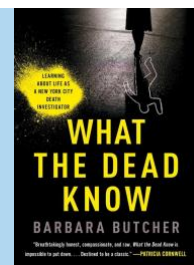


Discussion Guide



What the Dead Know
Barbara Butcher

Simon & Schuster
2023
288 pages
ISBN: 978-1982179403

Forensic Medicine

Summary

Barbara Butcher was early in her recovery from alcoholism when she found an unexpected lifeline: a job at the Medical Examiner's Office in New York City. The second woman ever hired for the role of Death Investigator in Manhattan, she was the first to last more than three months. The work was gritty, demanding, morbid, and sometimes dangerous—and she loved it.

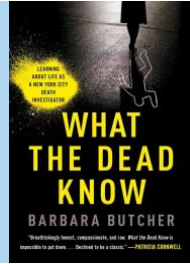
Butcher spent day in and day out investigating double homicides, gruesome suicides, and most heartbreaking of all, underage rape victims who had also been murdered. In *What the Dead Know*, she writes with the kind of New York attitude and bravado you might expect from decades in the field, investigating more than 5,500 death scenes, 680 of which were homicides.

This is the real-life story of a woman who, in dealing with death every day, learned surprising lessons about life—and how some of those lessons saved her from becoming a statistic herself. (from the [publisher](#))

Questions

1. How do the title and cover of *What the Dead Know* relate to the book's content? If you could choose a different title for the book, what would it be?
2. Barbara Butcher was the first woman to work as a Manhattan death investigator for more than a few months. What qualities or personality traits did she have that helped her excel at the job?
3. In the narrative, Barbara Butcher alternates between crime scenes and aspects of her personal life. Do you like this structure, or would you rather focus on one aspect more than the other? Which aspect do you prefer? Why?
4. Think of a favorite passage from *What the Dead Know*. Why did it resonate with you?
5. First responders encounter traumatic situations every day. How did Barbara Butcher deal with this daily trauma? How did the trauma affect her over time?
6. How did this book make you feel? Why?

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7. Many people are fascinated with true crime books and media. What aspects of true crime stories do you think readers find appealing? Why? What ethical issues might apply to true crime stories?
8. Would you recommend *What the Dead Know* to a friend? Why or why not?