

Review by Max Oliver

This emotionally draining book is a personal account of the myriad effects of being one of the many affected by a major natural disaster. Sue Gunningham's long-time partner Barry was at their small cottage in the bush outside Kinglake, Victoria, when it was overtaken by the savage bushfires that became known as 'Black Saturday'. Sue herself was at work and could not verify for some time that Barry had died, unable to flee. That horrific news, when it came, was just the beginning of years of grief, heartbreak, endless bureaucracy, small and large kindnesses and cruelties, and bemusement at people's behaviour. In particular the decisions made by Daniel, Barry's 'good friend' and executor of his estate, seem inexplicably heartless. It should be said that Sue characterises herself as a timid, emotional soul, fearful of confrontation and prone to losing control (Barry called her 'mouse'). Yet does any of us know how we would react, over time, to such a traumatic event as the loss of a beloved partner and a cherished home with all its possessions and memorabilia? I suspect not. Her writing is powerfully graphic though sometimes repetitive when writing about her emotions. The book should be read by everyone involved in disaster management, counselling, rebuilding lives or simply supporting someone through a traumatic situation.

Max Oliver is a retired Sydney bookseller

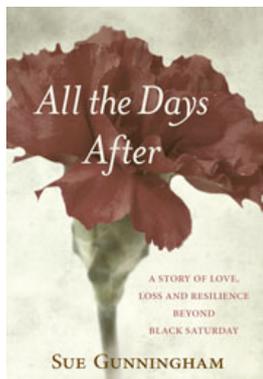
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