

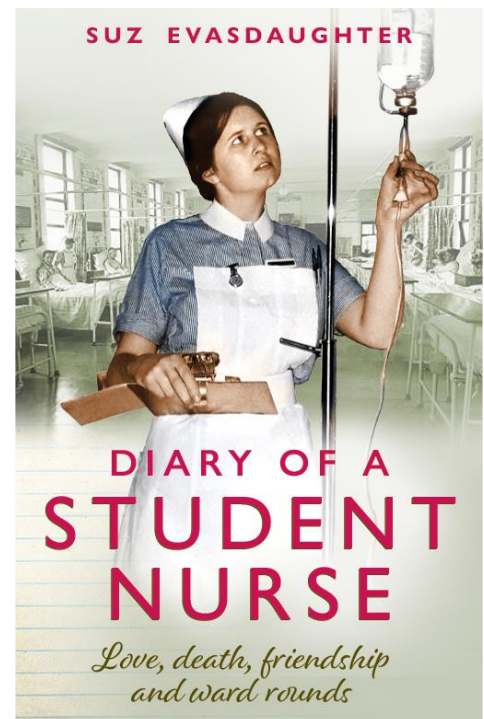
Diary of a Student Nurse

Love, Death, Friendship, and Ward Rounds

By Suz Evasdaughter

Book Review By: Lisa Courtney - Lead Midwife at The National Maternity Hospital.

This book follows the journey of a student nurse, Sue from Ireland, who is undertaking her training in the United Kingdom. Sue is a brave and brilliant student who is trying to navigate her way through life in the seventies. The story follows her around the wards, the patients she cares for, the friends she makes and the romances she encounters. The story comprises of key life moments and is one that anyone can relate to, medical or not. Sue describes, in captivating detail, her time living and working in the hospital while she encounters life lessons both in and out of the classroom. From the functionalities of the lungs to love and romance and from the structure of the human heart to heart break and deceit. Sue opens herself up to the readers so beautifully and lets us take a walk with her down memory lane. The chapters are small and broken up so well that as a reader, you are left wanting more and unable to put the book away.



This book touches on many important themes such as a gender imbalance, romance, workplace hierarchy, friendship, trust, and loyalty. However, it does not shy away from those topics such as fatality, loss, control, sexual assault, and fear, portraying these themes with such conviction and truth. To me, the author depicts both side of Sue's life perfectly. On one side, you have Sue's medical persona, a young, hardworking student witnessing the harshness of life for the first time, disease and unjust. On the other side, you have a young girl, experiencing the realities of life, love, and loneliness. Sue is so easy to connect with as a woman, with qualms about her imperfect body, flirtatious fun, romances, and friendships. It celebrates the hard work that frontline staff do on a daily basis and details the actualities of a career that can be taken for granted by many.

'I knew to expect stridor, that, when dying, a patient grasps for a breath that is beyond reach. I also knew that the death rattle is a natural part of dying and is no reason to believe that the patient is distressed. But no one had taught me how to be with someone in their final moments; I relied on my humanity'

There is something to celebrate in the way that Sue manages to confront difficult topics such as death and abuse, both mental and physical. Sue has a unique ability to fearlessly incorporate so many important and yet taboo, topics that need to be heard but are so often overlooked or embellish. There is an overriding theme of the struggles that women faced then in the seventies but also now in today progressive society. While times have changed for the better, Sue openly talks about the seniority of the male sex, those who were in complete control of women, their thoughts, finances, and their bodies. Sue talks a lot about feeling unworthy in a world of men and the hardships women face as they grow up.

'Why can't we be the ones doing the pestering? Why don't those ugly leering men take no for an answer.'

The insights into an era of such unfairness and inequality between men and women was so well described throughout the book. In addition, the book also outlines the harsh realists and unfairness towards those of lower class in healthcare during the era of the seventies. Women and men, their choice and dignity removed from them so easily and all faith in the hands of the physicians. What made this book most enjoyable were the stories of patient care and everyday life experiences that Sue so openly shared. The issues that are discussed are still apparent today in healthcare and the depth of knowledge the author has here is evident. From the very first line you are captivated.

'This was our first dead body. The stench that assailed us as we entered the brightly lit room, lined with gleaming white tiles, was almost overpowering.'

This is the first book that I have read as a Midwife that has truly brought me back to my training days, albeit in a more modern era with no live-in accommodation, the stories are so accurate and true to the experiences we go through during our training. The author arouses your imagination through her vivid descriptions of daily life. You can almost smell, taste, feel what is going on around you as you read.

'I was standing with coins in hand in the main corridor of the hospital, with its Victorian, patterned ceramic floor and glossy, fire-resistant, pale-green tiled walls.'

Sue displays the most remarkable compassion and humanity throughout. Her love for her patients is felt in every story that is told. Sue's character is one that you very easily and swiftly become close to and almost protective of as the story unfolds. Her love and humanity for others has you laughing, smiling, and weeping on many an occasion.

To summarise, the book is insightful and brilliant from beginning to end. This book will encourage you to look at life in a different light, make you appreciate the things that most people take for granted and will enlighten you about nursing training in the seventies. It is faultless, amazingly honest, and exceptionally written.