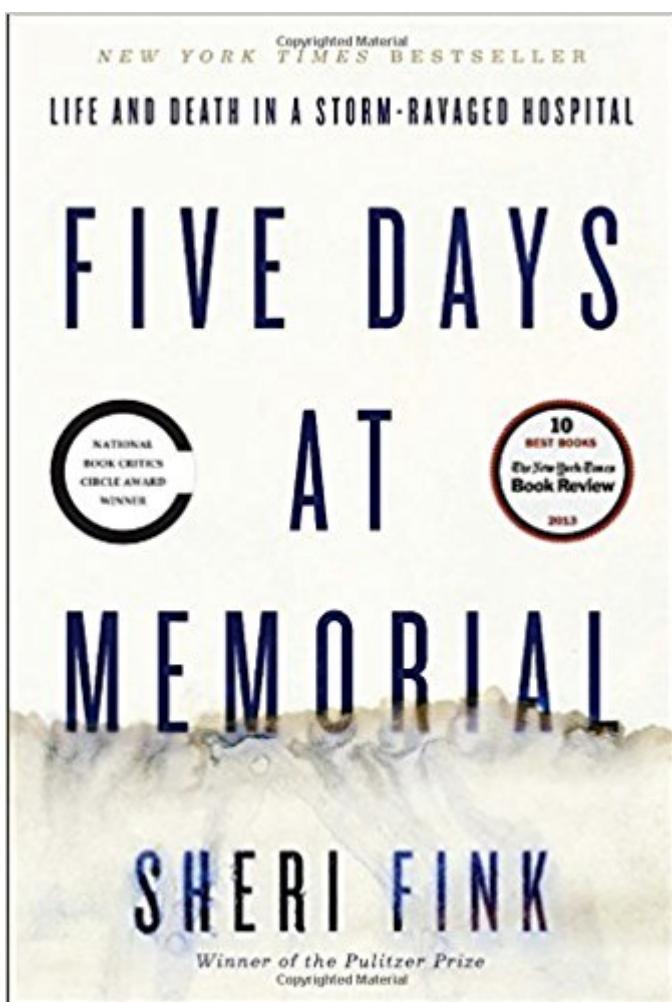


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# Five Days At Memorial: Life And Death In A Storm-Ravaged Hospital (Ala Notable Books For Adults)



## Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize winner Sheri Fink's landmark investigation of patient deaths at a New Orleans hospital ravaged by Hurricane Katrina and her suspenseful portrayal of the quest for truth and justice. In the tradition of the best investigative journalism, physician and reporter Sheri Fink reconstructs 5 days at Memorial Medical Center and draws the reader into the lives of those who struggled mightily to survive and maintain life amid chaos. After Katrina struck and the floodwaters rose, the power failed, and the heat climbed, exhausted caregivers chose to designate certain patients last for rescue. Months later, several of those caregivers faced criminal allegations that they deliberately injected numerous patients with drugs to hasten their deaths. *Five Days at Memorial*, the culmination of six years of reporting, unspools the mystery of what happened in those days, bringing the reader into a hospital fighting for its life and into a conversation about the most terrifying form of health care rationing. In a voice at once involving and fair, masterful and intimate, Fink exposes the hidden dilemmas of end-of-life care and reveals just how ill-prepared we are for the impact of large-scale disasters—and how we can do better. A remarkable book, engrossing from start to finish, *Five Days at Memorial* radically transforms your understanding of human nature in crisis. One of The New York Times' Best Ten Books of the Year

## Book Information

Series: Ala Notable Books for Adults

Hardcover: 576 pages

Publisher: Crown; 1 edition (September 10, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307718964

ISBN-13: 978-0307718969

Product Dimensions: 6.6 x 1.8 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 1,007 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #24,248 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Special Topics > History #11 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Atmospheric Sciences #23 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Disaster Relief

## Customer Reviews

\*Starred Review\* As the floodwaters rose after Hurricane Katrina, patients, staff, and families who

sheltered in New Orleans. Memorial Hospital faced a crisis far worse than the storm itself. Without power, an evacuation plan, or strong leadership, caregiving became chaotic, and exhausted doctors and nurses found it difficult to make even the simplest decisions. And, when it came to making the hardest decisions, some of them seem to have failed. A number of the patients deemed least likely to survive were injected with lethal combinations of drugs—even as the evacuation finally began in earnest. Fink, a Pulitzer Prize winner for her reporting on Memorial in the New York Times Magazine, offers a stunning re-creation of the storm, its aftermath, and the investigation that followed (one doctor and two nurses were charged with second-degree murder but acquitted by a grand jury). She evenhandedly compels readers to consider larger questions, not just of ethics but race, resources, history, and what constitutes the greater good, while humanizing the countless smaller tragedies that make up the whole. And, crucially, she provides context, relating how other hospitals fared in similar situations. Both a breathtaking read and an essential book for understanding how people behave in times of crisis. --Keir Graff

Five Days at Memorial is Sheri Fink's elaborately researched chronicle of life, death, and the choices in between at a New Orleans hospital immediately following Hurricane Katrina. What's important, it slowly emerges, is that despite Fink's painstaking re-creation based on five hundred interviews and mountains of documents—we weren't there. We cannot know. Fink, under the guise of third-person journalistic objectivity, drives us towards a kind of uncertainty so great that it's revelatory. There are conclusions to be drawn from Fink's collection of dilemmas. She seems to indicate that she believes "a crime had occurred." The scope of that crime—not just a legal trespass but a moral and ethical one as well—is the true subject of this book. This isn't just a policy brief ornamented with characters. It is, like all great journalism, a document unto itself, an artifact of what we thought about "life and death" issues in the early twenty-first century.

Jeff Sharlet

Fascinating book that looks at the situation from all angles and is proof positive that communication is essential in a disaster. There were many lessons in this story which was well written. One thing that became abundantly clear is that people who get to the top levels of any organization do not always get there because they are the most qualified person. The one talent that they all seem to possess is the ability to point their finger at someone else and blame them for any mistakes that were made. They also have very short memories for certain events or certain things that they said.

When making decisions in a chaotic disaster situation, it would be helpful to have at least a minimal understanding of the job that the people you are directing do. Not just their name and title but what they actually do and the environment that they do it in.

I love the book, yes it was long but the story is fascinating. I heard about some of the controversy going on in hospital during Katrina but did not know the whole story. My takeaway is that preparation is the utmost in any disaster but as the book stated hospital, towns and cities knew what they had to do, reports, TV shows and analysis were done about hurricanes and how to prepare for them to save lives and avoid tragedies. But one thing got in the way, MONEY. The hospital couldn't afford generator above grounds, it was too expensive, Levies needed to be fix to handle a major hurricanes, politics and money again, and I would not be surprise if another Katrina comes(God Forbid) and we hear again, a hospital not prepare for a major hurricanes for that fact, New Orleans not prepare. As for me, I look at disaster preparedness differently, I spoke to my employer about our plan, I got my emergency bag in my car, with extra clothes, flashlights, knifes, etc- in case I will spend a few day at work and no help is available for 72 hours, I live in Southern California and our poison is earthquakes. And it wouldn't hurt for any employer to contract with a private ambulance to call and contact for your critical care people at your work, your local paramedics will be busy.

Although very hard to read, because of the matter at hand, it's an incredible journalistic account of what happened in these 5 days and the months following. The author has done an incredible job not to throw judgement at the people that's interviewed and part of the story. It's truly an amazing work. I would definitely recommend it to readers who want to get a much closer look into what a crisis can look and feel like beyond what the media reports in the heat of the moment, too often very biased and simply unethical. Again the first half can be tough to read, but the second one goes by really fast. Extremely well written.

This book is haunting and unforgettable. Who can say how people will act under the horrific circumstances of Hurricane Katrina, when the medical staff at Memorial has to decide who lives and who dies, based on the limited resources following a natural disaster. It's hard to imagine the nightmare the patients, doctors, and nurses experience and the tests to which they will be subjected.

This is an extensively researched work of non-fiction. However, it gives the reader a real sense of

the human experience involved in the tragic episode with complex portraits of the people involved in the situation and its aftermath. It also deals with issues around euthanasia and end of life in considerable detail and with profound thoughtfulness. It was refreshing to have a book that I wanted to return to and finish.

As a retired registered nurse with well over a decade experience in acute care nursing in Oncology, Critical Care, and Emergency medicine, I was sympathetic to the conditions the staff of Memorial Hospital worked under, yet horrified by many of the decisions that were made and the allegations of mercy killing by doctors and nurses. As a writer, I was impressed by Fink's investigative reporting and her ability to bring the scene to life, with all the underlying themes. Every literate American should read this book and discuss it -- especially hospital administrators, nurses, pharmacists, and physicians.

I've just finished reading this extraordinary book, and upon looking for more information about what has happened to Dr. Anna Pou since publication, I came across the controversy about the book's accuracy. I can say that as I read, it never occurred to me that author Sheri Fink was biased against Dr. Pou. When I finished reading the book, I was unable to decide if euthanasia had taken place or not. Her balanced narrative reminds me of the story of the blind man and the elephant. It seems to me that Sheri Fink made an enormous effort to tell every character's story without pushing any point of view other than how critical it is for hospitals to have workable disaster plans. In any case, I recommend the book enthusiastically, and I urge readers to keep an open mind as they follow the complicated trail of events at Memorial Hospital.

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