

Dear Librarian,

I never planned to write a memoir or anything about my life and work. I've written a technical book before and various standard operating procedures for military and government as well as for my company, but never a memoir. I have a job like most people, and I try to do the best I can, again like most people. But I know my job and life are different.

I have been not just a witness to history but a participant in so many of the human tragedies of the last 35 years. I see what the cameras cannot show the world, or frankly, what the world is afraid to see. I also see stories of the lives ended prematurely and what they leave behind, often unfinished. I've witnessed the devastation of numerous tragedies. I was at 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the December 2004 Asian Tsunami, Haitian Earthquake, and more airplane crashes than I care to count.

From a very early age, life has been different for me, filled with opposites. It started with my father and uncle getting arrested (my uncle had a meth lab guarded by a mountain lion) and then me working for the same law enforcement agencies responsible for arresting them just 10 years later. It is working to recover the dead so I can help the living. It is knowing that for events that affect so many people, so few people really understand what happens in the aftermath, long after the cameras are gone, or trying to stay optimistic and human in the endless onslaught of inhumanity that I see and touch in the most personal way.

Personal Effects: What Recovering the Dead Teaches Me about the Living is a book about what happens behind the yellow tape, understanding the processes, what survivors and families go through, and what it means to be human--to stay sane, to get up and face the world, no matter what is thrown at you. Beyond that, it is an eyewitness account of some of the most private moments of the most public events.

There are no new lessons to be learned; only new people learning old lessons. I hope this memoir helps teach some of those lessons, answers some questions, and shows that there is always good and a better tomorrow. Thank you in advance for helping me share my story and the lessons I've learned through the years. I also hope you enjoy the book.

—Robert

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