



Any Ordinary Day: What Happens After the Worst Day of Your Life?

Leigh Sales

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As a journalist, Leigh Sales often encounters people experiencing the worst moments of their lives in the full glare of the media. But one particular string of bad news stories - and a terrifying brush with her own mortality - sent her looking for answers about how vulnerable each of us is to a life-changing event. What are our chances of actually experiencing one? What do we fear most and why? And when the worst does happen, what comes next?

In this wise and layered book, Leigh talks intimately with people who've faced the unimaginable, from terrorism to natural disaster to simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Expecting broken lives, she instead finds strength, hope, even humour. Leigh brilliantly condenses the cutting-edge research on the way the human brain processes fear and grief, and poses the questions we too often ignore out of awkwardness. Along the way, she offers an unguarded account of her own challenges and what she's learned about coping with life's unexpected blows.

Warm, candid and empathetic, this book is about what happens when ordinary people, on ordinary days, are forced to suddenly find the resilience most of us don't know we have.

Any Ordinary Day: What Happens After the Worst Day of Your Life? Details

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From Reader Review Any Ordinary Day: What Happens After the Worst Day of Your Life? for online ebook

Carly Findlay says

Any Ordinary Day by Leigh Sales is good literary journalism. So good. I read it quickly, in three sittings.

A mix of interviews with people whose lives have changed suddenly and often tragically, statistical research and memoir by Leigh. She reflects on her own writing and research for the book, and her mistakes as a journalist.

I kept sending screenshots of “wow” moments to a friend who has finished it.

While the topic is quite dark, and the interview subjects have been through some devastating tragedies, the book is joyous. There's wonderfully light moments - like when Louisa Hope, who was in the Lindt Cafe siege recalls joking to the surgeon that she would have liked some liposuction, and the surgeon said her fat saved her; some moments when you realise the power of selflessness - like when Walter Mikac reached out subtly to Matt Golinski (both men lost their wife and children suddenly); moments when you see the good in people - John Howard writing to the families of those killed in the war; and moments that show you just how tough Leigh Sales is.

Ultimately, as Wendy Liu who works in the morgue says, death and seeing death is often about love. And that's what this book is about. It's lovingly written, knitted together with hope and resilience.

Definitely recommend it. A smart, beautiful, spine tingling book.

Nancy says

Finished: 04.10.2018

Genre: non-fiction

Rating: A+++++

#AWW2018

Conclusion:

If you have a pulse...and I know you do
this book will grab you and not let go.

Absolutely inspiring!

Sometimes I have to let a book sink in for a few days....and this was one of them.

Last year I commented on my post 23 Nov 2017 about losing somebody dear to us.

We don't realize we were making memoirs back then when times were better...festive family get-togethers ...we were just having fun. When some leaves you life there's no one to share your memories anymore. They become like secrets. I must mention the new book by Leigh Sales 'An Ordinary Day'. My review (NF) was so short on #AWW2018 because the book had such an impact on me...I was at a loss for words. But every day I think about that book...every day. Leigh Sales managed to make me realize that if you look around your 'ordinary day'...in hindsight they are nothing but miraculous. Life can change in an instant. As I watch the news this past week with a devastating Hurricane Michael...people's homes are blasted from the face of the earth. If you are feeling contemplative....'An Ordinary Day' is worth reading....it put life into perspective

for me.

Belinda Ramsay says

This is my pick for the best non-fiction book of 2018. The book weaves emotive interviews with individuals who have faced high-profile traumas with statistical and psychological research that provides an explanation of the often unexplainable human themes of trauma, adversity and resilience. Leigh lends her own honest voice to her experiences and preconceptions in a way that is reminiscent of Helen Garner's non-fiction works. Overall, an incredibly interesting and introspective read from one of Australia's best journalists.

Meags says

4 Stars

In *Any Ordinary Day*, Australian journalist Leigh Sales takes a thoughtful look at the remarkable power of human endurance in the face of great loss and adversity.

Here, Sales shares with her readers a series of candid interviews, featuring members of the general public who have, in one role or another, been at the centre of some of Australia's most memorable and devastating news stories over the past few decades - everything from the Thredbo landslide and the Port Arthur massacre, to more recent tragedies like the Black Saturday bushfires and the Lindt Café siege are discussed within.

Ultimately, it's a collection of life experiences and shared insights of those ordinary yet remarkable Australian's who just happened to have experienced tragedy and loss to an extreme degree at some point in their lives.

Sales did a fantastic job with this emotional and thought-provoking story. I can honestly say I was completely engrossed from start to finish.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!

Cathy Miers says

Loved it - such an interesting topic well handled. Was great to meet such a variety of people who were willing to open themselves up to this extent. All the cases are things I remember well so I found it really relevant. I loved Leigh revealing her own vulnerability too. Well done.

A.B. Gayle says

I was drawn to this book out of respect for the author as an investigative journalist and because she is a very fair interviewer. I knew the subject would be explored thoroughly and with integrity. It was.

The author acknowledges, “If you often watch the news, you may come to believe that the events that are reported (terrorist attacks, shark maulings, child abductions) are more common than they really are.”

This book explores a number of personal tragedies which, due to their nature, became very public. They drew the media’s attention. The author talks to those brushed by these tragedies. The survivors, the victim’s families, the officials who dealt with them and the boffins who have studied the different aspects of death and grieving.

She looks at how those people coped at the time, how the experience changed them as a person and the long term effect of the tragedy.

Her interviews and research into each of the tragic incidents are used to illustrate the different aspects. First, why we have this morbid fascination - ie it could have been me. As she says, “We hate to feel vulnerable, and seek reassurance any way we can.” Our obsession can be seen as a survival instinct. In exploring the Lindt Cafe siege she states: “The brain wants an explanation so it can satisfy its desire for cause and effect. Something like the Lindt siege shatters our individual feeling of security and the brain desperately wants that restored. Such events don’t come with a ready explanation and yet the brain still hunts for one. It needs an answer so it can file the experience away and move on to thinking about less threatening things, like what to cook for dinner.”

But for those caught up, they can’t “Move on” there is never “closure”. Instead there is the “New Normal” which they have to learn to accept even if they don’t like it.

In the words of a Walter Mikac, who lost his wife and daughters in the Port Arthur massacre, ‘A year on, you’re just functioning. I really didn’t have any idea what I was going to do in the future. Twenty years on, it’s probably more like a surgical wound. You can see the scar. You’ve experienced a whole gamut of emotions but it sits okay. I still think about what the children would have been doing at this age. They might have finished uni. It’s a daily thought, just the loss of potential and what they could have been. Sometimes, I just wish so much that I could give them a hug.’

At one point, a Jesuit priest, Steve Sinn, says to the author: “You have a substance to your life if you’ve felt pain. You’ve got understanding, that’s where compassion is. It makes you a deeper, richer human being.”

There are so many good lessons to learn in this book. Words of wisdom, food for thought, actions that inspire.

One section dealt with how we, as individuals can have an affect. Probably the most important lesson for all of us. For Walter Mikac: “having friends avoid him for fear of not knowing what to say or do was one of the worst things in the aftermath of losing his family.” As he puts it, “There’s nothing anyone could say, no matter how badly it came out, that could be as bad as what’s already happened to you. So it’s much better for people to just let you know that they’re there to help, if you need it.”

This was reiterated by another interviewee: “people become paralysed because they want to offer something authentic or meaningful and they fear not delivering.” He goes on to recount how a young man helped him by simply expressing sorrow, asking how he was doing then offering help should he need it.

The media’s role was explored in detail. In interviewing James Scott years after his ordeal in the Himalayas, the author questions it herself: “Where is the balance between the cost to the individual and the public’s desire to know the story?” The role of the media manager is described as necessary, plus the different way

interviews are conducted. The author admits she was not always considering the wellbeing of her interviewees when pursuing a story for a deadline.

The section where she interviews Amanda Gearing should be compulsory reading for all journos. Amanda is a journalist who has studied the effect of media interviews on their subjects. For starters, Amanda recommends the approach, “There is going to be a story in the paper about this. If there is anything you would like to say about your child or husband or wife, the paper is interested now. Next week, they probably won’t be so interested.”

Amanda’s research showed that interviewees wanted four things: humanity (don’t lose sight of the fact that you’re dealing with people, not characters in a story), empathy (try to understand what the person is going through and act accordingly), autonomy (allow the subject to lead the discussion), and respect (make allowances, give the person time and space, and above all, don’t be exploitative). She added that interviewees should understand that they don’t have to answer every question that journalists ask them.

Perhaps the most hopeful thing to come out of all this talk of tragedy, loss and suffering was the concept of post traumatic change.

There is no denying: “one of the hardest things is that life keeps relentlessly rolling on.” But in the words of a woman who lost her husband in a tragic surfing accident: “It’s as if surviving the hardest thing –the greatest pain –frees me to live more courageously. You can crumble and give up. Or you can keep living and loving. I choose the latter.”

So, lessons for all of us in just the right amount of detail to ensure authenticity without losing the essence of what is important. A recommended read.

Tanya says

#mindblown #perspective

It's fair to say that until a recent turn of events occurred in my life, I have never really experienced "trauma". Certainly, a few shitty things have happened to me in my life but nothing that has shaken me to my core.

In the aftermath of said trauma my dearest friend happened to mention a podcast she had listened to by Leigh Sales over a dinner gathering. I swiftly listened to the podcast then ran to the first book store I could find to purchase *Any Ordinary Day*.

In the wake of the most unfathomable tragedies, Leigh Sales explores how people react after the worst day of their lives. To say I was riveted would be an understatement.

The people she interviewed for the book in some cases have experienced multiple traumatic life events. My own experience and reactions to what I believe was the worst day of my life have been completely unprecedented so I eagerly wanted to hear the reactions of others.

We all think we would know how we would cope getting any type of bad news but until it happens you really don't. In every case those interviewed for the book emerged stronger, wiser, kinder. My regret is not having a highlighter in my hand as I read it. But I will read it again.

In the aftermath of my own trauma two people in my life fronted up and showed me such kindness that my view of friendships was also transformed. Much like the survivors in Sales book I have come to view kindness in a whole new light.

"I'm so changed. I'm so different. I feel like I've sort of had a layer of skin removed. I'm still me, I still hold the same values. But I'm able to live my life now in a very different way. I just find peace and beauty in the smallest moments now.....it's as if surviving the hardest thing - the greatest pain - frees me to live more courageously. You can crumble and give up. Or you can keep living and loving. I choose the latter". Hannah Richell

Amanda says

What an absolutely beautiful book made even more powerful by listening to Leigh's narration on Audible. Very grateful for Leigh daring greatly to capture these stories, to accompany grief and to share some lessons learned.

None of us know when something will happen that changes everything. And we have no ability to control or prevent death and grief visiting us and our loved ones. Understanding how other people have endured grief does not give you a blueprint but it does give you faith in our resilience and the kindness of others.

The key take away - be kind. Take that forward every day.

PipReads says

the most sensitive and honourable gut punch I've experienced.

Michael Livingston says

In contrast to everyone else I follow on Goodreads, I didn't love this. Sales interviews a handful of people who have suffered high profile tragedies about how they coped with the trauma, loss and attention they went through. The interviews are honest and interesting and provide a powerful look at recovery, resilience and grief. The book weaves Sales' own trials and scientific research around these interviews and here, especially the science bits, I was bit underwhelmed. It's a thoughtful and moving book, but it didn't really sweep me along with it the way I was hoping it would.

Claire Fuller says

I was really interested in the interviews with the individuals, but the premise of the book wasn't clear enough. What happens after the worst day of your life either wasn't strong enough to carry the book, or Sales didn't stick to it closely enough. So it seemed to meander into some pop psychology, statistics (which were repeated), secondary worst days, and other things that diluted the whole thing.

Kali Napier says

I found truths in Leigh Sales' writing about traumatic events that have blindsided people that I found confronting and had to heed.. I've been that person who doesn't know what the right thing to say is to someone who's experienced intense loss and so have 'avoided the subject'. As many of the people Leigh interviewed for her book said, this lack of acknowledgement was the hardest to bear.

However, this book sat uncomfortably with me. I think this sense of disquiet started when statistics were brought into it. How unlikely it is for someone to experience X event and possibly Y event too. I don't believe everybody in society has the same-sized ticket in this lottery. There is a constant refrain in the book of the belief that these are things that happen to 'other people'. One of the points made in the book is that random events occur and nobody is immune. Yet society is not a level playing field. For many, traumatic events, grief, loss and acts of violence are more LIKELY to happen to them because they don't live in the bubble of being white, middle-class, beautiful, loved, etc etc. They don't necessarily believe that these things happen to 'other people' because these are things that happen to them more frequently. Homelessness, displacement, deaths of loved ones. They respond differently to such events because of experience. Towards the end of this book I grew more frustrated at the implication that blindsides are somehow 'worse' when they happen to the bubble people, though I'm sure this was not Leigh's explicit intention. It troubled me when there was so much emphasis on how 'good' and 'beautiful' a person was. Of course, this reflects the media's sensationalising of crime events, which Emily Maguire skewered so well in *An Isolated Incident*. So much focus on 'good people' who aren't 'deserving' of the events that befall them implies the inverse: that there are bad people out there, and they are more deserving of being blindsided.

This is just my subjective gut reaction and reading of the points of the book, which were engagingly made in some chapters, particularly Mikac's. I think the second half of the book diluted the impact it might have made. I am sure that it will be of comfort and insightful to others.

Zohal says

It started off good but then it just veered into unexpected territory.

Reannon Bowen says

I didn't think I'd like this book. I thought it would be hard & cause my overly anxious mind to go into overdrive. But I loved it. I watch Leigh Sales most nights, I listen to her podcast. She feels familiar & trustworthy. The way she narrates this book is so open, so honest & her natural curiosity shines through. And

yes, the stories were hard to listen to, made me catch my breath, broke my heart but overall it made me feel uplifted & amazed at how strong & resilient humans are. I'm so glad I've read this book, it's such a life affirming book.

elisabeth says

couldn't finish this one. I'm a massive fan of leigh's journalism and podcasting, but her pop-psychology attempt didn't hold my interest. I was interested in the idea behind this book and some of the subjects interviewed but I feel like she should have stuck to her strengths - interviewing, getting stories out of people, and then highlighting that more than scientific studies and statistics. it was also a pity because I did find her interview segments quite interesting, especially her segment about Port Arthur. I thought these interviews were well considered and definitely what I'm used to Leigh doing - interesting questions dealt with sensitively. the rest just...didn't click for me.
