

arts & culture

### Dr. Rachel Toles Delves Into Darkest Minds at The Sharon

The clinical psychologist and criminal expert brings her true crime masterclass to The Villages this month.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

Be it Jack the Ripper, Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy or Ted Bundy, few subjects grab the public's attention like serial killers.



Toles

People are as intrigued by the gruesome actions and twisted psyches of these mass murderers as they are perplexed by their own fascination.

In "The Psychology of Serial Killers and Why They Captivate Us," clinical psychologist and criminal expert Dr. Rachel Toles and co-host Lizzie Bourne answer audiences' burning questions by delving into the minds of the world's most infamous serial killers.

"Expect to start looking at serial killers incredibly differently," Toles said.

Her interest in true crime started at a young age.

"I've always been interested in death, dying and murder," she said. "It started when I watched a girl die in a pretty horrific car crash at 5."

At 14, Toles learned about Dahmer, the cannibalistic serial killer and sex offender charged with the murder and dismemberment of 17 men between 1978 and 1991. She became obsessed with understanding how people could commit such atrocious crimes.

Since then, Toles has devoted her life to understanding the motivations,

behaviors and patterns of dangerous criminals. She has worked with numerous women murderers and inmates suffering from acute mental illnesses at Century Regional Detention Facility in Lynwood, California.

Beyond her clinical practice, Toles performs psychological evaluations for courts and has served as an expert witness in a few court cases.

In 2021, Toles' started posting videos on TikTok, initially covering a variety of different mental health topics. But that changed with the release of Netflix's 2022 drama series "Dahmer."

By then, Toles had been studying the man dubbed the "Milwaukee Monster" for nearly 20 years.

"Netflix got a lot wrong about his father and had a lot of people thinking he was a good, nice guy, but that wasn't true," she said.

Her masterclass "The Psychology of Serial Killers" evolved from Toles' critique of the show and her subsequent analyses on TikTok, one of which had 4.4 million views.

Toles said many people's interest in true crime — as well as its continued popularity — stems from varying degrees of similar experience.

"I always ask people to think about a person you really know and trusted, someone you knew your whole life and who suddenly pulled the rug out from under you," she said. "Those are the people in particular that I find are interested in it."

Although Toles talks about the crimes committed by the serial killers, she does not go into graphic detail or share gruesome images of the victims. Instead, she uses cutting-edge theories, including her "serial killer formula," to psychoanalyze the murderers and discuss how such crimes can be prevented in the future.

Toles presents "The Psychology of Serial Killers" at 7 p.m. April 25 at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. Tickets are \$30 and up. Go to thevillagesentertainment.com.

### The Studio Theatre Closes Season 8 With 'The Roommate'

The play, directed by Anne Hering, runs through April 27 at The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

Billed as "The Odd Couple" meets "Breaking Bad," the final play of The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol's eighth season keeps audiences guessing who the real Heisenbergs is.

Directed by Orlando Shakespeare Theater's Anne Hering, "The Roommate" follows Sharon, a middle-aged divorcée in need of a roommate to fill the emptiness of her Iowa home. Her monotonous existence is disrupted by the mysterious Robyn, a vegan, pot-smoking lesbian from the Bronx who recently retired from a life of crime.

The two women could not be more different, but when Sharon finds Robyn's hidden cache of fake IDs and multiple identities, she's fascinated and eager try her hand at being a conwoman. Meanwhile, Robyn is torn between being impressed by her roommate's transformation and alarmed by her increasing zeal.

According to Leslie Becker, the new director of people, projects and culture at Significant Productions, the theater production company that oversees The Studio and The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center, "The Roommate" was selected as Season 8's finale because of its relatability. "We have all had people come into our lives who can seemingly uproot everything we thought we knew about ourselves," she said. "Our instincts tell us whether to embrace that change or stay grounded in what we know."

Like most productions of "The Roommate," Hering's

interpretation involves all the stereotypical trappings of Middle America.

Sharon is played by Studio newcomer Avis-Marie Barnes. At the beginning of the play, she is awkward, judgmental and has little life outside of her son, her book club and her part-time job.

Robyn, played by another Studio newcomer, Rebecca Fisher, is the most exciting thing to ever happen to Sharon and also is one of Hering's few departures from the play's standard characterization. Fisher's Robyn is a worldly New Yorker who attends farmers markets, writes slam poetry and wears satin pajamas. She's also the more levelheaded of the pair.

Much of the play's funniest moments come from Sharon, whose honest observations and lack of filter undercut the play's more serious moments. Despite its levity, however, it doesn't shy away from the often painful reality of self-discovery and transformation.



Submitted photo

In Jen Silverman's "The Roommate," Sharon, played by Avis-Marie Barnes, right, is an anxious 50-something divorcée who has recently acquired a new roommate, the mysterious Robyn, played by Rebecca Fisher.

"You're a mom, you're a wife and then your kids don't need you anymore," Villager Laurie Tann said, surmising central theme. "What do you do with the next part of your life?"

"It's about what happens when you get presented with the opportunity to be totally different than you normally are," Laurie said. "It's a chance to expand — sometimes good, sometimes not."

Tann, along with her husband, Martin, liked the authenticity. The Village of Gilchrist residents are originally from Iowa, and they agreed the play gave a fair depiction of the state. Martin said that they never locked the door in Iowa and if their kids fell on the street, people would come out and help them.

Not only does the play faithfully depict the life of a staid Iowan housewife, it also explores the dissatisfaction Sharon feels at having missed out on life.

"The Roommate" is the final play of The Studio's eighth season, themed Trust Your Instincts. It runs through April 27. Tickets start at \$35.

Before Season 9 officially begins, The Studio Summer Mini Vacation Season will feature lighthearted productions of two beloved stories. Howard Ashman and Alan Menken's "Little Shop of Horrors" opens May 31 and Paul Elliott's "Exit Laughing" opens Aug. 2. For more information, go to thevillagesentertainment.com.

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