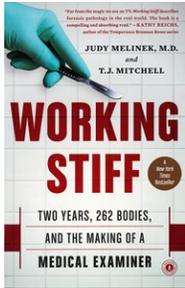


Books by the Stack



Working Stiff: Two Years, 262 Bodies, and the Making of a Medical Examiner by Judy Melinek, M.D. and T. J. Mitchell

Two months before the September 11 attacks, Dr. Judy Melinek began her training as a New York forensic pathologist. Judy threw herself into the fascinating world of death investigation. Here she takes readers behind the police tape to some of the most harrowing deaths in the Big Apple.

Why you'll like it: *Action-packed, witty, not for the squeamish.*

About the Author: Judy Melinek, M. D., is a forensic pathologist and an associate clinical professor at UCSF Medical Center. She lives in San Francisco with her family. T.J. Mitchell graduated with an English degree from Harvard and worked in the film industry before becoming a full-time stay-at-home dad in 2000.

Questions for Discussion

1. Many reviews and press events about *Working Stiff* list Judy Melinek as the sole author, even though the book is co-authored by T.J. Mitchell. Do you think this is due to his role as a homemaker? Would Judy's appearance in the media standing by her writer-husband detract from her status as a strong female media figure? Is Judy a "character" the press wants to explore in their stories, even outside the confines of her character role in her own book?
2. What role does New York City play in the book? Is the City a character? If Dr. Melinek had pursued her post-residency training in another city, could she have written a book about her experience? How (apart from her work after the World Trade Center disaster) would training in another city have changed the story?
3. Dr. Melinek took notes and kept a journal every day of her training in 2001-2003, yet *Working Stiff* is not structured chronologically. Why is this? What is gained from the book's case-based structure? What has been lost-and what have the authors compromised-in choosing to tell a non-linear story?
4. T.J. worried while writing *Working Stiff* that the book might read like a hagiography of Dr. Charles Hirsch, and the OCME staff as a whole. Was he right-is Dr. Hirsch a saint, or a real character?
5. What role does the theme of parenting play in the book? Does being a parent make Dr. Melinek a better medical examiner? Was T.J.'s role as a full-time stay-at-home dad important to the story? How does being a parent influence how you do or your colleagues do their job, or affect others you work with?
6. Does *Working Stiff* have a story arc, or is the book just a collection of interesting if disparate death stories? Does it matter? Does a memoir need a structural arc?

7. What was the most interesting forensic fact you learned in the book? Is this what you expected a medical examiner's training to be like? How is the authors' portrayal of forensic pathology different from its portrayal on television?

8. Did you wish after reading *Working Stiff* that you had heeded Judy's advice, "you don't want to know," about stories of terrible deaths? If so, did this desire change with time, after you had finished the book?

9. Do you feel that Judy's opinion of suicide as "a goddamned selfish act" is too harsh? Do you think it reflects the accepted medical opinion of her peers? Did reading the book change your attitude toward suicide?

10. In the United States 50% of all suicides are effectuated by gun and 50% of all gun deaths are suicides. States with highly restrictive gun control laws have far lower rates of suicide than states with lax gun control laws. These numbers include all types of suicide, not just suicide by gun. Do medical examiners have a civic duty to speak up about highly contentious political issues having to do with the death, such as statistics on gun deaths and the effectiveness of gun control?

11. *Working Stiff* has been described as a "brisk" and "a quick read." Is it too quick? Would you have liked to read more stories about the various manners of death we explore in the book, even if that meant some of them would become repetitive of others you had already read? Would a longer book have caused you to lose interest somewhere in the middle?

(Questions provided by author)



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