

The Education Of A Coroner: Lessons In Investigating Death



Synopsis

In the vein of Dr. Judy Melinek's *Working Stiff*, an account of the hair-raising and heartbreaking cases handled by the coroner of Marin County, California throughout his four decades on the job—from high-profile deaths to serial killers, to Golden Gate Bridge suicides. Marin County, California is a study in contradictions. Its natural beauty attracts thousands of visitors every year, yet the county also is home to San Quentin Prison, one of the oldest and largest penitentiaries in the country. Marin ranks in the top one percent of counties nationwide in terms of affluence and overall health, yet it is far above the norm in drug overdoses and alcoholism, and comprises a large percentage of suicides from the Golden Gate Bridge. Ken Holmes worked in the Marin County Coroner's Office for thirty-six years, starting as a death investigator and ending as the three-term, elected coroner. As he grew into the job—which is different from what is depicted on television—Holmes learned a variety of skills, from finding hidden clues at death scenes, interviewing witnesses effectively, managing bystanders and reporters, preparing testimony for court to notifying families of a death with sensitivity and compassion. He also learned about different kinds of firearms, all types of drugs—prescription and illegal—and about certain unexpected and potentially fatal phenomena such as autoeroticism. Complete with poignant anecdotes, *The Education of a Coroner* provides a firsthand and fascinating glimpse into the daily life of a public servant whose work is dark and mysterious yet necessary for society to function.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Riveting and complex” the cases [Bateson] meticulously describes vividly represent Holmes’ long-standing tenure as a forensic professional. Throughout the book, the author spotlights each gory detail with macabre precision. These factual narratives magnify the work and the resolve necessary to bring closure to violent, unjust, suspicious, or unresolved deaths. They also make for supremely entertaining reading material for anyone with a dark curiosity in forensic science. A fascinating and wildly informative dive into the mysterious world of death and decay.

• Kirkus Reviews “Entertaining, if morbid, reading, especially for those with an interest in forensics and homicide investigations.”

• Booklist

John Bateson was executive director of a nationally certified crisis intervention and suicide prevention center in the San Francisco Bay Area for sixteen years. He is the author of three previous books • The Last and Greatest Battle, The Final Leap, and Building Hope.

One of the most interesting and fascinating books I have read in a long time. I would recommend this book highly not only do you learn the inside workings but you get some history on some cases as well. Holmes is a fantastic subject I’ve already bought two copies of this book to give away. It’s superb

I am actually surprised as to how much I enjoyed this book. The beginning is a bit dull and I found myself skimming parts, but once I got into the actual findings and how the investigators were able to dig through the obvious to the actual, the book took a surprising turn for me. John Bateson takes his time interviewing Ken Holmes and recounting his thirty-six year career at the Marin County Coroner’s Office starting as a death investigator and ending as the three-term, elected coroner. There are actual case studies, but there is no gruesome gore. In his career, Holmes focused on the family members. He emphasizes how important the job of coroner is when it comes to working with people compared to police investigators who are only looking at the facts of a homicides and do not take time with outward appearing suicides. Sometimes you do not know what you have until all the details are examined. How all the pieces may not become known until decades later, but a focused coroner investigator is always on the lookout for the parts that make up the whole. Granted, this reads more like a memoir where Ken Holmes only recounts the “saves” in his long career, and recounts the “if it was not for me” stories, but such is life. He has a fulfilling career and it was

interesting to see it from an insider's perspective.

If you like coroner shows on TV you'll likely enjoy this book. It's full of behind the scenes info, and they chose many of the more interesting cases during Ken Holmes' nearly 40 years as a coroner. Lots of fascinating facts. It covers cases in Marin County, California which is a very beautiful area with some of the most expensive property in part of it, in another part it has a bridge with a high suicide rate, and yet another area, a prison full of a wide spread of case types. So it has all sorts of cases and covers everything from what's involved in covering a case from start to finish, what happens to John and Jane Doe cases, and things like what happens to all or any of the unclaimed property left behind by deceased people. My thanks to NetGalley, Scribner, and the author for providing me with an eARC in return for my unbiased review.

I received an ARC of this book from Netgalley for free in exchange for an honest review. John Bateson has written an engaging book that grabbed my attention and kept it from the first page to the last. Ken Holmes was an excellent subject for the book. His humility and humanity were an excellent counterpoint to the often grisly nature of his job. The cases that were featured showed how varied the day-to-day work of the coroner's office is. The politics of the office were often frustrating and made me appreciate Mr. Holmes' doggedness in defending the importance of the work an independent coroner's office does. Mr. Holmes's advocacy for the dead and their families was inspiring. His advice about grieving was sensitive and spot-on. I recommend this book for anyone who has enjoyed a police procedural in any format - it is eye opening and worth reading.

I have been interested in the mortuary/coroner field for a long time. I read as many books on this subject as I can. This book is going to be high on my list for books to read on this subject matter. The cases that are used for this book are told in a very respectful way. Very interesting tidbits are also presented as for the administrative parts of the coroner that we never really think about. This book has a very good flow to it and it holds your interest. I was sad when the book was finished. I could have read more about Mr. Holmes and his experience. This is a very good book, a must read. Thanks to NetGalley, the publisher and the author for the ARC of this book in return for my honest review.

"The Education of a Coroner" is both a biography and a collection of crime stories. We're given details about how Ken Holmes got into a career as a death investigator (then coroner's assistant

and later coroner), the training he received, and how he went about doing his job. We learn about the things Ken Holmes checked when he first came to a death scene, the importance of death certificates, and the difference between cause and manner of death. The author also explained how death notifications were done by the coroner's office, how they dealt with the media, how they interviewed people about the death, and many other aspects of Holmes' job. We're also told about some of the cases he was involved in, from suicides and accidents to homicides. He talked about some big name cases, unusual or shocking cases, and about the many suicides off the Golden Gate Bridge. The accidents and murders were described with minimal gory detail and were more about the clues found while working the case. He gave more gory details about the suicides, though. I found the book very interesting and would recommend it to people interested in what a death investigator and coroner do and to fans of true crime stories. I received an ebook review copy of this book from the publisher through NetGalley.

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