

Robert and Natalie were remarried in 1972

# Robert WHAT NIGHT

In a riveting, no-holds-barred memoir, Robert Wagner reveals for the first time what really happened on that heart-breaking night of Nov. 29, 1981, when Natalie Wood disappeared from their boat and drowned near Catalina Island. Breaking his silence for the first time in 27 years, the handsome actor writes in "Pieces of My Heart" about the most profound tragedy of his life. Here, a publishing source familiar with the book (publish date: Sept. 23, 2008) discloses some of its blockbuster revelations.

**T**HE marriage of Robert Wagner and Natalie Wood blew apart after four and a half years when she hooked up with Warren Beatty. Ten years later, the couple got back together and they remarried in 1972. They both loved the ocean and each other – but in 1981, their marriage again hit rough seas... and headed for tragedy.

Natalie had taken a role in "Brainstorm," opposite Christopher Walken. Visiting her on the set, Wagner realized that Natalie was being emotionally unfaithful but did not confront her.

Over Thanksgiving weekend 1981, the couple decided to take their boat, the Splendour, on the 22-mile journey to Catalina Island – with Christopher Walken as a guest.

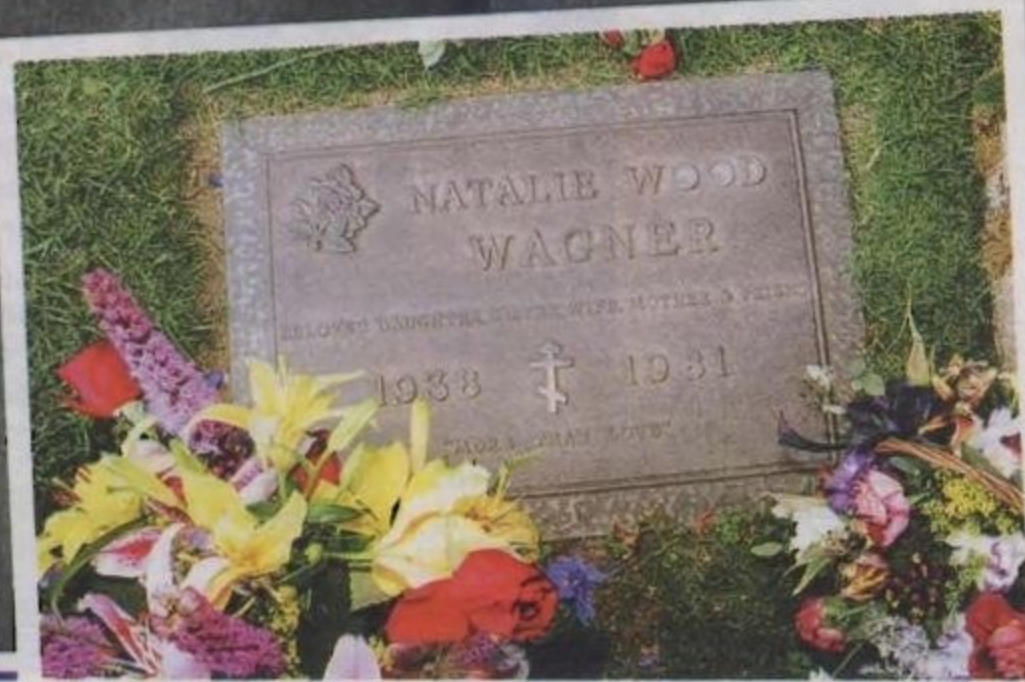
After drinking at a bar on the island on Friday night, the trio headed back in a dinghy to the boat about 9 p.m., but Natalie – who was a poor swimmer – became worried about the rough seas. So the group returned to Catalina for more drinks and dinner.

#### THINGS GOT COMBATIVE BETWEEN

Natalie and Wagner, and Natalie had the boat's caretaker take her by dinghy to the town of Avalon on the island.

Walken and Wagner returned to the boat, but Natalie did not come back until the following morning. Later that day, everyone took a nap, but when Wagner woke up, he was in for a big surprise.

He found a note from Natalie

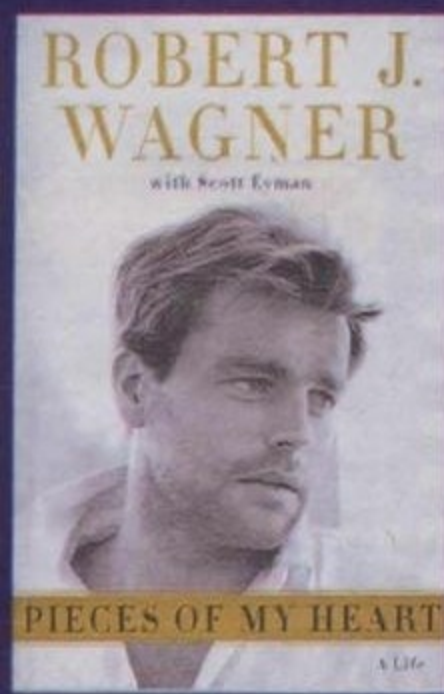


Natalie's final resting place

After Natalie's bath, Wagner went to bed for eight days in a catatonic state of pain.

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# Wagner finally reveals: REALLY HAPPENED NATALIE WOOD DIED



Star's tragic memoir details screen beauty's *fateful final hours*



Natalie and Robert on their yacht, the Splendour

saying she and Walken had gone back to the island. Wagner admits he was agitated, and he called for a shore boat to take him to the island.

They drank and had dinner there, leaving for the Splendour around 10 p.m. Back onboard, they continued to drink, and soon Wagner and Walken were butting heads. Walken touched off the hostilities by talking about his total dedication to his career. He thought Natalie should show the same dedication despite having two small children, according to the publishing source.

Wagner finally had enough and told Walken to stay the hell out of Natalie's career. Furious, Wagner picked up a wine bottle and slammed it on a table, shattering it. Meanwhile, Natalie had gone below deck to the master cabin and the bathroom.

The last time Wagner saw his wife alive she was fixing her hair at a little vanity in the bathroom while he was still arguing with Walken. She shut the door to go to bed, and the two men took their argument up to the boat's deck.

Calmed by the fresh air, they returned to the salon. Walken then went to bed, while Wagner stayed up to chat with the boat's caretaker.

"When Wagner went below, Natalie wasn't there," says the publishing source. "He went back up on the deck and the dinghy was gone. He knew she wouldn't have taken it because she was terrified of dark water and they would have

heard its loud engine.

"The Coast Guard initiated a search-and-rescue mission. At 5:30 a.m., the dinghy was located in an isolated cove, the key in the off position, the gear in neutral and the oars fastened to the side. It appeared that Natalie had never gotten into the dinghy.

"TWO HOURS LATER, they found her body. The harbor master pulled her from the water and he came onboard the Splendour to tell Wagner.

"The autopsy revealed Natalie's alcohol level of .14, well above the .10 level of intoxication," says the publishing source. "Her body was bruised.

"Having several decades to think about what happened, Wagner concluded that Natalie heard the dinghy banging against the side of the boat and went to re-tie it. But she slipped on the always wet swim step, hit the step and was knocked unconscious, rolling into the



Christopher Walken

water. And the dinghy floated away. "There was only one way off the boat – the swim step, one step down the dinghy, near the water line. It was very slippery.

"But it's all conjecture," Wagner believes.

"After Natalie's death, Wagner went to bed for eight days in a catatonic state of profound emotional pain. He blamed himself."

In deeply moving passages, Wagner tells of his great love for Natalie and how she defined his emotional life. After their long-divorce, he was able to win her back. Grief-stricken, he had to come to terms with the loss because this time, there was no getting her back.

NEXT WEEK: Wagner talks about Warren Beatty, Liz Taylor and many more Hollywood stars.