



Death Just Happens

Margaret J. Scott

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Post-traumatic stress disorder is commonly assumed to be an unwelcome souvenir of battle, but PTSD also affects people who have never heard a bomb explode or a rifle shot fired in anger.

Margaret J. Scott enjoyed most of her duties as a respected and hard-working nursing supervisor in an Australian hospital. What she didn't realize was the enormous strain her job put on her psyche.

*Apparently, after studying the hospital mortuary stats with the hospital's occupational health and safety officer, the numbers I had been involved in were excessive; I was supposed to have snapped years prior. He went on to say I had been working a 93 percent rate of trauma; the analogy he used was, in [Beirut], Lebanon, the medical and nursing are monitored to work only 30 percent trauma in any given year. I had been doing this for over fifteen years.**

Early in the memoir, readers vicariously experience the "straw that broke the camel's back." As part of her responsibilities, Scott, a dedicated caregiver, was charged with preparing and presenting human remains whenever officials or family needed to view them. With years of medical experience in trauma care, Scott didn't expect anything to faze her. Then she found herself under time pressure to prepare the body of a drowned swimmer for family identification.

Our nostrils and eyes were slammed with the visual of the entire front torso in a skeletal state filled with sea creatures, the jackals of the sea, that had been doing their job ... I involuntarily vomited, an experience new to me.

So begins *Death Just Happens*. Scott does a creditable job describing her hard work and thoroughly stressful responsibilities.

Scott then moves into a description of her childhood, one as a rural Australian dairy farmer's daughter, which she believes prepared her for the nursing profession. It's apparent she is a natural Type-A personality. Even as a child, she seemed competent and disciplined beyond her years, even to the point of being able to apply an effective tourniquet when her father lost part of a finger in a farming accident.

Margaret the Mute, as she was labeled in school because of her shyness, then enrolled in nursing school, took advanced training in midwifery, moved to "the big smoke" (vernacular for an Australian metropolis), returned to her native area to become a first responder at Mount Baw Baw ski resort and traveled during the resort's off-season. She worked in a castle in England, was entertained by a famous clothing designer in Paris, sojourned in South Africa, and spent a month touring the American West before settling into marriage. All this is told with great gusto. The memoir ends with both Scott and her husband triumphing over severe cases of mercury poisoning.

Scott was trained as a nurse rather than a writer, and that fact is illustrated in some of her syntax and use of grammar. As an example, she writes "Dad was ashen, with the gray color of his hair with an unusual silence." A professional editor would have given the book polish, but it stands as an appealing retelling of a life well-lived.

For those who treasure listening to a friend's adventures within an exciting life story, this book will intrigue.
GARY PRESLEY (May 16, 2011)

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