



Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Tales of a Forensic Pathologist

Zoya Schmuter

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Three Stars (out of Five)

As an occupation glamorized by medical and legal procedural TV shows, forensic pathology seems, to the casual observer, to be an exciting profession full of murders to be solved by clever scientists who find all the clues within the dead bodies themselves. Zoya Schmuter's *Tales of a Forensic Pathologist* goes beyond the public perceptions of the job and into the true details, which are more complex, hair-raising, and varied than those represented in popular media.

Schmuter was born and raised in the former USSR. She emigrated in 1975 after working as an anatomic pathologist. She also worked as a pathologist in Israel, before moving to the United States, where she practiced as a senior medical examiner for twenty-two years in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) of New York. An expert in her field, Schmuter has also written a memoir about her early life, *From Russia with Luck*.

Tales of a Forensic Pathologist begins with an overview of the evolution of the New York City OCME during the author's tenure and its transformation into one of the best and busiest medical examination offices in the country. In this section are interspersed Schmuter's personal observations about life in New York City. The second and longest segment of the book contains brief descriptions of challenging or unusual cases from the author's experience, from initial presentation to resolution.

The strength of *Tales* lies in its case studies. In some cases, Schmuter investigates murders and is asked to testify in court. More frequently, though, she determines accidental causes of death in circumstances ranging from the morbidly amusing (strangled by pet python) to tragic (drowned in bathtub). Schmuter includes an interesting variety of cases, which she describes well, portraying the forensic pathology profession as one of detail-oriented observation and detective skills, instead of constant high-stakes murder mystery.

Tales' set-up and organization distracts from the content, however. The first section, in

which the author rambles about the OCME, as well as unrelated topics such as the dogs of New York City, lacks focus and does not serve as an engaging lead-in to the cases. The case study chapters are much more fascinating, but they drop off abruptly at the end, with no conclusion from the author.

Occasional typos and the lack of an adequate introduction or conclusion work against *Tales*, but it still contains enough clearly written case studies to satisfy readers who want to learn about the real daily life of a forensic pathologist.