



All That Remains: A Life in Death

Sue Black

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Sue Black confronts death every day. As Professor of Anatomy and Forensic Anthropology, she focuses on mortal remains in her lab, at burial sites, at scenes of violence, murder and criminal dismemberment, and when investigating mass fatalities due to war, accident or natural disaster. In *All that Remains* she reveals the many faces of death she has come to know, using key cases to explore how forensic science has developed, and what her work has taught her.

Do we expect a book about death to be sad? Macabre? Sue's book is neither. There is tragedy, but there is also humour in stories as gripping as the best crime novel. Our own death will remain a great unknown. But as an expert witness from the final frontier, Sue Black is the wisest, most reassuring, most compelling of guides.

All That Remains: A Life in Death Details

Date : Published April 19th 2018 by Doubleday (first published April 15th 2018)

ISBN : 9780857524928

Author : Sue Black

Format : Hardcover 368 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Science, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography, Death, Medical, Crime, True Crime

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From Reader Review All That Remains: A Life in Death for online ebook

Rebecca says

Black, a world-leading forensic anthropologist, was part of the war crimes investigation in Kosovo and the recovery effort in Thailand after the 2004 tsunami. She is frequently called into trials to give evidence, has advised the U.K. government on disaster preparedness, and is a co-author of the textbook *Developmental Juvenile Osteology* (2000). Whether working in a butcher's shop as a teenager or exploring a cadaver for an anatomy class at the University of Aberdeen, she's always been comfortable with death. "I never had any desire to work with the living," she confesses; "The dead are much more predictable and co-operative."

The book considers death in its clinical and personal aspects: the seven stages of postmortem alteration and the challenges of identifying the sex and age of remains; versus her own experiences with losing her grandmother, uncle and parents. Black wants her skeleton to go to Dundee University's teaching collection. It doesn't creep her out to think of that, no more than it did to meet her future cadaver, a matter-of-fact, curious elderly gentleman named Arthur. My favorite chapter was on Kosovo; elsewhere I found the mixture of science and memoir slightly off, and the voice never fully drew me in.

Favorite line: "Perhaps forensic anthropologists are the sin-eaters of our day, addressing the unpleasant and unimaginable so that others don't have to."

Jo says

Professor Dame Sue Black is one of the UK's foremost forensic anthropologists. In this book she recounts personal and professional stories that detail her life dealing with death. Absolutely fascinating.

Clarissa Marley says

I was very excited to read this book given that I studied an MSc in Forensic Anthropology and Sue Black is very, very well known in the field. It did not disappoint!

It is very witty and written in a way that really engages you with the field of Forensic Anthropology, without going into too much detail that may discourage readers who perhaps do not know what it is. I very much enjoyed reading about both Sue Black's experiences within the field and also her more personal experiences with death and the like. I feel like she writes about death in a way that is oddly comforting and I really appreciated that, it added a certain depth of emotion to this book that I wasn't expecting.

Even as a graduate this book taught me a lot of new and fascinating things about Forensic Anthropology i had no idea about! Every chapter i found myself getting excited over a case or a certain method of identification etc and excitedly telling whoever was in the room with me at the time.

I will definitely be recommending this to my family and friends. I also recommend it to anyone who has an interest in forensics, Forensic Anth i think is still relatively unknown when people actually think of the different forensic fields (no-one i know knew what it was anyway!), but it is so important and can do so much good... i think it should be given the attention it deserves!

Nicki Markus says

All That Remains was a truly fascinating read. Death is something that is always on my mind. Coupled with old age, it terrifies me, which is probably why I love vampires so much; I'd jump at the chance to stay young and live forever. Anyhow, that preoccupation with death is what made me request Sue Black's book from NetGalley, and I found it intriguing. Professor Black has certainly had an interesting working life, and I was captivated by her tales from her student days and from her more recent work in places like Kosovo. Black offers readers an interesting reflection on death, alongside wonderful descriptions of the work of both anatomists and forensic anthropologists. For instance, I had no idea you could still bequeath your body to anatomy schools.

All That Remains will certainly appeal to general readers looking for something different in non-fiction. However, I believe it holds even more value for authors. I am a writer myself, and my current WIP involves murder scenes (albeit of a supernatural nature). It occurred to me that Black's detailed descriptions of things such as the DVI process and the various stages of decomposition would be of use to crime writers seeking to ensure their scenes feel authentic.

I am glad I gave this book a read. It certainly got me thinking, in more ways than one, and it's one I would now considering purchasing, if only for the research value it would offer me as a writer. I did skim through a couple of chapters, which didn't full capture my attention. However, overall, it was an enjoyable work, so I am giving it 4 stars.

I received this book as a free eBook ARC via NetGalley.

Emma says

A few years ago I saw that Desert Island Discs was interviewing Sue Black, Professor of Anatomy and Forensic Pathology at the University of Dundee... I read a lot of crime fiction, I've watched *Bones* and *Silent Witness*, I knew this was definitely going to be my cup of tea. [I urge you all to listen if you can <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06j0wf3>].

The programme was even more fascinating than I could have imagined and helped me discover more about both the process of identifying human remains and what kind of person it takes to do it. This book expands on much of what was in that interview, as well as adding more details about her life, work, and the cases in which she's been involved. It's a mish-mash of history, science, memoir, police investigations, cold cases, natural disasters, education and invention...not to mention some handy tips for would be ~~murderers~~ er...writers about procedure. For example, dismembering a body in certain ways causes too much leakage, making it harder to move and there really **is** a best way to remove a human head. And don't forget about the smell if you try to hide body parts in your cupboard or beneath your driveway (yes, she's seen this). Since the bathtub is well sized for a human body, people usually use it to cut up their inconveniently sized dead so Scene of Crime officers start their search there as a matter of course. Apparently it's hard to cut up/saw through a corpse without scratching the bath surface and it's *very* difficult to clean all the necessary drainage parts. Sadly, she didn't suggest better alternatives but I have these snippets of advice mentally shelved in case I ever need them. Which I won't, obviously.

Some parts of the book are discussed with relative humour and she has a knack for particularly apt descriptions of body parts and fluids that you might not want to read around dinner time. Or any time. One particular story about accidentally getting something in her mouth during an autopsy was enough to make me put the book down for a solid five minutes. But i'm a hardy sort and it was too interesting to set aside for long. Her no-nonsense practicality towards death and the human corpse gives the whole book a grounding that lifts it out of some kind of macabre show into a very necessary and frank discussion about what happens when we're dead, whether that be by fair or foul means.

Other parts of the book have an altogether different tone. Though she always emphasises how imperative it is for those who work with the dead to show the proper respect, there's an added gravity in her tone when talking about the victims of atrocities in Kosovo. How can it be otherwise when you meet a man who lost 11 members of his family to an RPG, including 8 children, one a baby, and struggled to find pieces of their bodies to bury while bleeding out from being shot by a sniper himself? Her time there, as part of a team investigating war crimes, clearly had a significant effect on her as a person and that really comes across in the text. It's hard to read so how can we even imagine how it must be to experience? Both for those who suffered through it and those like Professor Black, who had to give these unidentified bodies their identities back and find the evidence necessary to prosecute the offenders. It's just another example of how incredibly important her work is.

My only criticism about the book is that I wanted more of it. There's so much in here that I felt Professor Black only touched the surface of what she could show and teach us, and I really hope she wants to write more for the public sometime soon.

ARC via Netgalley

****Anyone interested in her writing or interviews, see her page below:**

<http://cahid.dundee.ac.uk/staff/sue-b...>

Laura says

An intriguing, often heartbreaking look at the fascinating work of forensic anthropology. As someone thoroughly interested in true crime, I can't say I have ever given much thought to this area of the investigative process. This book taught me a lot and gave me a new found respect for the work that these professionals do. The amount of knowledge and skill they possess is mind-blowing.

Yes parts of this book are technical and can make for slightly tough reading if you aren't from a scientific background, but there are lots of areas dedicated to the genuine respect for those being examined by the anthropologists. The author is well travelled and her time spent working abroad on various natural disasters and war zones are riveting reading.

An extremely worthwhile read for those interested in the sciences, human biology and anatomy.

K.J. Charles says

I'm not as blown away as many by this book. The accounts of anatomy and what happens after death are fascinating, and it's an interesting light on how to cope with a job that many people would find horrifying, but it's written in a very chatty way as many of these are--as if transcribed from a long talk in the pub rather than written--so a lot depends on whether the reader finds that endearing or otherwise. Generally I don't, The Ravenmaster: My Life with the Ravens at the Tower of London being a huge exception. And that's a completely different sort of weird job that needed to be told like a shaggy dog story.

Loads of good stuff, very accessibly written, much of sense to say about death, and invaluable decomposition and dismemberment tips for writers to nick. But, just a bit heavy on the moralising for me, although I dare say you spend a lot of time thinking about morality in the author's job.

Nigel says

Briefly - fascinating, powerful and very well written. Without question this will be one of my best books of the year.

In full

Sue Black (Professor) is probably the country's leading expert in forensic anthropology. In this book she looks at her life in death. This is in part biography and in part an exploration of cases and events she has dealt with. She deals with "remains" - what is left when one of us die. Her expertise has been used in many a varied situations over the year. Murders and unknown bodies discovered are her bread and butter (did I really just write that!). However she has also dealt with truly horrifying events such as mass graves in Kosovo and the aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami.

This starts off with a very good intro introduction to death in general and forensic anthropology in particular. I immediately for the writing easy and so the reading was too. Sue Black comes over as one of those rather rare experts who are good at communicating too. From the start there is humour and humanity amongst visceral scenes. The writing manages to feel objectively scientific and warmly human at the same time.

The book explores aspects of the author's life - part biographic and part recounting of significant cases she has dealt with. While I loved this book I frequently felt I wanted more, particularly about the cases. You are left with the feeling throughout this book that few people in the world know more about her subject than Sue Black.

There are a wide variety of cases offered to the reader in the course of this book. I'd rather people discovered the stories for themselves. However I would just say that the Kosovo chapter was far the hardest to read and made me shed a tear. It might well have been the one with most humour in too. Certainly the Indian Ocean Tsunami and the Kosovo chapters show just how determinedly outspoken the author can be although she appears to be listened too increasingly as well.

Towards the end of the book there is a chapter that looks at what to most of us would be the horrors of Sue Black's work. The humanity, delicacy and sheer grit exhibited here and elsewhere in the book would alone have me recommending this book. It ends (other than a comprehensive index) with her thoughts on her own mortality. They came as little surprise to me but were worth the read too.

I simply found this book fascinating in the broadest sense of the word. Sue Black writes with a remarkably light touch, humorously at times however still gentle in the troubled and troubling parts. One of the best non fiction reads to me and it will certainly be a "best book of the year". If the subject matter interests you do read it - I would be surprised if many did not find it very interesting at the least.

Note - I received a digital copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for a fair review

<http://viewson.org.uk/non-fiction/all...>

Sara says

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

I'm (yet again) finding it difficult to organise my thoughts surrounding this book. It's an intense, sometimes clinical, portrayal of death in a very pragmatic and scientific way. It's equal parts cold and without feeling in its descriptions of death, yet also simultaneously deeply emotive and moving. I found that at times I had to step away from it, because although fascinating, I found myself becoming too attached to the cases. I'm also deeply in awe of the author's knowledge, enthusiasm and respect for the subject she teaches.

This is a very personal look at the many faces of death as described by one of Britain's leading forensic anthropologists, and covers everything from the various ways a body can be buried or preserved, what happens to a body after death, and how forensic anthropologists can establish any number of things about an individual from their remains. It also goes into detail about various interesting cases the author has been directly involved with, and how forensics have helped to build a case or resolve a mystery surrounding an individual's death or that of a major disaster. It was these chapters I found the most interesting, as it builds on knowledge the reader takes from earlier chapters. I do think it helped that I have an anthropological/medical background however, as some of the terms used are quite medical in nature.

The book also documents the author's time spent in Kosovo and some of the atrocities witnessed there. I think it was these chapters that effected me the most deeply, as the descriptions of some of the scenes Sue Black is involved with are, simply, horrendous. However, it again highlights the invaluable work undertaken within the profession.

I suppose I was less taken with the small sections near the beginning of the book that seemed to be more like a familial memoir or history rather than delivering facts and experiences. Although there was always a reason for them, such as a device to further expand the readers understanding of various biological processes etc., I just wasn't that taken with them in comparison to the later chapters.

That said, I really enjoyed this. It was informative, well written and interesting. As Sue Black herself states, **'humans cannot fail to be affected by the stories of other humans'**, and when you've lead a life as full as this, it's hard not to agree. Read it. You won't be disappointed.

Babs Green says

An interesting read but not quite what I expected (hence the 3*). I was expecting a more philosophical tome about how as a society we avoid conversations about death. Of course if I'd researched it properly before choosing to read it I would have known that! There's loads of detail and Prof Black is clearly erudite but perhaps a challenge for the lay reader or maybe just me ? One of her observations which I did like was, '...if, in striving to stay alive for as long as possible at all costs, all we are in fact doing is prolonging our dying'.

Petra CigareX says

I've read over 100 pages. I've learned all about the author's teenage years working as a Saturday girl in a butcher's shop, about her grandfather's death and her uncle Willie's. And I am bored. Worse, I am totally irritated by the extreme and extended characterisation of death as 'She' whom we should get to know better so we can understand "her". José Saramago did this brilliantly in *All the Names* where she, Death, was a fully-fledged character and the linchpin of the story. The author has no such success in depicting death as a person.

For a professor of anatomy and forensic anatomy I had expected more. The best book I've ever read on anatomy and death (and philosophy, in the form of thoughtful essays) is by F. González-Crussí. His *The Day of the Dead: And Other Mortal Reflections* is so stupendous, and so brilliantly written I was never able to come up with a review that would accurately reflect my impressions of it.

I might be out of step with other reviewers who loved this book, no problem, I have a bookshop, I'm used to my customers not liking my recommendations and me not liking what they read, that is why we have such diversification in book subjects. (Unless the author is chasing money in which case it will be a *Twilight* situation with a million teenage vampire romances.)

So, final judgement. I thought this book was awful.

Luca says

Reading memoirs by people I have never heard of before is something I very much enjoy. The thought that each and every human being on this planet is leading their own life which is unique and distinct from all others is an unfathomable idea and yet so fascinating.

This particular memoir is written by Sue Black who is a Scottish professor of forensic anthropology and anatomy. Through her field of expertise, Sue finds herself confronted with death all the time. In *All That Remains*, she tells her readers what death has taught her, what impact her work has had on her as a person, and does this through a number of actual cases she has dealt with.

At first I was hesitant with this book, because there is just no way around it that death is a topic that easily gets gruesome. But this book turned out to be so much more intriguing than I could have guessed up front. What impressed me most is that Sue's warm personality is clearly present from beginning to end. You get to know her as a loving mother, a no-nonsense woman, and she never fails to keep in mind morality.

Reading this book is like watching your favorite crime series only much more down to earth and more realistic. Just as thrilling, because Sue has experienced a fair share of ghastly situations, but shows you the

relevance of her work, and why respectful treatment is important.

My rating for this book is 3.75 out of 5 stars. This book is perfect for you if you are an avid (true) crime reader, who is looking to expand their interest in the non-fiction genre.

I received a digital review copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are entirely my own. My review is susceptible to changes in the final copy of this work.

Elizabeth says

For fans of Caitlin Doughty, Mary Roach, and CSI shows, a renowned forensic scientist on death and mortality.

Dame Sue Black is an internationally renowned forensic anthropologist and human anatomist. She has lived her life eye to eye with the Grim Reaper, and she writes vividly about it in this book, which is part primer on the basics of identifying human remains, part frank memoir of a woman whose first paying job as a schoolgirl was to apprentice in a butcher shop, and part no-nonsense but deeply humane introduction to the reality of death in our lives. It is a treat for CSI junkies, murder mystery and thriller readers, and anyone seeking a clear-eyed guide to a subject that touches us all.

Cutting through hype, romanticism, and cliché, she recounts her first dissection; her own first acquaintance with a loved one's death; the mortal remains in her lab and at burial sites as well as scenes of violence, murder, and criminal dismemberment; and about investigating mass fatalities due to war, accident, or natural disaster, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. She uses key cases to reveal how forensic science has developed and what her work has taught her about human nature.

Acclaimed by bestselling crime writers and fellow scientists alike, *All That Remains* is neither sad nor macabre. While Professor Black tells of tragedy, she also infuses her stories with a wicked sense of humor and much common sense

My thoughts

rating : 5 stars

Wow what a great read , and I couldn't put it down. The author gives you in-depth information about what a forensic anthropologist and human anatomist does , and how they work case that are solved and might have never be solved at all, and while its a very serious matter to talk about , she does throw in some humor to brake it up.She makes it very easy to understand how important they are , and has a why of making her job more realistic then the tv shows does , with that said i want to thank Edelwiss for letting me read and review it in change for my honest opinion and i will differentially be on the look out for books by her .

Buchdokter says

Sue Blacks Rückblick auf ihre Karriere als Anatomin und forensische Anthropologin ist stark von ihrer Herkunft aus einer Familie geprägt, in der niemand ein Blatt vor den Mund nimmt. Die Art, in der ihre eigene Familie mit dem Tod umgeht, hat prägenden Einfluss auf sie. Als 12-Jährige übernimmt die Autorin einen Nebenjob in der örtlichen Metzgerei, den sie klaglos und nüchtern als Gelegenheit betrachtet, von ihrem Chef zu lernen. Blacks weiterer Lebensweg wird davon geprägt sein, dass sie die Ärmel hochkrempelt

und anpackt, was getan werden muss.

Die Autorin berichtet zunächst von der Abgrenzung zwischen Pathologie (Feststellung der Todesursache), Paläopathologie (Untersuchung von Leichen, die nach mehr als 70 Jahren gefunden werden) und forensischer Anthropologie (Identifizierung des Toten und Rekonstruktion seines Lebenslaufs). Forensik als Ganzes führe die Identität(en) und den Körper eines Verstorbenen wieder zusammen. Voraussetzung für die solide Ausbildung von Pathologen seien Spender, die ihren Körper der Wissenschaft zur Verfügung stellen. Blacks respektvolle Beschreibung dieser Spenderkultur in Großbritannien nimmt einen beachtlichen Raum im Buch ein, schließlich muss jeder britische Medizinstudent mit „seiner“ Leiche ein ganzes Jahr verbringen und in dieser Zeit das anatomische Wissen aus drei dicken Anatomie-Lehrbüchern erwerben.

Black schildert aus der Sicht der Pathologin spektakuläre Fälle aus Großbritannien, die die Öffentlichkeit bewegten oder die den Ehrgeiz der Pathologen-Zunft besonders anstachelten. Anders als in Fernsehserien, ginge es in ihrer Profession nicht darum, Recht zu behalten, sondern den Angehörigen der Toten endlich Klarheit über den Tod und die Todesursache zu verschaffen. Wie wichtig die Gewissheit für die Hinterbliebenen ist, haben diese ihr immer wieder gespiegelt. Sue Black beteiligte sich auf internationaler Ebene u. a. 1999 an der Exhumierung von Massengräbern im Kosovo und 2004 in Thailand an der Identifizierung der Opfer des Tsunamis. Unter Blacks Einfluss wurde Großbritannien innerhalb kurzer Zeit weltweit führend darin, bei globalen Katastrophen Opfer aus vielen verschiedenen Ländern zu identifizieren. Dass Großbritanniens prominenteste Anatomin in der wissenschaftlichen Lehre tätig wird, ist deshalb nur folgerichtig. Wie Blacks Zusammenarbeit mit Val McDermid entstand, hat mich als Krimi-Leserin natürlich besonders amüsiert.

Mit einem sympathischen Maß an Selbstkritik und dem Bewusstsein für die eigene Fehlbarkeit zeigt Sue Black eindrucksvoll, warum sie für ihre Tätigkeit brennt. Unvergesslich bleiben mir dabei Szenen und Persönlichkeiten, die sie als Jugendliche prägten.

Jessica says

Fascinating, passionate, and refreshingly frank, Dr. Sue Black's respect for the dead and complete dedication to her subject is palpable.

At once sobering, bittersweet, funny, and thought-provoking, *All That Remains* dissects a life and career as a world leader in forensic anthropology. From friendly cadavers called Henry, to private meetings with the prime minister: From crippling rat phobias, to the horrors of war crimes in Kosovo. Each moment is explored with poignant honesty and great sensitivity.

In the Audible version of *All That Remains*, Dr. Black herself narrates and her soft Scottish lilt and genuine connection with the text makes listening a real pleasure.

There's something very intimate about listening to someone recount stories from their own life, and one feels by the end that you almost know the author. Hearing the smile in her voice when she tells an amusing or embarrassing story and the professional detachment and sensitivity with which she deals with the most harrowing of situations is a real privilege and for once, I'm truly glad that I had to choose the audiobook over the hardback.

For some, *All That Remains* may effect a re-examination of how they think about death, dying, and what

comes after; It may even convince them to bequeath their own body to science.

For others, it may be Black's examination of how we treat death as a society that draws them in. Her thoughts on how we treat the dying, what we do with them once they are gone, and the rights of the individual to decide how they meet death, are all told through Black's own life experiences and anecdotes. Her comfort with the subject is clear in the way she moves seamlessly between quiet contemplation and a wry, irreverent humour that can't help but bring a smile to your face.

In *All That Remains*, the open discussion of death processes and the incredible importance of forensic anthropology for science and criminal investigation is both comfortingly gentle and crisply pragmatic. Like the lady herself, Black's writing seems to balance on the precarious line between the emotional heartbreak of loss, and the hopeful yet unwavering fortitude of hard science.

With a funny and uplifting final chapter reflecting on her own mortality, Black discusses how she wants her body to be used and how she feels about chronic illness and society's obsession with extending human life. Truly a book for every body (pun entirely intended).

The verdict: ????
