



Goodbye Wives and Daughters

Susan Kushner Resnick

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Book Synopsis:

One morning in 1943, close to eighty men descended into the Smith coal mine in Bearcreek, Montana. Only three came out alive. “Goodbye wives and daughters . . .” wrote two of the miners as they died. The story of that tragic day and its aftermath unfolds in this book through the eyes of those wives and daughters—women who lost their husbands, fathers, and sons, livelihoods, neighbors, and homes, yet managed to fight back and persevere. Susan Kushner Resnick has uncovered the story behind all those losses.

Author website:

www.coalminedisaster.com

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Book Description

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Susan Kushner Resnick has uncovered the story behind all those losses. She chronicles the missteps and questionable ethics of the mine’s managers, who blamed their disregard for safety on the exigencies of World War II; the efforts of an earnest federal mine inspector and the mine union’s president (later a notorious murderer), who tried in vain to make the mine safer; the heroism of the men who battled for nine days to rescue the trapped miners; and the effect the disaster had on the entire mining industry. Resnick illuminates a particular historical tragedy with all its human ramifications while also reminding us that such tragedies caused by corporate greed and indifference are with us to this day.

Pre-Publication Praise

“Susan Resnick has done a marvelous and very difficult thing. Through her fine research and wonderful prose, she has captured the heart and soul of an American town that was brilliantly alive until the day a sudden disaster all but killed it. How that day came is a matter of documentation, but Resnick is far from satisfied with mere reporting on the life and death of a town. She has dug deep, as deep as the mine beneath Montana that is the centerpiece of this remarkable history. This is one of the best books I’ve ever read about mining and the strong, amazing, enduring people who do it.”—Homer Hickam, author of *Rocket Boys* and *October Sky*

“In most history books, disasters—when they are recounted at all—are reduced to numbers. The dead. The cost. But in this remarkable look at a forgotten moment, Susan Kushner Resnick replaces statistics with detailed lives of some of the seventy-five men who died in the 1943 mine explosion in Bearcreek, Montana—an explosion that, for some families, still echoes today.”—Scott Martelle, author of *Blood Passion: The Ludlow Massacre and Class War in the American West*

Post-Publication Praise for the Hardcover Edition

“Resnick does an admirable job of breathing life into the story of a small town’s demise and its questioning of whether the disaster could have been avoided.”—Lisa Bonos, *Washington Post*

“Few accounts have ever done justice to the women, families and communities of coal towns, or depicted their character with such clarity as this book does. The heartrending and yet, in the end, inspiring portraits of actual people willing to battle against a callous industry are skillfully rendered.”—Gordon Simmons, *Charleston Gazette*

“Those who enjoy reading history and about the perseverance of the human spirit will not soon forget this story of the tragedy that left fifty-eight women widowed and 125 children fatherless.”—Robin Rarrell Edmunds, *ForeWord*

“Ms. Resnick writes about a tougher time, of miners who sensed they were in danger but went into the mine anyway, determined to feed their families and keep the coal coming. . . . This story will never be told better.”—David Crisp, *Billings Outpost*

“Goodbye Wives and Daughters weaves together a narrative about death and survival that provides a fascinating window into the underground coal-mining industry during World War II. Most importantly, the book is filled with the stories of people—including those of the Wakenshaw, Mourich, Anderson, and Freeman families—that place the Smith Mine disaster squarely in a context not previously known.”
—Jon Axline, *Montana, the Magazine of Western History*

“What makes Resnick’s book significant . . . is her account of the people of Bearcreek, the miners and their families. Her treatment of the actions of surviving women, and their relentless determination to get answers and justice, not only humanizes our understanding of the tragedy and its aftermath, it vividly illustrates the strength and courage of ordinary people living and working in a coal mining community.”
—Gordon Simmons, *Charleston Gazette*

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Author Biography



Susan Kushner Resnick is the author of *Sleepless Days: One Woman's Journey through Postpartum Depression*. She has been a journalist for twenty-five years; her work has appeared in *The Best American Essays*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Boston Magazine*, *salon.com*, *Parents Magazine*, and *Utne Reader*.

Additional Information

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