

# Book riles Tarpon Springs with allegations against Pappas family

*The book's author says he was raised as Kevin Cunningham but changed his name to Kevin Pappas after he learned the identity of his father.*



Kevin Pappas, author of 'Godfather of Night', and his mother, Willadean Cunningham.

Kevin Pappas writes that his biological father was Lucas "Lukie" Pappas. Lukie Pappas is a son of Louis Pappas, the namesake of the original Louis Pappas restaurant that opened in 1923 on the city's sponge docks.

Kevin Pappas' claims don't stop with his paternity. He writes that Lukie Pappas controlled the City Commission, the police department and the town's Greek Orthodox Church and was the silent man behind much of the local drug trade and the "Greek mafia."

Kevin Pappas acknowledges that he is a felon who spent 14 years in prison for drug dealing. He writes that at one point, hoping to get his sentence reduced, he wore an FBI-supplied wire in an effort to implicate Lukie Pappas.

Lukie Pappas, 83, is said to be in poor health. His grandson responded:

"The Pappas family has no knowledge of any event in the author's life," said Luke Pappas, 26, "nor do we have knowledge or reason to believe that the contents of his so-called autobiography are anything more than fiction."

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Denials of the book's claims extend beyond the Pappas family.

- "That family has been a pillar of this community and the Pappas family gave this community a restaurant that was well renowned that brought tourists to town from around the world," said Anita Protos, 67, a former Tarpon Springs mayor. "Tarpon Springs is not a community of mafia; we do not have a Greek mafia. This book is a bunch of garbage."

- Jerry Theophilopoulos, whose father was the head priest at the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral for 32 years and who himself was a church board member for 10 years, called the book a disgrace.

"There is no such thing as a Greek mafia," said Theophilopoulos, 41, a local attorney. "He is trying to smear the name of a good family. What the Pappas family over the years has been is very generous to the Cathedral and they do this out of the kindness of their heart with nothing to gain."

- Mark LeCouris, Tarpon Springs' current city manager and long time

police chief, said that he was not aware of a Greek mafia in the town.

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The book is titled *Godfather of Night: A Greek Mafia Father, a Drug Runner Son, and an Unexpected Shot at Redemption*. It is published by Random House Inc. and can be found at local bookstores such as Barnes & Noble and Books-A-Million. No sales figures were available.

The author says he was 17 when Jim Cunningham, the man he knew as his father, called him to his deathbed.

"He told me that Lukie Pappas was my real father," Kevin Pappas recalled during a recent telephone conversation. "I've been trying to get my dad's (Lukie Pappas) attention since I was 17 years of age and hoping to God to have a relationship with him. The moment he found out I was going to claim the name, he, at that point, he pushed me away."

Kevin Pappas' mother, Willadean Cunningham, 82, supports her son's claims, although his birth certificate lists the father as James Cunningham.

Known as Peggy around Tarpon Springs, Cunningham says that Lukie Pappas is indeed the father of her youngest child.

"He looks just like his dad," said Cunningham, who worked as a waitress at the Pappas restaurant. "I don't know how anyone can deny that he's the daddy."

Amy Graham, a waitress at the Pappas restaurant for 35 years, agreed that "everyone knew" that Peggy Cunningham was pregnant with Lukie Pappas' child.

"Well, it was talk in the restaurant there," said Graham, 75. "And he looked just like the family."

Cunningham said she moved from her Grosse Avenue home to Zebulon, Ga., in an effort to shield Kevin from the rumors. She lives there today.

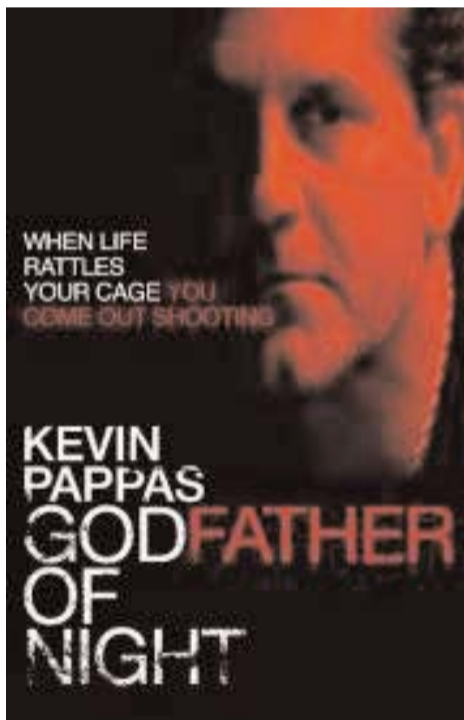
Kevin Pappas said he would take a DNA test to prove the identity of his father. He said all he wanted was to be acknowledged.

That quest, he said, led him to a life as a drug trafficker, 14 years in prison and working with the FBI in an effort to snag Lukie Pappas in a cocaine sting.

"I don't want your money, Lukie," Kevin Pappas said to the St. Petersburg Times. "I don't want anything from you ... just for you to acknowledge me as your son."

Kevin Pappas wrote that Lukie tried to appease him by giving him \$4,000 and sending him to Kalymnos, Greece, for two months.

"I thought that trip would cure me



of my hunger to know who I was, but it didn't," Kevin Pappas wrote. "If anything, I wanted Lukie's acceptance even more. When I got back, I changed my name to Kevin Lucas Pappas."

According to the book, Kevin was introduced to drug dealing as a Chippendales dancer in Georgia. He soon opened a jewelry store and entered the drug game. He had jewelry and money, and drove Porsches, Ferraris and Lukie's favorite, a Mercedes 560 SEC, Kevin Pappas wrote. He wore the Rolex Submariners that he said every Greek mobster wore.

But then a string of arrests led to prison time. Willadean Cunningham said on several occasions she traveled to Tarpon Springs to meet Lukie. He would give her money to help pay for attorneys, she said.

"At times, I cleaned houses, offices, toilets trying to keep the money going," Cunningham said. "But there were times I just couldn't and I'd call him (Lukie), and I'd come down and run back."

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At age 24, Pappas was busted for trying to distribute 107 kilos of cocaine and sent to federal prison in Atlanta with a life sentence. To reduce the time, he said, he started cooperating with federal agents.

Kevin Pappas wrote that he was approached by two FBI agents with a folder with pictures of several Pappas family members.

"Below Lukie's photo was my name and my mug shot and it had 'Pappas, Kevin Lucas, a.k.a. Cunningham, Kevin Lee, illegitimate son'," Kevin Pappas wrote.

According to Kevin Pappas, the FBI agents were after Lukie Pappas and wanted him to assist.

His assignment was to get "Lukie to admit on tape to financing drug deals, or bid-rigging, or fixing a judge, or whatever the ---- he may have been up to that month," Kevin Pappas wrote. The FBI promised to get him out of prison if he got Lukie Pappas to admit to a drug deal on tape, he wrote.

In June 1991, Kevin Pappas wrote, he was released from prison and drove to Tarpon Springs to set the FBI's plan into motion. On Aug. 12, 1991, he had gotten Lukie to agree to meet him to set up "a mid level coke deal — twenty ki's ..." he wrote.

Wired and sitting across from Lukie Pappas, Kevin said he asked him if he was his father: "Just tell me the truth, just once and then we never have to mention it again."

According to the book, Lukie responded: "Of course I'm your father ... Look at you, you look just like your grandfather."

Kevin Pappas, said he could not go through with the deal and showed Lukie Pappas the wire. Lukie Pappas walked away without saying a word. Kevin Pappas said he was sent back to federal prison until 2000.

FBI spokesman Ken Hoffman in Washington, D.C., would not confirm or deny that the agency had any contact with Kevin Pappas.

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Kevin Pappas, who is adamant that he never testified against anyone to get leniency, is now married to a former Mrs. Hawaii and a father of three living in the greater Atlanta area. He is still looking for Lukie Pappas to once again call him one of his own.

"It was not my quest to do this book," Kevin Pappas told the Times. "My quest was to get his attention so he would accept me. I would like this man to say I made a mistake and you are my blood."

By Demorris A. Lee,  
Times Staff Writer