



Aid from Above: Inside My Veiled World as a Flight Nurse

Kurtis Bell

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Aid from Above is the memoir of a raconteur who witnessed memorable saves and disheartening deaths.

Kurtis Bell details his years working for a private air ambulance service in *Aid from Above*, an anecdotal career memoir that portrays a lesser-known facet of emergency care with folksy candor and tenderness.

Set between 1997 and 2010, the text is an overview of Bell's work with Native American Air Ambulance, named for the company owner's part-Native American heritage rather than for the territory or population its flights served. Topical chapters sketch Bell's background in nursing; the particulars of helicopters and logistics related to the operation; colorful individuals Bell worked with; and incidents that range from crushing to humorous.

The book winds through memories in an unadorned style that brings the versatility, experience, compassion, and tough-mindedness required for the job to the surface. At times, this casual structure results in a loose chronology. Details on the company's workings are spread across chapters. Transitions from chapter to chapter are spare, and many of the emergency calls read as intriguing, stand-alone events that illustrate the crew's camaraderie and skill. The final chapter is a noteworthy exception, featuring a chance encounter with a patient from a previous call that allows the full weight of the job's significance to hit home.

Bell's reflections on nursing—how it evolved over time, how it has impacted him—are less clear. When asked by a coworker what sparked his interest in the field, his response is a deflection based on an unrelated, off-color play on words. Still, his passion for his sometimes trying job—which included navigating the media, as well as mundane waiting between calls—comes through.

From responding to road accidents to a cardiac arrest in the desert to a burn at a campsite, each incident is an eye-opening account of calm amid crises. The book is informative about medical procedures without turning too technical, and it dispels some of the dramatic impressions people have of the job, noting that it often involves straightforward transport, rather than rescuing (medics, firefighters, and police on the ground tend to reach patients first).

Some awkward descriptions arise, including likening a burn victim's vocal chords to women's anatomy and of the viscerally detailed damage done to the face of someone who attempted suicide. Most of the writing is more respectful to the patients. Mixed homophones and shifts in verb tense impede the text.

Aid from Above is the memoir of a raconteur who witnessed memorable saves and disheartening deaths, and also a tribute to the people who've chosen the same unusual, critical vocation.

KAREN RIGBY (May 29, 2019)

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