



In the Name of God: The True Story of the Fight to Save Children from Faith-Healing Homicide

Cameron Stauth

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A FINALIST FOR THE FRANCES FULLER VICTOR AWARD FOR GENERAL NONFICTION

An anonymous caller tells a detective in a small Oregon town that a woman has just bitten off a man's finger. But the man is not the victim, the caller says. The woman is. She's being held by a group of faith-healing fanatics who are trying to cure her depression with violent exorcisms. Then the detective gets an even more ominous message: Children in the church have been dying mysteriously for years, and now several more are in immediate peril.

The caller, a church insider, risks everything to work with detectives and prosecutors to stop faith-based child abuse, joined by a mother who'd suffered a faith-healing tragedy herself and dedicated her life to saving others from it. Masterfully written by Cameron Stauth, *In the Name of God* is the true story of the heroic mission that exposed the darkest secret of American fundamentalism, and the political deals that let thousands of children die at the hands of their own parents--legally.

Faith-healing abuse still continues around the country, but the victory in Oregon has lit the path to a better future, in which no child need die because of a parent's beliefs.

In the Name of God: The True Story of the Fight to Save Children from Faith-Healing Homicide Details

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From Reader Review In the Name of God: The True Story of the Fight to Save Children from Faith-Healing Homicide for online ebook

cindy massey says

This book will be a long time in my head. I was totally drained at the end after reading it. I have never in my life read a book that sucked me in the court room and the lives of the these people, everyone of them. I knew some of this was going on from the news but i had no idea it was still going on like it is; ALL IN THE NAME OF GOD. People are stupid. They would let their children and adults die because they felt they were holy and yet i have never seen such lying come out of their mouths in the court room. They stuck together as a church group in the court room and planned on what to say and lie and it didn't bother them. It was so intense that i can't even think of reading for a while. So many churches involved. Our country had shield laws against faith healing and the deaths. Faith healers were even getting paid though medical insurance. that has stopped due to Rita who will have many jewels in her crown in heaven. What a woman! I was raised a preachers kid and missionary kid and i believe God heals. I have had healing in my own life. I was raised to believe that medical help is Gods hand extended! I could go on and on but will stop now. (This book was written 3 years ago and this is still going on) wow, just wow. Please read

Jordyn Redwood says

This non-fiction title delves into the ramifications of religious shield laws which (thank heavens this is changing) grant protection under the law if a child dies of a treatable medical illness and due to the parents' religious beliefs-- they refused medical care.

This touches close to me as a pediatric ER nurse seeing parents refuse some aspects of medical care-- immunizations would be the largest. As a parent, I believe in my right to make decisions for my children, but as a pediatric nurse, I also believe that children deserve a certain level of medical care to grow up strong and healthy. The line between these two are not always clear.

Refusing immunizations pales in comparison to what these religious groups do-- who believe that God is the ultimate healer and that if God decides-- their child will be healed from illness. Sadly, these kids die from highly treatable conditions like pneumonia, cysts, prematurity, diabetes, and urinary obstructions. The strange thing is, The Followers don't seem to have trouble going to the dentist or eye doctor.

The book alternates perspective between the legal side (those trying to change these laws) and inside views of The Followers as a religious group.

The book is interesting but really needed to be pared down. I don't need to read a play by play of a child's vomiting and throwing up each meal over two days to get the point that they couldn't hold anything down. Also, I don't think it's necessary to give gory details about a pediatric autopsy-- using words like, "This doctor was going to eviscerate . . . " I think it's disrespectful of a pediatric victim to do that. The intimate look into the followers, in my opinion, became overindulgent and tedious to read.

That being said, I do think this is an important, challenging book and in this era of religious extremes, I think

those of us that have faith need to speak out against the extremes of our faith and I applaud this book for doing so in a balanced way.

Beth says

Perhaps because I live in OC, and am a native Oregonian certain things in this book bothered me more than the general reader. I'll start with my peeves then get to the good stuff that encouraged a 4 star rating.

First, no one I've ever met uses terms like clackalackie, clackatucky, clackatraz, etc etc etcetera I think the Portland based author talked to one weirdo who did and ran with it. Many of his descriptions of the general lay out of the area were weird and off but again because I'm local. Ok so now that I've said my bit on that let's get to the subject.

I was really riveted by this. Faith healing in itself is so sensational to most of us, but the info about these people (they really are everywhere up here) the "mother church" which I had no idea existed, our governors relationship with that mother church etc really opened my mind to how pervasive people with these beliefs are. It's all so tangled. Supposedly we are a nation of religious and political separation but this book opened my eyes to what a joke that is. Religion is money and money is politics forever and ever amen.

I felt like the author was beyond respectful and non judgmental of the various religions he was writing about, I've read some reviews that feel hotly opposite on that point but as a non affiliated party I saw nothing but respect. Anyhow this book examines deeply the highly publicized cases with the followers and goes through a lot of legal and law enforcement information in a way that never gets dry. I don't know if it's right to say I liked this book but I couldn't put it down. It would have been a 5 star read but for my previously mentioned peeves and what felt like the author getting a tad flowery in the end.

Shelley says

I stayed up past my bedtime finishing this, so this is going to be short.

This is a popular account of religious wingnuts won't/don't seek medical attention, and centers on a radical wack-a-doo community nearby, and the ultimately successful attempts to bring them to justice for allowing their children to die.

It's kind of odd to read about attorneys and judges you know (by appearance or by reputation). Interesting (although the author is admittedly anti-medical establishment and apparently anti-religion and anti-Portland), especially since I think people who don't seek medical attention for their children should be water boarded, and I'm anti-torture.

But three stars, you say?

Don't get me wrong: it's good reading. Like I said, stayed up past my bedtime to finish this. I followed the court cases as an attorney and a mother and a pro-vaccine, pro-science evangelist.

But.

My lord, the thing needed pruning. So much extraneous crap--for example, mentioning the cost overruns of the Aerial Tram when talking about the Casey Eye Institute. (I wonder if he was being paid by the word?)

Necessary? Not even a little bit.

Also, there's a limit to how many times I can read the rude ways of referring to Clackamas County. Look, I've argued motions in that courthouse and sure, I don't want to hang out there--it's maybe a bit on the creepy side--but you insult Kentucky when you call it "Clackatucky" (for the hundredth time). Also, I like Kentucky. And FFS, a food cart loses its tip jar every time "Portlandia" is used in vain. Shame. Just call it Portland or "downtown" and be done with it.

Fishface says

I cannot recommend this book too highly. It's a well-thought-out, compassionate, yet hair-raising story of how the faith-healing movement in the United States overstepped the bounds of sanity and became more important than the right of a minor child to get needed medical attention. The author starts all the way back at the beginning, with Mary Baker Eddy and her entire generation of people who wanted to believe God could and would heal any illness or injury with enough prayer and clean living. He follows that through to a particular, horrific infant death in 1977 in Grosse Pointe, MI and explains how that led -- MANY years later -- to the defeat of the laws that allowed many, many parents to kill their children without legal consequences. It's a truly epic story well told from every possible perspective. Not for the weak of stomach, but if you can stand to watch helpless children die needlessly in gruesome ways, the story is more than worth it.

Jessica says

In the Name of God is an epic book that describes a series of landmark legal cases that changed the way faith-healing churches operated. Faith-healing churches believe that God is the ultimate healer and therefore if they have enough faith they will never be sick. They won't go to doctors or take their children to doctors even if they're dying. Christian Scientists are the most commonly known faith-healing church, but there are many offshoots. In 1977 a woman named Rita Swan lost her son to bacterial meningitis because she and her husband were members of a faith-healing church. It devastated them both and that tragedy turned them away from faith-healing. But it also inspired Rita to fight religious shield laws that allowed churches to get away with what she considered child abuse and murder by allowing their children to suffer and die from common ailments that could be easily treated with medical care.

This book gives a brief history and overview of the Christian Science faith and how it's transformed over the years. The majority of the book focuses on The Followers, an off-shoot of the Christian Science Church, based in Oregon City, Oregon. After far too many children are dying needlessly every year in the Followers church, an insider named Patrick calls the police. He becomes a crucial informant to the police who rarely find someone willing to do what Patrick does by continuing to live in the close-knit Followers community, but working as a double-agent informing the police of sick and dying children. Because of Rita Swan's relentless work to change religion shield laws, the authorities in Oregon City are able to arrest the parents of 4 children who either died or were disabled because of their parent's lack of medical care. These cases shook up the Followers church enough to finally enact some long-overdue theological changes.

While this book is pretty long at 450 pages and the subject matter is not exactly happy, but it is so fascinating and horrific that you just can't put it down. It's truly amazing what people will do in the name of God, but even more amazing is when just one person stands up what can result from that act of courage. A fascinating

book about when religion goes wrong and how a few people fighting for what's right changed history and saved countless lives.

A quote I really liked:

"The Followers were pleasant people, Lewman thought, but most of them seemed to be brainwashed. They'd forgotten one fundamental fact: Freedom of religion must include freedom within a religion - freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and the freedom to follow your conscience - or it's not a religion at all." (p. 48)

Schuyler Wallace says

"In the Name of God" is a narrative from reporter Cameron Stauth about the practice of faith-healing, a wide spread religious practice with tragic circumstances. It is an interesting account that, unfortunately, sometimes smacks of bias and non-objectivity. One might ask how anyone could believe the death of children due to familial obstruction is anything but bad. My answer would be that, indeed, such actions would be repugnant to me personally, but there are individuals out there who have strong feelings about the role religion plays in making life and death decisions and who would appreciate having a brighter light shone on their beliefs than that wielded by the author.

Stauth subtitles his book "The True Story of the Fight to Save Children from Faith-healing Homicide." That signals a problem with the book from the start because homicide simply means the killing of a person by another. I don't believe homicide was ever hinted at in the book. Death because of following faith-healing beliefs doesn't imply that death has been caused by another. To me it means that death occurred because a person with strong beliefs that God is all-healing allowed a death to occur. The legal system struggles to bring clarity to that distinction

Stauth has written a book about the beliefs held by certain religious groups, primarily the Followers of Christ Church in Oregon City, Oregon, concerning faith-healing and the avoidance of medical treatment. He presents a short history of many such fundamentalist religion groups in the United States that is well-researched and that will open a lot of eyes about the results of such practices. It certainly would seem that such inhumane convictions are outside the norm and should be discontinued. But religious groups, protected by shield laws in most states, continue to allow deaths to occur by refusing to seek medical attention for injuries and illness. Stauth recounts many such incidents in his book, along with many legal efforts to bring to justice to those who shield their actions from being criminal by invoking religious beliefs...

The author gets it right in his accounting and presents the facts in detail. Many interviews, legal and medical records, and investigative reports have been included, along with several trial proceedings. He has been described as a "talented and graceful writer." I would second that. Unfortunately the tone of his reporting is faintly judgmental and almost snide in some places. Too much emphasis is put on Followers' practices and too many snarly names are used to describe their world; Clackatraz, Clacklacky, and Clackatucky are few that are too often used. I would also have preferred less gory detail in the descriptions of the conditions of bodies. The tendency to shock rather than inform takes the book out of the reporting category.

The book was riveting even though I suffered through some less than professional writing. I certainly agree with the author that humanity is more important than sanctity and hope for some clearer thinking from faith-healing communities. As Stauth says, change will only come from inside pressure, fear of legal liability, and doubts about the validity of their doctrine.

OC Resident says

As someone who has lived in Oregon City all my life, I can say this book NEEDED to be written. I have gone to school with, my children have gone to school with, and my job puts me in contact with members of this faith every day. While I was never a party to the cases mentioned in the book, I have seen numerous times where a small child from the cult has to deal with the pain of a broken bone with no medical attention, and then the aftermath of a bone that hasn't set correctly, or numerous other medical issues that turned into more major ones due to lack of medical care, and it kills me to have to witness the suffering of small children and be rendered helpless to do anything about it. While Oregon's laws have tightened up when it comes to faith being used as an excuse for child abuse, there are still a lot of children of the Followers suffering from lack of medical attention on a very regular basis.

However, this book was poorly (lazily?) written. The author uses many terms for the area that I've never heard of my entire life, the descriptions of the area are off, and I've followed the news on many of these stories, and he's sloppy with some of his descriptions of what actually happened. Portland is a 15-20 minute drive away from here, and it seems like his knowledge of the local area is very tenuous, indeed. I wish he had written a tighter book with less mistakes and made fewer sweeping claims about other religions, since it seems from other reviews that those claims are turning people off from the book itself, because the core message is not to be doubted.

Emily says

This book is incredibly difficult to put down, which is especially impressive considering the heavy subject and length. Staath presents a very emotional and personal ethical dilemma in, my opinion, as fair and balanced as he could be. It would be incredibly easy to portray parents who deny their children medical attention as evil and selfish, but Staath actually made me sympathize with the Followers and explained their faith with care and civility. With that being said, I am very glad that things played out the way they did, because I absolutely am against faith-only based healing and was delighted to read about the changes made to the Followers in Oregon. It was heart breaking to read about the number of children who suffered due to their parents religious choices, and am thrilled that changes in Oregon's laws helped prevent more needless deaths from occurring. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in politics, ethics, or crime dramas.

K.A. Krisko says

When I purchase any book, but particularly one from an author with a number of works to his/her name, I expect it to be reasonably edited. This one was chock full of distracting errors, from people whose names changed from page to page (as one example, Patrick's son went from Paul, to Pat, to Paul, to Pat, and back to Paul again), to extraneous commas, misplaced periods, find/replace errors, and others. Even a good run-through with Word's grammar/spelling check could have found some of these.

The story itself was eye-opening and revealed a hidden world I had very little knowledge of prior to reading the book. I've certainly got more knowledge now. However, somewhere between a third and a half of this

book was fiction, not true crime. Now, all good true crime authors take liberties to create a more engaging story by re-creating short dialogues and thought patterns. These are generally based on careful interview and often on tapes. Here, the author creates entire sections of internal dialogue and conversation, chapters long, of which he could not possibly have knowledge. No one can remember in that much detail what he or she was thinking or the course of a long conversation, especially years later, to relay it to the writer, and some of it was frankly condescending. The longer it got, and the more tangents the author went off on (history of various locations, for example), the more it bugged me. I'm sure the author could write a great mystery with his gift for dialogue, but that's not what I thought I was getting.

Towards the end, it also got repetitive. I found myself saying, "Yes, I know. You've already told me that twice before," on more than one occasion. Once again, a good edit could have fixed those issues. I also didn't know, or didn't remember, who the author was or how he was connected to the crimes in question when he suddenly appeared towards the end of the book. All at once there were sections narrated by 'I' instead of he/she/they. Here, some introductory detail would have been nice.

All in all a fascinating subject and a good writer, but with issues that bugged me too much to rate the book any higher.

Kristen says

I would give this 3.5 stars. Fascinating topic, especially given that I know Oregon City (I've been to The Verdict) and I'm familiar with child abuse in Oregon (I've worked with child abuse pediatrician Dr. Leonhardt on a committee). I appreciated the historical aspects of The Followers, and the national efforts noted throughout the book, but I grew tired of the author's cheap shots at Clackamas County. Also near the end of the book the author inserts himself in a way he hadn't throughout and shares that he has more than a healthy skepticism for modern medicine. Yet after sharing this he doesn't delve into how he balances his POV with his admonition for the Followers' neglect of their children, made me wonder why he brought it up in the first place.

Gayle Francis Moffet says

An excellent story about the defeat of religious shield laws around the country that allowed parents to stand by and murder their children through medical neglect.

The meat of the story centers in Oregon City, Oregon, a suburb of Portland. Oregon, which at one time boasted the strictest religious shield laws in the country. Because of these shield laws, a number of faith-healing, doctor-shunning churches set up shop in the state. This is the story of how a single, focused activist, a single man inside one of the churches, and the authorities managed to slowly but surely stop children dying from medical neglect. It's painful because Staughton focuses on the deaths both as the religious people said they occurred and what medical science said happened. It's also painful because the parents involved believe what they're doing is right. They're not malicious, and that makes things more complicated for everyone involved. They're not murdering their children for fun or pleasure; they're letting their children die because they believe it's God's will.

Staath gets repetitive at times. He likes to use a series of nicknames for the area of Oregon City that I have literally never heard (I worked within a couple of miles of all of the events for 4 years, and many of the people I worked with lived in the same places as the places mentioned in the book), and he also goes back again and again to a couple of slogans to bring home how "weird" Oregon is. It gets a bit tiresome, but there's good reportage here. It's a story worth knowing.

Elizabeth says

from the library 2015

it's hard to put stars on a book about such horrible things

Rob read this carefully and read selected parts to me.

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20 The father, the son ;

21 It is finished --

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Karyl says

I want to make something clear. This book does not denigrate faith. It does not mock those who pray for healing. It does not call in question why anyone would be of strong faith.

What this book does deal with is mainly one church, called the Followers of Christ Church, who believe that the only way to effect healing is to pray. THE ONLY WAY. Not what most of us would do, which would be to see a child who was ill, bring them to the doctor's, and pray for the child's quick recovery. No. Instead the only "medical" care they would provide would be prayer. It is also one of their core beliefs that sickness itself is a manifestation of a lack of faith, and it doesn't have to be that person's lack of faith. His mother, his father, his sister, his grandmother -- if any of these people suffer in their faith, he could become ill from this... and God could decide to bring about his death.

I think almost anyone would agree that this is a pretty insane position to hold. Unfortunately it has caused the death of too many children: babies who were born too young that could have been saved with the use of IVs and incubators, little girls with hemangiomas that could have been shrunk with the use of a topical medicine before it damaged her eye so badly that she will never see properly out of it or have any depth perception, teenaged boys whose kidneys had a congenital blockage that could have been fixed with a quick surgery as a child, but who suffered for fifteen years before finally passing away as his body filled with toxins that should have been filtered out by his kidneys. And the more these children suffered, the more their parents and families felt they were chosen and holy.

This book would make anyone who has loved ones angry, to know that these people would simply stand by and allow the suffering to continue simply because they felt it was entirely God's will. However, there is a ray of light in the form of the informant who was a member of the Church, who felt it necessary to turn in his friends in order to save children's lives, and who ultimately began to effect change. He is a true hero.

I had to dock this book a point for its language. I'm not a prude, but I didn't care for the way Stauth would drop an F bomb here and there, almost for shock value. I also didn't enjoy the way in which I felt that Stauth was dismissive or disparaging towards some of the other faiths he mentions, and also towards the residents of Clackamas County, lumping them all into undereducated religious nutjobs.

But this is an important story that needed telling, and I admire Rita Swan so highly for fighting the good fight all these years with all her hard work in repealing as many religious shield laws as she can, so that the perpetrators of these crimes can be held accountable, and not hide behind their religion.

zespri says

This is a pretty sobering read. I started reading it at my local library where it was on the New Book shelf, and I could not put it down.

This is the account of the tireless work of many people to bring protective legislation into place to protect children from the perpetrators of extreme faith healing practices. In heartrending story after story, the author documents cases of gross child abuse, where the parents had been protected under so called "religious shield" clauses. Under the guise of "I believe God and would never take my child to a Doctor", many children of extreme religious sects had been protected from prosecution.

Thankfully, those who fought on the behalf of children, often for years, have been rewarded, and legislation now is in place to protect the vulnerable, and not the perpetrators.

A very moving book.
