



FINCH PRESS RELEASE

Black Saturday survivor reflects on loss, survival and recovery

As the nation comes to grips with the grim reality that the fire season is almost upon us, a survivor of the “Black Saturday” bushfires has published a personal and revealing memoir about the devastation such a natural disaster can cause, the loss of property and loved ones, and the slow path through grief to recovery. In *All the Days After*, Victorian teacher and trainer Sue Gunningham also documents the lesser-known follow up to a major tragedy; the frustrating – and often unhelpful – mountains of civil and government bureaucracy that confront bewildered survivors of a major disaster.



Sue was at work the day the fires struck but her partner Barry was caught in the heart of the fire at their beloved cottage Waldene. Waiting impatiently for news of him, she gradually realised the terror of worst-case scenario reality. Little did she know at the time that Barry’s death would be just the beginning of her own battle not only to find the strength to go on but to cope with ongoing police interviews, disputes over legal entitlements, sessions with case workers and psychologists, and participation in a Royal Commission inquiry. On top of this, she has to fight an overwhelming bureaucracy to identify and keep Barry’s remains and to preserve the memory of the life they built together.

Clinical psychologist and emergency and trauma consultant Dr Rob Gordon has been called in on almost all of Australia’s major natural disasters, including the Black Saturday bush fires. He says, *‘I would like to congratulate Sue on not only her story and her courage but for the quality of her writing. This book should be required reading for everyone setting out to “help” those faced with the trauma of disaster, grief or other events which test people to their core.’*

Sue says she wrote *All the Days After* because *‘there was so much happening, so many challenges, that I went into ‘automatic pilot’ in order to survive. I promised myself that when it was over I would write everything down in order to try to make sense of it, to work out what went wrong and to find a missing piece of the puzzle that would return Barry to me.’*

The book is divided into four sections:

- ‘Lost’ – the frantic search for Barry in the days after the fire;

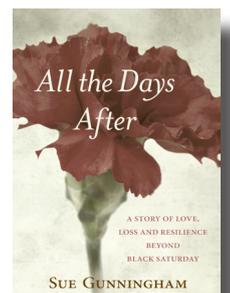
- ‘Stolen’ – dealing with the Coroner’s identification process, solicitors and the funeral parlour in a struggle to have Barry’s remains identified and returned to her;
- ‘Examined’ – the continual round of formal interviews with police, case managers, psychologists and the Victoria Bushfire Royal Commission; and
- ‘Rebuild’ – dealing with Waldene’s burnt-out site and trying to rebuild both the cottage and a life.

Retired Salvation Army Major Glenys Ford was one of the many volunteers who helped Sue in the days after the Black Saturday disaster. She says, *‘All the Days After is not only compelling reading but a testament to the strength of the human spirit through unimaginable heartbreak. Sue’s strength, courage, fortitude and infinite beauty are inspirational. It was a privilege to have walked a few steps with her on this journey.’*

Raw and compelling, *All the Days After* will resonate with anyone who has suffered through devastating grief and is looking to emerge on the other side.

Sue Gunningham has worked as a teacher, university lecturer and private education consultant. She currently develops and delivers financial literacy workshops to remote indigenous communities and disadvantaged groups in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Regions. She has co-authored or contributed to 13 teacher references and textbooks, and her fiction has appeared in two anthologies *Time To Write* (2014) and *A Tapestry of Words* (2014). Although the Country Fire Authority classified the landscape at Waldene as being of the highest risk for further bushfires, she obtained permission to rebuild and is doing so in Barry’s memory. Sue is available for interviews.

All the Days After (Sue Gunningham) is published by Finch Publishing on 1 November 2015. It is available in paperback (\$27.99) and ebook (\$9.99) from all good bookshops nationwide, online retailers and etailers.



Media queries

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