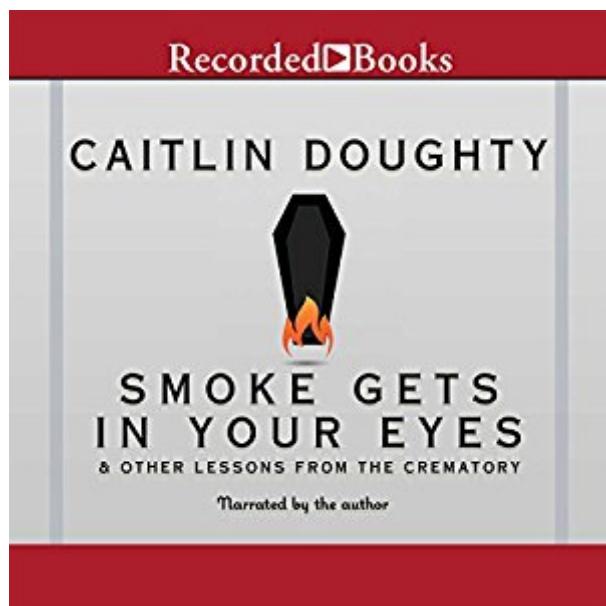


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Smoke Gets In Your Eyes: And Other Lessons From The Crematory



Synopsis

Most people want to avoid thinking about death, but Caitlin Doughty - a 20-something with a degree in medieval history and a flair for the macabre - took a job at a crematory, turning morbid curiosity into her life's work. With an original voice that combines fearless curiosity and mordant wit, Caitlin tells an unusual coming-of-age story full of bizarre encounters, gallows humor, and vivid characters (both living and very dead). Describing how she swept ashes from the machines (and sometimes onto her clothes), and cared for bodies of all shapes and sizes, Caitlin becomes an intrepid explorer in the world of the deceased. Her eye-opening memoir shows how our fear of dying warps our culture and society, and she calls for better ways of dealing with death (and our dead). In the spirit of her popular Web series, "Ask a Mortician", Caitlin's engaging narrative style makes this otherwise scary topic both approachable and profound. Caitlin Doughty, the host and creator of the "Ask a Mortician" Web series and the collective Order of the Good Death, is on a mission to change the way we think about death.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I had trouble coming up with a title for this review that wouldn't turn off anyone because I think this is an important book and I hope many, many people read it. The author of this book has been fascinated with the subject of death and dying since she was a young girl and witnessed the death of another young girl who took a fall at a local mall. For years afterwards she was filled with angst and trepidation and described herself as "functionally morbid." When she went to college she got a

degree in medieval history with a focus on death and rituals and afterwards got a job working at a mortuary - the Westwind Cremation & Burial. This book describes her experiences facing death straight on and how it actually eased her own existential angst and made her better able to appreciate and enjoy her own life. We not only read (detailed) descriptions of what happens to bodies in a crematorium, we also learn about other mortuary practices and what really happens behind the scenes. The author makes such an important case against our own culture's tendency to avoid death (and aging!) and to try to avoid its very existence. She points out how in the past and how even today - in other cultures - family and neighbors took care of their dead and witnessed dying all the time. She points out how important that is to accepting our own death and by doing so, make it less frightening and esoteric. Lest I give the impression that this is a depressing book, for me it was not. There are so many laugh-out-loud moments and when I finished the last page I found myself with a little less of my own existential angst. This book reminded me a lot of science writer Mary Roach and I feel like I'd love to hang out and be friends with both of them. Ms. Doughty has such a pleasant writing style and when you're finished reading, you will not only have been entertained but educated as well. She takes on this sobering and angst-filled subject with an abundance of wit and sensitivity. I hope this book gets the attention and audience it deserves.

I found this book to be a refreshing, unsentimental and honest look at the way Americans deal with death - which is to say, not very effectively. Author Doughty spent time working in a crematory and later went through mortuary school, and her memoir is by turns darkly funny, fascinating, disgusting, and touching. I have a lot of admiration for anyone who works in a crematory, does embalming, or deals with mourning relatives - it's very challenging work and I couldn't do it. In addition to her own story, Doughty skillfully weaves in a history of embalming, American funeral traditions, other cultures' funeral rites and beliefs about death, and how the mortuary industry works, and it's all quite interesting, if sometimes a little difficult to read. If you're squeamish, it might be best to steer clear, as Doughty spares no description in her quest to open the reader's eyes to what really happens to our bodies after we die and how we can best understand and deal with death more honestly and directly than we currently do. I don't know if I should say I "enjoyed" this book the way I would enjoy a novel, but I certainly appreciated it, especially since I have gone through the deaths of family members and am getting on in years myself, and I feel it's important to explore and be able to talk about our own ends openly, rather than tiptoeing around the subject. I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the mortuary/funeral industry, medical students (doctors in this country don't deal with death very well), and anyone who, like me, wants to understand more about death.

and how to plan for it.

This book is not a "guilty pleasure". Despite what one might think, it is not a book for indulging in the macabre, or something that feels as though it might have been written by Alice Cooper or Bela Lugosi. This is a book about life, or rather an important and meaningful part of life which we have collectively chosen to hide from ourselves. It is both a memoir, and a call for each of us to bravely reconsider how we're cheating ourselves by handing what was once something to be experienced and shared by families, over to professional experience removers. Yes, the book includes the "hands on" details of what the author experienced while turning human bodies to ash, but it has to in order to help us see just how insulated we've become from a milestone which occurs in every life. If you're looking for ghoulish irreverence, this book isn't the place to find it. If you'd like a warm, often humorous, but always caring narrative on the subject, told by a down-right likeable writer with first hand experience, I can think of no better book. It's an amazingly well written first book, and I cannot wait for her next.

I received this in the mail Monday. It's now Friday (of the same week, in case that wasn't clear), and as of earlier this afternoon it is definitely a book in my top three favorites. Easy to follow, funny, honest, not skimping on the details, and not shying away from the reality of the situation, this book was difficult to put down. If you're interested (or just mildly curious) in death, I fully suggest giving this a read. I don't fully agree with some of the more... social... comments, but they help give context to the woman behind the book, and pull back the curtain a bit on the perspective that helped shape her and her journey with death (besides, no one truly agrees 100% with anyone else, even themselves, sometimes). Overall, and if you take nothing else from this review, know that I adored this book, and I'm going to have a hard time waiting for her next one!

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