

The Fantasist [ShareThis](#)

The 14-year-old told Epstein she was 18 and in the twelfth grade. In Florida, this is not a defense. The law protects the young by placing the burden on the adult to learn the truth. And while Epstein's girls might have fooled a lot of people—they were tall and grown-up—it's difficult to believe Epstein wouldn't have suspected some were underage. (Though Epstein later passed a lie-detector test saying that he believed the girls were 18.) Girls needed to be driven home or given rental cars. Offered whatever they wanted from Epstein's chef, they often gobbled cereal and milk. One 16-year-old told police that Epstein told her repeatedly not to tell anyone about their encounter or bad things could happen. Alfredo Rodriguez, a houseman, told police that at his boss's direction, he brought a pail of roses to a girl to congratulate her on her performance in a high-school drama.

"He has never been secretive about the girls," Wolff says. "At one point, when his troubles began, he was talking to me and said, 'What can I say, I like young girls.' I said, 'Maybe you should say, 'I like young women.'"

Epstein mounted an aggressive counterinvestigation. Epstein's friend Alan Dershowitz, the Harvard law professor, provided the police and the state attorney's office with a dossier on a couple of the victims gleaned from their MySpace sites—showing alcohol and drug use and lewd comments. The police complained that private investigators were harassing the family of the 14-year-old girl before she was to appear before the grand jury in spring 2006. The police said that one girl had called another to say, "Those who help [Epstein] will be compensated and those who hurt him will be dealt with."

By then, the case was politicized. The Palm Beach police had brought stacks of evidence across the waterway to the Palm Beach County state attorney's office, but the state attorney apparently saw the main witnesses as weak. One had run away from home, lied about her age, and bragged about her ass on MySpace. Another had a drug arrest and had stolen from Victoria's Secret. The police wanted numerous felony charges against Epstein as well as charges against Haley Robson and Sarah Kellen. Then they heard that the state attorney was preparing a deal with Epstein giving him five years on probation and sending him for psychiatric evaluation. The police chief, Michael Reiter, accused the state attorney of bending over backward for a rich man and then turned the matter over to the FBI.

Finally, in July 2006, the Palm Beach County state attorney's office handed down one indictment of Epstein on a felony count of soliciting prostitution. There is no reference to minors in the indictment. Reiter was enraged. He released a letter he had sent out to five underage girls that read "I do not feel that justice has been sufficiently served."

Epstein's lawyer said that Reiter was out of control, but the police chief was having an effect. The U.S. Attorney's office began an investigation, and the dream team added another member, Kenneth Starr, the former Clinton prosecutor.

One of Epstein's friends told me, "He thinks there's an anti-Semitic conspiracy against him in Palm Beach. He's convinced of that. Maybe it's a defense mechanism." Palm Beach was historically a bastion of Gentile privilege. Vanderbilt and Glendinning and Dillman and Warburton are still engraved on the public fountains, and the Everglades Club with its espaliered trees and brass plates reading private seems stuck in the time of the Gentlemen's Agreement. Yet the anti-Semitic charge disturbed Jews whom I asked about it in Palm Beach. Michael Resnick, rabbi at the oldest synagogue on the island, Temple Emanu-El (circa the sixties), says he strongly doubts that Epstein is a modern Dreyfus. "There's no way, shape, or form that you can say that Palm Beach is a bastion with respect to religion. Individuals, yes. And there are some places that it is not an asset to be a Jew." Once Palm Beach tried to keep synagogues from opening. There are now four on the little island, including an Orthodox shul started by Slim-Fast founder Danny Abraham. José Lambiet, gossip columnist for the Palm Beach *Post*, says, "Half my sources on the island are Jewish socialites."

Lambiet says the case has fed rage within the community over Palm Beach rules: The rich never have to do time. William Kennedy Smith in 1991, Rush Limbaugh, lately Ann Coulter for a voting infraction.

Maybe it was inevitable that religion would come into the case. Peggy Siegal says Epstein's two big charitable causes are science and Israel. His Brooklyn homies Dershowitz and Rubenstein are also major Israel supporters. Dershowitz has written a book about lingering anti-Semitism in elite life. Now throw in the fact that the Palm Beach police asked at least three of the girls whether they had noticed whether Epstein was circumcised. "I asked ... if she knew what being circumcised meant," the officer stated in

regard to the 14-year-old.

Of course, that might be evidence. But other details in the police narrative seem to derive more from Edgar Allan Poe’s psychological tragedies than from Philip Roth’s sociological comedies. Epstein is licensed in Florida to carry a concealed weapon—he has a Glock—and a shower on the first floor was given over to a gun safe. One girl said his chest was so pumped up he appeared to be on steroids. He had a Harley next to the many black Mercedeses, but his Florida license was expired. Now he was licensed in the Virgin Islands and gave his “permanent residence” as the same address as Island Yachts.

Notwithstanding the room on the first floor with floor-to-ceiling books, the general aura is cold and joyless and lonely, that of a man in his fifties denying death by giving himself over completely to the sensual life, with the help of Brit, Alexis, Rhiannon, Sherry, Nicole, Haley, and Joanna.

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