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Review by Anja Cuhalev

Further Than Yesterday: That's All That Counts

Medric "Cous" Cousineau | Invictus Maneo Publishing, 2015. 294 pp. ISBN 9781514661963

The myth that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD occurs only with soldiers who have faced battle, is dispelled in the book *Further than yesterday: that's all that counts*. The author, Captain (Retired) Cousineau, a former Canadian naval aviator, describes his struggle with the disorder from which he suffers as a result of his involvement in a high-risk rescue mission.

Capt. Cousineau, Cous for short, graduated from the Royal College in May 1983 and finished serving the navy in 1990 as a result of a 1986 Sea King helicopter rescue mission involving a fishing vessel with two injured crewmen. For four years after the rescue mission, Cous was haunted by anxiety attacks and nightmares, until he realized that his condition could endanger others and was consequently discharged from the navy in 1990.

He comes from a military family, with both his parents, as well as his siblings serving; his mother served as a naval reservist and his father was in the Royal Canadian Dragoon. His father is, due to his military experiences, a passionate pacifist, which is sometimes reflected in Cous' writing.

Jocelyn, Cous' wife, was a nurse and they had two daughters. In the book, Cous speaks of his marriage and the obstacles he and his wife had to face during his time in the navy, as well through the years of his battle with PTSD. According to Cous, they spent 117 days together during the first 298 days of their marriage; on the 298th day, he was sent on the rescue mission that changed his life forever. Due to the traumatic events during that mission, Cous suffered from PTSD from then on and new challenges in his life began. His condition reshaped his professional life, and more importantly, his family life has been affected; specifically, his role as a partner and parent. The book *Further than yesterday: that's all that counts*, offers an insight into Cous' struggle, the effect of his PTSD on the people around him, and his fight for a return to a "normal life."

On his path to recovery, Cous realized that psychotherapy was not sufficient and discovered that his service dog, Thai, contributed to his wellbeing on a day-to-day basis, acting as a significant addition to his weekly psychotherapy sessions. Due to that realization, he participated in the fundraiser called "Paws fur thought" to fund and advocate for service dogs for disabled veterans battling PTSD. He started this fundraiser with his friend, Pam, who passed away before seeing him partake in the big charity event "the Walk to Sanity," sponsored by the Poppy Trust Fund, Canada's largest veteran support organization. His great efforts to raise awareness of the issue of PTSD, as well as bring attention to the importance of service dogs, were recognized and consequently rewarded; during that 50 day walk, he managed to secure twenty five percent of all Poppy funds to go to funding of service dogs.

Further than yesterday: that's all that counts consists of an introduction which focuses on Capt. Cousineau's years in the Royal Military College of Canada called "The Before Time." "The Before Time" is described as the years prior to the traumatic rescue mission. The book starts with a thorough explanation of the author's college years. Here, he speaks of the strict regimes, high intensity trainings, as well as the dedication and strength of the cadets. He touches on the connections made during those years, and discusses relationships between officers and cadets, the cadets' everyday routines, and graduation. The natural progression of the story leads the reader to the crucial event at sea.

The book's core section, "The Rescue," describes the incident which was the lead cause for Cous's PTSD. The rescue mission had two launches, the second of which consisted of boarding the *Sea Hawk*, a fishing vessel with injured civilians, on the eve of October 6, 1986. Capt. Cousineau and his team, were sent to the *Sea Hawk* in the middle of the North Atlantic; they reached the fishing vessel in a helicopter (aka. the *Sea King*) to execute the rescue. Cous was responsible for the transportation of the injured fishermen from the boat to the helicopter, which meant he boarded the boat. They attempted to board numerous times; bad weather conditions negatively affected their success and risked their lives in the process. Whence the boarding was successful and Cous managed to reach the injured fishermen, he accidentally dropped one in the ocean before lifting him to the helicopter. He himself fell into the ocean before being lifted back to the helicopter.

The mission was high risk and was, despite the rescue teams' efforts, unsuccessful; the injured crewmen died during, or shortly after, the rescue. All of this contributed to the mental strain of the author which he describes quite well. The event of the rescue is touched on throughout the book and acts as a reminder of the trigger point which is the core of the author's PTSD.

Concluding chapters are suitably titled "New Beginnings." The final and most important chapters, these account his experience with his service dog Thai, how she has helped with his everyday life, and the importance of Thai's role on Cous' path to recovery from PTSD. His inspirational journey through the charitable walk, "the Walk for Sanity," is described in this section, including the numerous psychological and physical trials that Cous had to face while trying to conquer his PTSD.

The book attempts to communicate the importance and considerable impact of PTSD on veterans' quality of life. The author successfully portrays the detrimental effects of PTSD, as well as the grave importance of available support to the sufferers. It reads easily and would be valuable material for anyone with an interest in PTSD. The intended audience is individuals who are working with people who have PTSD or who have suffered from it themselves. The reader can sense the effort to raise awareness amongst military students and personnel; hence, one can presume that the book would be most suited, as well as most effective with readers with a service background. Nonetheless, it is an educational read for anyone with an interest in this field.

The purpose of the text is presented quite clearly: to raise awareness regarding PTSD and to underscore the importance of service dogs. The story progresses from Cous' early years, runs through his life with PTSD, and concludes with the end of his charity walk to raise awareness for Paws Fur Thought. His storytelling is mostly linear, but the style of writing feels disoriented in certain chapters. For example, the writing in the first half of the book is regularly disrupted by flashbacks of the rescue mission and can be difficult to follow, although one might say that it demonstrates, rather than merely describes the effects of PTSD. Cous describes his experience with PTSD as an overwhelming and overpowering experience which disrupts his everyday life, paralyzes him, and sends him back to the events of the rescue mission. And as mentioned, the description of the rescue mission acts in a similar manner and disrupts the story throughout the book.

The author spends a fair amount of time covering his early years as a cadet, which carries some importance, as it provides the story's context; but, considering the material and main topic of the book, that section seems to lose a part of its value. It is easy to understand how the portrayal of the atmosphere in the navy, or more importantly the attitude and determination of cadets, contributes to the understanding of why naval officers, and presumably people in other high-risk professions, tackle situations which could and most often do trigger PTSD. But the author discusses topics in his introduction which don't seem to contribute to the content of his chosen subject. One such topic, is the introduction of female cadets to the naval college. In itself, that is an important subject, but the author does not dedicate enough significance to it for the reader to see any benefit to its inclusion in

the text. Female cadets are mentioned on numerous occasions, but fundamentally the thread is lost and leaves the reader wondering about their importance and contribution to the story.

PTSD is an issue that has been discussed on many occasions; for example, David J. Morris' (2015) biographical book in which the author, a former marine, tells of veterans, as well as his, PTSD experiences. Despite the myriad of texts on the subject, *Further than yesterday: that's all that counts*, offers a unique insight into the lives of people suffering from PTSD, and reminds readers that its effects don't end with the sufferers. Most importantly, it inspires with the author's great efforts for own rehabilitation, as well as the rehabilitation of other veterans suffering from this crippling condition. The subject of service dogs has not been covered before, even though their vital role in rehabilitation is equally intriguing and eye opening. This representation of both PTSD and the talent of service dogs is what makes this book a truly valuable read.

References

Morris, D. (2015). *The evil hours: A biography of post-traumatic stress disorder*. Boston, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

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