Frank Salemme for control of the region's underworld in the 1980s and '90s," but then on the very next page he writes that Guarente was "a loyalist to Frank Salemme and his underworld gang." According to Kurkjian's own book, Donati and Guarente were on opposing sides of rival gangs.

Later Kurkjian wrote how Guarente was personally involved, according to sources, in the execution of Richard "The Pig" DeVincent, for fraternizing with members of a rival gang, just like Kurkjian claims Donati and Guarente were doing, since he claims they were "great" friends at the time of the Gardner heist:

"An FBI report attested to Guarente's involvement with organized crime figures," Kurkjian wrote. "During the battle for control of Boston's underworld in the 1980s and '90s, he [Guarente] was aligned with Frank "Cadillac Frank" Salemme. Guarente was designated by his bosses to make it clear to Richard "The Pig" DeVincent, whom he knew from prison in the early 1980s, that he needed to stop associating with a rival gang seeking the same power." Like DeVincent, Donati, a Ferrara loyalist, was in a rival gang seeking the same power.

DeVincent did not heed Guarente's advice and was shot to death in 1996, an execution witnessed by Guarente, according to the FBI."

In addition, Kurkjian's own source in claiming Donati robbed the Gardner to get Ferrara out of prison, insists that Guarente, and David Turner, whom Kurkjian claims was a Guarente "thug" protege, were not involved.

From "Master Thieves:" I told him that as far as I [Kurkjian] could tell, the FBI was certain the heist had been arranged by David Turner, who had

turned the stolen art over to Robert Guarente, who before he died in 2004 had given at least several of the paintings to Robert Gentile."

"They don't know what they're talking about," the caller said. "David Turner didn't have anything to do with this. If he did, he wouldn't be spending the best years of his life behind bars. Bobby Donati robbed the Gardner Museum," the caller said flatly, "to get Vinnie Ferrara out of jail."

There was no way Guarente could associate with, nevermind plot, or be involved in a massive caper like the Gardner heist, with a Ferrara soldier and confidant like Bobby Donati, most especially so if Vinny Ferrara would stand to benefit, as Kurkjian's source claimed, since Ferrara was one of Salemme's chief rivals for power in the Boston underworld, and Guarente was a loyal member of Salemme's gang.

Chapter Seven

The Memory Holers

In the Washington Post review of "Master Thieves" the reviewer, English professor Art Taylor observed that "Kurkjian has gathered so much information that explaining the smallest bit of it leads to a spate of cross-references, qualifications and digressions," adding "as the section on "The Heist" transitions to "The Search," readers might expect to plunge into the investigation, but Kurkjian leaps instead [from 1990] to 1997, when Tom Mashberg, then at the Boston Herald, reported that he'd seen one of the stolen paintings."

So while there is an overwhelming amount of poorly laid out information about a gallery of local toughs, who may or may not have been involved in the Gardner heist, there is barely anything about the actual investigation in Kurkjian's book, or for that matter in Ulrich Boser's book or in Geoff Kelly's Gardner heist book. In an interview with the New York Times promoting his 2009 book, "The Gardner Heist," Boser said: "The F.B.I. gives a very standard line that they investigate all viable leads," But occasionally you'll see evidence where they're not."

The investigation from the outset was thousands of miles wide and an inch deep, and the books on the case reflect that, although they do so without addressing that glaring absence of a tangible investigation of the historic robbery. There never was anything like the kind of comprehensive investigation people were led to believe there had been, ever, which should be reflected in the literature, yet it is not.

What happened between the time of the heist and when Youngworth popped up seven years later looking to make a deal with the museum to return the art?

Kurkjian claimed on Netflix *This Is A Robbery*, "Episode 3," that "Between 1990 when the theft took place and around 1997 there was nothing."



Brian McDevitt interviewed by Morley Safer on *Sixty Minutes* November 29, 1992 about his possible role in the Gardner heist

Nothing? Brian McDevitt was questioned by the FBI in November of 1991. News stories about how McDevitt flew back to Massachusetts from California to speak with investigators ran in the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times*. He appeared on *60 Minutes* to discuss the fact that he was a Gardner heist suspect in November of that year, and was brought before a federal grand jury in Boston in 1993, but that chain of events only began after he started talking about art heists:

“There was a day last autumn [1991] when Brian McDevitt, sitting in the office of his small loft house in Hollywood Hills, proposed writing a screenplay about a brazen art theft during which the thieves hid the stolen treasures deep in a German cave,” Brian McGrory, the current editor-in-chief of the *Boston Globe* wrote in June of 1992.

Then, McGrory writes that “Just a few weeks later, McDevitt found himself at the center of an investigation into the largest art theft in history, when the FBI summoned him back to his lawyer's Salem [MA] office and asked him what he knew about \$200 million in paintings missing from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston,” McGrory wrote.

In the same episode of Netflix where Kurkjian said "between 1990 when the theft took place and around 1997 there was nothing," the New York Times' Tom Mashberg said: "Very remarkable that between 1990 and 1997 there were very few stories about the crime. There was never an arrest or a suspect being questioned. Bobby Donati, nobody ever had a chance to ask him any questions obviously."

Wait, what? Donati didn't die until September of 1991, eighteen months after the robbery. What is very remarkable is that Mashberg can claim there were very few stories about the crime when, in the first minute of Episode One, of "This Is A Robber" Kevin Cullen said, "Every reporter in this town eventually did something on that heist." By *eventually* did Cullen mean after seven years?

In a sense, Mashberg was right. In terms of the investigation, there was nothing, at least as long as people kept their mouths shut. McDevitt had stopped doing that, and it was only then that the FBI questioned him and brought him before a grand jury.

Chapter Eight

Polluting The Public's Information Stream

The mysterious lack of adherence to professional standards by Robinson and Kurkjian at my attempt to constructively engage with them, as a source of input, about the the Gardner heist, as well as Kurkjian's consistent unprofessionalism as it pertains to his role as a journalist covering the Gardner heist case in the decade that followed, is one more example of something that points to there being more going on with the Gardner heist case, than a crime for monetary gain, or a get-out-of-jail free card perpetrated by local gangsters,

It also points to a problem with the free exchange of information through the news media, that is accurate, fair and thorough, and not only at Fox News, and MAGA media, but mainstream sources.

“Americans have long held views about press freedom that have had little connection to the real world of journalism,” Austin Sarat, professor of Jurisprudence and Political Science at Amherst College wrote in 2026, adding:

“One can get a glimpse of that portrait in popular films... “All the President’s Men” lionized The Washington Post and reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward for exposing the Watergate scandal, and the 2015 film “Spotlight” told the story of the investigative team at the Boston Globe, which exposed child sex abuse in the Catholic Church.”

“But, he continued, “the recent “60 Minutes” fiasco suggests that in the legacy media, journalists are employees tethered to organizations with their own editorial and political commitments. The First Amendment protects journalists only from government censorship... The goings-on at “60 Minutes” are a reminder of that fact, and of the need for citizens to pressure those who own the media to use it in the public interest”

These problems existed prior to the election of Donald Trump in 2016, whose victory received a big and unprecedented boost by James Comey,

director of an FBI that had somehow, somewhere along the line become above reproach, even in Boston of all places, where the FBI's corrupt relationship with organized crime leader, James "Whitey" Bulger, was a major news story in a half dozen separate years, starting in 1988 when the Boston Globe first reported he was an FBI informant, which the FBI vehemently denied at the time.

Nearly a decade later in 1997, when "faced with an ultimatum from a US District judge," the FBI was forced to admit Bulger was indeed an informant during the trial of several crime bosses, including Francis P. "Cadillac Frank" Salemme. At that point Bulger was into the fourth year of his seventeen year stint on the run, after a retired FBI agent John Connolly tipped him off in 1994 of his pending arrest.

Then in 2013, as Bulger was prosecuted for multiple murders, he was also put on trial for being an informant, which is not only not a crime. On the contrary, according to the FBI, "the informant is THE with a capital "T" THE most effective tool in law enforcement today - state, local, or federal. We must accept that and deal with it," Director William Webster stated in 1978.

Nonetheless federal prosecutors "introduced a 700-page document [Bulger's FBI case file] that suggests Bulger was an informant. That assertion has been the crux of the prosecution's case." CNN reported, in their coverage of Bulger's trial.

A quarter century after denying Bulger was an informant, 16 years after being forced to acknowledge that he was an informant after all, the FBI seemed more interested in establishing Bulger was an informant (their strategic partner) than that he was a murderer. Bulger was convicted of both homicide and of being an informant by federal prosecutors, although the sentence on the informant conviction took five years.

There are places, such as in the criminal underworld and behind prison walls, where being an informant **is** a crime, and that is where James "Whitey" Bulger met his end.

Bulger was beaten to death within hours of arriving at USP Hazelton, a notoriously dangerous, high-security federal facility in West Virginia.

“A prisoner testified to a grand jury that a fellow inmate named Paul DeCologero told him Bulger was a ‘snitch’ and they planned to kill him as soon as he came into their unit,” the Guardian reported.

Interestingly, Bulger's "attorneys have said Bulger was ready to negotiate giving up some information about the [stolen Gardner Museum] paintings in exchange for safer prison digs just weeks before he was murdered."

But was Bulger offering, or threatening, to share information about the Gardner heist? The government certainly did nothing to offer him anything in the way of extra protection, or amenities in exchange for his offer. Instead, Bulger received a death sentence, in short order, which was quickly carried out before he was able to share the information about the Gardner heist he claimed to have.

Even when acting publicly in questionable ways, as was the case with the Gardner heist anniversary press conference on March 18, 2013, a nationally covered event whose stated purpose was to advise the public about progress in the case, which the FBI did not do, and "appealing to the public for help," which through their actions they demonstrated that they did not want," the press did not challenge the FBI's questionable pronouncements and explanations.

The only help the FBI really wanted was from the news media, and that was to help them dominate the narrative, to help them to distract, to deflect, to dismiss and to defame, to threaten and intimidate, and to lie without consequence, to transform the Gardner heist "mystery" into a *sensational destination* where your questions are the only *answers* you will ever need. And the new media, both MAGA and mainstream, have been only too happy to oblige.

"The public wants a story that's worthy of the world's largest art heist," Geoff Kelly said, on Boston 25 News, in March of 2026. "It's become part of Boston folklore," he said wishfully the following June.

What the public deserves is the truth, not folklore, and not "a story" that changes when people talk as Rick Abath began to do in 2013, die as Abath did in 2024, and Robert Gentile did in 2021, or retire like Kelly himself did in 2024.

A society where members of the press work with law enforcement and intelligence agencies to deceive the public, while their colleagues remain silent, even for what may seem like laudable, public safety and security goals, is a society in grave risk of losing its freedom.

As the public interest has become increasingly subordinated to the interests of big government, and big business in the news media, we should not be surprised by where these practices have helped take the country in this century.

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