

Good Girls on Bad Drugs

photos by Mark Mathew Braunstein

News media documentation about my photos of 144 Connecticut
sex workers of New London, Norwich & Willimantic

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☯ **Network TV newscasts**

1998: NBC-TV Connecticut newscast interview about my photos of and interviews with Renee Pellegrino and Michelle Comeau, the first two of three strangled streetwalkers.

2002: FOX-TV Connecticut newscast interview about my photos of and interview with Hope Becker, the third of three strangled streetwalkers.

2009: ABC-TV Connecticut newscast interview about my photos of and interviews with Heather Brown, the serial bank robber of 6 banks in 6 days.

2009: NBC-TV Connecticut newscast interview about my photos of and interviews with Heather Brown, the serial bank robber of 6 banks in 6 days.

2016: CPTV (Connecticut Public Television) documentary about heroin addiction that included my photo of Trisha Rios, who survived the streets and the drugs to become a drug counselor.

The Next 3 Links Are Active as of July 2026

☯ **Gallery of 54 photos on Social Documentary**

www.SocialDocumentary.net/exhibit/mark_mathew_braunstein/422

☯ **YouTube video** – narrated 9-minute book trailer

<https://youtu.be/gTle2oKFfC4>

☯ **Webpage on my website**

www.MarkBraunstein.Org/good-girls

see next page for NEWSPAPER articles
with links all active as of July 2026

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NEWSPAPER articles – ask me for PDF's if articles are hidden behind paywalls

Among 13 total articles, these are only the 7 articles with Links still active as of July 2026.

2000: cover story about *Renee* discusses me and my photo of her: "Phi Beta Kappa Prostitute," by Joel Lang, *Hartford Courant's* Sunday magazine *Northeast*, March 12, 2000.

<https://www.courant.com/2000/03/12/the-phi-beta-kappa-prostitute/>

2009: lead article about my photo of *Heather*: "Heather Brown's Crimes Often Fueled by Crack Habit," by Greg Smith, syndicated in four newspapers, September 29, 2009.

www.NorwichBulletin.com/article/20090929/NEWS/309299893

www.NorwichBulletin.com/story/news/crime/2009/09/29/heather-brown-s-crimes-often/64953005007/

2009: discusses my photo of Heather, "Heather Has a Problem," by David Collins, *The Day* of New London, September 30, 2009. <https://TheDay.com/news/80942/heather-has-a-problem/>

2010: front page article with my photo of strangled streetwalker *Michelle*. "Suspect charged in slaying of Norwich woman," by Greg Smith, *The Bulletin* of Norwich, September 2, 2010.

www.norwichbulletin.com/story/news/crime/2010/09/02/suspect-charged-in-slaying-norwich/65019344007/

2011: article with my photo of strangled streetwalker *Michelle*. "Trial to begin soon in prostitute's strangling," by Greg Smith, *The Bulletin* of Norwich, December 3, 2011.

www.norwichbulletin.com/story/news/crime/2011/12/04/trial-to-begin-soon-in/64993280007/

2017: article about my research about and photo of *Olivia*: "Groton Motel Room-Mate Sentenced in Overdose Death," by Karen Florin, *The Day* of New London, Oct 18, 2017.

<https://www.pressreader.com/usa/the-day/20171018/281672550177245>

2019: article about my book, *Good Girls on Bad Drugs*: "Retired Librarian's Book Details Lives of Local Sex Workers," by Lindsay Boyle, *The Day* of New London, February 9, 2019.

<https://TheDay.com/news/416406/retired-librarians-book-details-lives-of-local-sex-workers/>

Appendix 01 - DOCUMENTATION

Documents regarding the photos and interviews by or about this author, listed chronologically 1997-2017. Links active in 2019.

Narrated color slideshow viewable at: <https://youtu.be/gTle2oKFfC4>

📰 NEWSPAPER articles

1997: front page article about this author's photo of and interview with *Renee Pellegrino*: "Unbelievable Story Ends Abruptly on a Dark and Lonely Road," by Bethe Dufresne, in *The Day* of New London, CT, July 2, 1997.

1997: AP article specifically about this author's many photos and interviews: "Paralyzed Academic Chronicles Lives of Prostitutes," by Strat Douthat, *Associated Press* (AP) story syndicated in five newspapers, July 14, 1997.

1998: article about this author's photo of and interview with Michelle Comeau: "Comeau Interviewed for Local Man's Book," by Mark Reynolds, in *Norwich Bulletin*, CT, May 6, 1998.

1998: AP article about this author's interview with Mary Gibbs: "Norwich Hookers Say They Are Being Stalked," by Strat Douthat, *Associated Press* story syndicated in five newspapers, May 26, 1998.

2000: cover story about *Renee Pellegrino*, including about this author's interviews with her: "The Phi Beta Kappa Prostitute," by Joel Lang, in *Hartford Courant's* Sunday magazine *Northeast*, cover story, March 12, 2000.

http://articles.courant.com/2000-03-12/news/0003122425_1_renee-diploma-crawl

2002: front page article about this author's photo of and interview with *Hope Becker*: "Hope: Her Name, Her Philosophy," by Katie Malone, in *The Day* of New London, CT, December 21, 2002.

2009: lead article about this author's photo of and interview with *Heather*: "Heather Brown's Crimes Often Fueled by Crack Habit," by Greg Smith, syndication in four newspapers, September 29, 2009.

www.NorwichBulletin.com/article/20090929/NEWS/309299893

2009: article about this author's interview with *Heather Brown*: "Heather Has a Problem," by David Collins, in *The Day* of New London, Sept 30, 2009.

www.TheDay.com/article/20090930/NWS05/309309878

from the book, Good Girls on Bad Drugs

2010: front page article with this author's photo of Michelle Comeau: "Suspect Charged in Slaying of Norwich Woman," by Greg Smith, in *Norwich Bulletin*, CT, September 2, 2010.

2011: article with this author's photo of Michelle Comeau: "Trial to Begin Soon in Prostitute's '98 Strangling," by Greg Smith, in *Norwich Bulletin*, CT, December 4, 2011.

2011: article about this author's photo of Michelle Comeau, the first photo her daughter had seen of the mother: "Daughter Delves into Norwich Mom's Tragic Life," by Greg Smith, in *Norwich Bulletin*, CT, December 12, 2011.

2017: article with author's research about *Olivia*: "Groton Motel Room-Mate Sentenced in Overdose Death," by Karen Florin, in *The Day*, Oct 18, 2017.
www.theday.com/policefirecourts/20171017/groton-motel-room-mate-sentenced-in-overdose-death-of-olivia-roark

❶ TELEVISION newscasts

1998: NBC-TV Connecticut newscast interview with this author about his photos of and interviews with strangled streetwalkers *Renee Pellegrino* and *Michelle Comeau*, broadcast June 24, 1998.

2002: CBS-TV Connecticut newscast interview with this author about his photos of and interview with *Hope Becker*, the third of three strangled streetwalkers, broadcast December 20, 2002.

2009: ABC-TV Connecticut newscast interview with this author about his photos of and interviews with *Heather Brown*, the serial bank bandit of six banks in six days, broadcast September 28, 2009.

2009: NBC-TV Connecticut newscast interview with this author about his photos of and interviews with *Heather Brown*, broadcast September 29, 2009.
www.NBCconnecticut.com/news/Bank-Bandit-Strikes-Again-61941757.html
(scroll 1/3 down to 1st video, titled: *Heather Brown Background*)

2016: Connecticut Public Television one-hour documentary about heroin addiction which includes this author's photo of *Trisha* (here on page 206).

<http://CPTV.org/heroincrisis>

www.PBS.org/video/2365725031

<https://youtu.be/tH-5JRpUKc>

Retired librarian's book details lives of local sex workers



A retired Connecticut College librarian who spent 10 years paying women not for sex but to tell their stories has published a revised version of the book he wrote about the experience.

Called “Good Girls on Bad Drugs,” Mark Mathew Braunstein’s book features 22 women who, for the most part, were sex workers in New London, Norwich or Willimantic between 1997 and 2007.

An exception is Olivia Roark, a 17-year-old Internet escort who was the

The Day of New London, February 13, 2029

youngest person to fatally overdose in Connecticut in 2016. Notably, Braunstein tells her story — the Griswold native fatally overdosed in the Flagship Motel in Groton in May 2016 — through two other women instead of her.

Most of the book's stories end tragically. Some of the women die by AIDS, hepatitis C, overdose or murder. Others are serving lengthy prison sentences.

Braunstein said he became interested in the topic while living in a house in the Connecticut College Arboretum. Set back from the road, the house had a windy driveway where sexual activity in cars was rampant.

Braunstein initially thought the people in the cars were high school students, but later learned they were sex workers with "johns."

Paraplegic because of an early 1990s diving accident, Braunstein made it his goal to talk to as many New London sex workers as he could. He later expanded to Norwich and Willimantic. Once the women learned of his plight, most talked to him freely, Braunstein said.

He said he recorded hundreds of women and talked to several multiple times. He corroborated their stories using public documents whenever possible.

"Sometimes I would come away with a sense of joy in my own life," he admitted. "They're chemically crippled; I'm physically crippled. In some ways, I would feel like Superman when I heard about their lives."

But Braunstein said he also hopes people who read his book realize many of the women wouldn't be dead or in prison if they could better address their underlying mental health issues.

"The book is about sex and drugs, that's the text," he said. "But I wrote it for

the subtext, which is drug law reform. These girls are not monsters — they're human beings. ... Drug addiction shouldn't be a crime, it should be considered a disease."

Braunstein said the rush of him doing something that seemed illegal — apparently soliciting a prostitute — also compelled him to keep talking to the women.

"There's a certain risk," he said. "That was part of the thrill."

Braunstein's book includes the stories of Heather Brown, a woman who robbed six banks in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island in six days, and Elizabeth "Liz" Gagne, a woman serving 13 years to life in prison in Vermont for her role in a double murder.

Braunstein said though some of the women weren't thrilled with his portrayal, none disputed it.

Indeed, New London resident Trisha Rios, who hasn't yet read the new version, said Braunstein's 2017 book was fair. Now [a recovery coach](#) for the city — she tells people who are addicted to drugs about the steps they can take — the 41-year-old has been sober for more than nine years. Rios is included in the chapter about Gagne and figures Braunstein picked her up and talked to her at least 20 times.

"His goal is to help someone else," she said. "If I had read his book when I was 15 or 16, maybe my life would be different."

"Yes, I chose to try heroin," Rios said. "But did I choose the life that happened after? I don't think so."

In the book, Braunstein uses some brash language. In one sentence, for example, he calls "geeking" a "crackhead" slang for smoking crack. Medical

professionals caution against using terms like “addict” and “crack head” to describe people struggling with addiction. When informed of such, Braunstein said he always is learning. Prominently, the phrase “Unhappy Hookers,” which appeared on the cover of his first edition, is missing from the newest. He also removed many uses of the word “junkie.”

When Braunstein revisited his recordings years after he made them, he realized he needed an update that included how the internet has changed sex work. He also included in his book that, while Willimantic used to be the go-to for drug users, “now every town is a heroin town.”

Importantly, Braunstein photographed and published photos of many of the women he interviewed. The photos are powerful and, for a woman like Rios, serve as a reminder of how far a person can come.

“He’s watched me grow up,” she said. “I’m glad I had that experience with him. ... I couldn’t see anybody else doing what he does.”

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