



Visiting Hours: A Memoir of Friendship and Murder

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In this powerful and unforgettable memoir, award-winning writer Amy Butcher examines the shattering consequences of failing a friend when she felt he needed one most.

Four weeks before their college graduation, twenty-one-year-old Kevin Schaeffer walked Amy Butcher to her home in their college town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Hours after parting ways with Amy, he fatally stabbed his ex-girlfriend. While he was awaiting trial, psychiatrists concluded that he had suffered an acute psychotic break. Although severely affected by Kevin's crime, Amy remained devoted to him as a friend, believing that his actions were the direct result of his untreated illness. Over time, she became obsessed—determined to discover the narrative that explained what Kevin had done. The tragedy deeply shook her concept of reality, disrupted her sense of right and wrong, and dismantled every conceivable notion she'd established about herself and her relation to the world. Eventually realizing that she would never have the answers, or find personal peace, unless she went after it herself, Amy returned to Gettysburg—the first time in three years since graduation—to sift through hundred of pages of public records: mental health evaluations, detectives' notes, inventories of evidence, search warrants, testimonies, and even Kevin's own confession.

Visiting Hours is Amy Butcher's deeply personal, heart-wrenching exploration of how trauma affects memory and the way a friendship changes and often strengthens through seemingly insurmountable challenges. Ultimately, it's a testament to the bonds we share with others and the profound resilience and strength of the human spirit.

Visiting Hours: A Memoir of Friendship and Murder Details

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From Reader Review Visiting Hours: A Memoir of Friendship and Murder for online ebook

S says

I lived with Emily and was friendly with Kevin-- it hurts a lot to be reminded of this event in a way that's not a supportive conversation with a friend. A couple years ago I was caught off guard when I came across a short story by Amy about Emily's murder at Barnes and Noble. Guted is a great way to describe that feeling. Amy and I have a somewhat shared experience, but I could not relate to her storytelling despite having been there myself. Frankly I think it's crass to write about a trauma without the support of the community and families who shared it. It's not compassionate-- it's the opposite in my opinion. Amy was not the only friend to stay in contact with Kevin, how dare she bend the truth like that when so many difficult visits were made by heartbroken people? She may be, however, the only friend to have alienated herself from Emily and Kevin's friends and families by exploiting our experiences against all our wishes.

Beth Anne says

I think this book was really unnecessary. If this woman wanted to be a writer she should write something. Writing this book seems to be a way of calling herself a writer without having to actually do the work. It drags on and repeats the same things about herself over and over. I suppose she is expecting we feel badly for her because of what she has gone through and the guilt she experiences, but she's so annoying and self absorbed it's difficult to have sympathy or empathy towards her. She doesn't really seem to have any either.

I received a free e-galley of this book from First To Read

Alissa Hearson says

This book broke my heart. The writing is beautiful but more important is the pervading sense that the only ones who suffer from violence are those directly involved. As a survivor of frequent second-hand violence, I was so glad to have found this book. Brave.

J says

In response to Jason's review - I am not certain who you are and I am not sure if you are speaking to my review, but I hope it does not come across as hypercritical, spiteful, or attacking because it's a genuine expression of pain. While I respect your opinion and perspective and understand why your interpretation of this book may be different than my own, that does not negate how upsetting it is to see that Amy has used my dog's name as my personal pseudonym or to find that she's repurposed elements of my personal life to further her narrative - implying I worked at domestic violence shelters because of Kevin, when I actually began a new job (a job I interviewed for while Kevin was visiting two or three weeks prior) at a shelter four days after Kevin murdered Emily, a daily source of deep anguish and guilt. I believe that Amy is aware of this, as it was the subject of conversations we had regarding the publication of the book.

I most certainly did not expect Amy's experience of this event to mirror my own and just like Amy has urgently asserted her need to express her feelings, I won't be shamed for openly expressing mine. I can assure you that the people I personally know who have taken issue with her novel seem far from concerned about whether this novel confirms their perspective, but instead object more to blatant misrepresentations of events and more significantly, the co-opting of their personal narrative for the purposes of Amy's. It is very hard for me to understand when I hear the claim that we did not process this event together, because this is so discordant with my own experience and I lived across the country at the time. I understand that this processing was much direct and active for many of those living in Gettysburg, who were closest to Kevin.

I must also admit, at the risk of sounding paranoid (and that's how truly and oppressively crazy making a situation like this is that it can swiftly re-trigger hypervigilance associated with the initial event), I find it a little confusing that someone who seems unfamiliar to those of us who knew both Kevin and Amy, who only recently established a Goodreads profile, who has rated books primarily written by colleagues of Amy's, has decided to author a review primarily criticizing the authentic expressions of others involved who rightfully feel hurt by her decision. The loss of certain friendships and the shame and guilt I felt surrounding how my actions contributed to those losses is one of the more painful elements of the aftermath of this event for me on a personal level, so I struggle to relate when Amy does not appear to grieve the losses her choice to publish this book has resulted in.

Full disclosure: I know (knew?) Kevin and Amy and I, along with others in our social circle, took issue with Amy's intention to write and publish this book from the beginning. I bought this book hoping to better understand her intentions and to gain information that Amy had access to through the FOIA, though it seems much of that is not shared. Further full disclosure: I haven't finished reading the book, in part because the dedication page made it difficult to combat the doubts I had coming into it.

Amy dedicates this book to her parents, and to Kevin and Emily's. While I don't know if Amy has contacted Emily's parents to alert them to the impending publication of this novel, two days prior to the anniversary of her murder, I have heard that Kevin's parents did not know this book was being published, only that it was in progress. Given that, it's challenging for me to see how this book may be for them. I acknowledge my bias and recognize that, like Amy, my version of the events that transpired before, during, and after this brutal murder are incomplete, likely inaccurately, and ultimately self-centered. I understand that perception is inherently colored by the individual experience and that is why I find it so particularly painful that Amy's re-telling of these events, as told in excerpts I've read, include what I believe are blatant falsehoods. While Amy acknowledges this is a work of creative nonfiction and reports that she relied on the accounts of others she trusted, as far as I know she was negligent in both consulting with and alerting others about the publication of this novel and the short stories that preceded it. It's hard to describe the experience of scrolling through Salon.com and unexpectedly seeing Kevin's mugshot, an image that still shakes me to the core. There's a feeling I can describe no better than gutting when I see Amy imply in interviews that others did not grieve as she grieved or did not contact or visit Kevin as frequently as she did. Amy washes over the experiences of those she knows well in an interview in Vela where she implies that others moved on with their lives while she suffered. This is agonizing for those who were particularly close to Kevin, who were fully aware of his mental illness and how it manifested.

I prefer not to elaborate on these inaccuracies that seem to rise far beyond simple perspective because I want to be clear that my intention is not to smear Amy, though I can see how it may come across that way. Rather, I hope to offer a dissenting voice that I think echoes many who knew Kevin, who were devastated by this event for countless and complicated reasons, and who find the accolades and acclaim she is receiving for this novel heartbreaking. I can only imagine the impact this novel may have on Emily's family and friends and

frankly, the thought makes me a little sick. I've been grappling with this feeling that Amy wrote this book for gain and I don't even like what that thought says about me and about people. But it's very difficult to read her writing, to view her author's page on Facebook, and not come away with that feeling. I hope that further reading serves to prove me wrong though truthfully, more than that, I hope others who read this book do so with a discerning eye.

Anti- Fabulist says

I knew and lived with Kevin -- this is a work of FICTION, not creative nonfiction. Much of it is simply not true. To begin with, her repeated claim that she was the only one who maintained communication with Kevin. Even more confusingly: we all know that she KNOWS that numerous people kept in contact with Kevin, all more so than herself.... Also, she wasn't even a close friend of his, let alone a "best" friend.

Why trample on peoples' real feelings by claiming this is a memoir?

Rebecca says

The facts are simple: one night towards the end of their senior year at Gettysburg College (2009), Kevin Schaeffer walked Butcher home from a drunken outing, then stabbed his ex-girlfriend to death. This book has elements of a true crime narrative, detailing the crime and speculating on possible causes for Kevin's psychotic episode – he was coming down from a high dose of antidepressants, and may have been making a second suicide attempt when Emily stopped him – but it's more about how the crime affected Butcher. Knowing that a good friend was a murderer forced her to revisit her memories of their time together, and left her with a form of PTSD that visiting him in prison several years later did little to ameliorate.

This is a concise and gripping narrative reminiscent of *Half a Life* by Darin Strauss. I'm surprised by the low ratings here; people seem to be reacting against Butcher's presumption to write about a case she wasn't directly involved in. I would argue, though, that it's precisely that slight removal from the case that allows her to comment: she pores over all the details available on the public record, but also insists that the facts don't tell the full story; neither do her admittedly fuzzy memories. Ultimately, Kevin's motivation remains a mystery. I appreciated Butcher's sensitive examination of mental health issues. It also helped that I had visited Gettysburg the week before reading this, so the sites were fresh in my mind.

Related reading: *Give Me Everything You Have* is James Lasdun's account of being a victim of online stalking. It has a similar true crime vibe in places but is, again, more of a personal reflection. I also think to mention it because it's a book I loved that has (inexplicably, if you ask me) earned much vitriol on Goodreads.

Melissa B says

I received this book through GoodReads First Reads

A memoir like no other I have ever read. The author's self-doubt and her confusion about the whole murder, and the murderer (who was a good friend) shines throughout the book. We all hope that we are never put into this same situation. It is something unimaginable that one reads about, or it happens to someone we don't know. An interesting read.

Scot Taylor says

Painful. I read this because the writer was recently hired at my alma mater as an English professor. I weep for the future. The writer is self-centered and lacks insight. Her prose is leaden when it's not blazing purple. It's a vaguely compelling anecdote puffed into book length by Iowa Writers' Workshop pretentiousness. AVOID.

Heather says

My low rating isn't for the things that bothered other reviewers. I don't mind that the author capitalized on the murder. She's a writer; that's what writers do. I don't even mind that people involved say parts aren't true; everyone has his/her own memories and viewpoints on situations. My issues are with the writing itself.

First, certain things just don't make sense. Butcher did extensive/obsessive research before visiting the prison and knows no jewelry is allowed, yet she forgets she can't wear a ring. And it's not even a ring she always wears and is now part of her. She says she wears it "sometimes" and thought it could "come in handy." She could still have told us what the ring means to her without introducing it in a contradictory way.

The next issue is that we learn a few details are simply wrong. For instance, she emphasizes that she was the last person Kevin saw before the murder, but then at the end of the book, as an aside, she tells us that, actually, he watched tv with a guy friend before going home. She's writing the book looking back at events, so I felt lied to. She knew she wasn't the last person and there's no reason to say that she was.

The writing style also irritated me. Descriptions go on and on beyond the point of being useful. I actually got bored in sections. For example, here's her description of the shirts she packed to visit Kevin in prison: "These are not shirts for prison. These are shirts for a magazine ad: a girl walking down a sidewalk, a girl eating an ice-cream cone with sprinkles. She's holding a yellow umbrella, maybe, a white pug on a pink leash beside her, and for a second I allow the thought: I wish I could be her instead. I'd name the dog Kit-Kat or Pancake, I think, and never think about prison again." She thought all that about a shirt? Really? Not likely. Simply saying the shirts are ones you'd find in a magazine ad is enough. The rest had me rolling my eyes.

She also repeats the same information ad nauseam for the first ¾ of the book: she and Kevin both grew up sheltered in small towns; the college is on the grounds of the Battle of Gettysburg; she and Kevin were part of the hip, intellectual crowd, not the shallow, preppy Greek students. It's not until the end of the book that she gets into any depth about what happened to Kevin and her PTSD and what it all means. By then, it was too late for me.

In the acknowledgements we learn portions of the story were previously published in journals. If you cut out the wordiness, repetitions, and give the relevant information up front, a long article seems about right. Book-length stretched her story too thin.

Leigh Paddon says

I COULD NOT PUT THIS BOOK DOWN!!!

A look into a young woman's mind as she visits a friend in prison. It is spellbinding!

Lissa says

1.5 Stars

I have been debating all morning how to honestly, yet kindly, rate and review this book but the truth is that I just did not like it. One night, the author was walked home by her friend Kevin and had surprisingly discovered the next day that he had then violently murdered his ex-girlfriend. I understand how this would affect someone, which is why I picked it up in the first place but the way the author turned this tragic event into her own memoir is disturbing and strange. I added half a star because at times she does seem to honestly admit that her connection to the whole situation is tenuous but that doesn't stop her obsessive behavior towards those actually involved. I received this book from Penguin's First to Read program in exchange for an honest review.

Wendi Manning says

Kevin killed Emily. Emily is dead and Kevin is in prison. Kevin walked Amy home before he killed Emily, so naturally, this book is all about how that murder changed Amy's life.

I couldn't figure out if she stayed friendly with Kevin because she liked him or because she thought it would make her more interesting. Either way, this book is nothing more than another cashing in by Amy on Kevin's crime. She's previously written an article for Salon on the topic. Selfish and self absorbed, Amy needs to ditch the whole killer angle and just write about herself like she really wants to.

I received this from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. I feel kind of bad because I hated this book...but the review is honest.

AmberBug *shelfnotes.com* says

I didn't like this book, put it down half way through. I don't understand why this Author has written a fictional? book about a real life event that has happened to her. I would have rather liked it to be a memoir and stated as such. I'm not a huge fan of memoirs, which this reads like, and probably wouldn't have wasted our time. However, I can see the appeal to someone who devours memoirs, but I still think the author made a mistake defining it as fiction.

Holly says

I borrowed an ebook copy and picked up where I'd left off in the audio. Still just didn't like it. Perhaps it was

the self-absorption and the constant reaching for profundity. Butcher dwells a lot on her own obsession with the case, but it was too much - couldn't her obsession have been the result of spending years writing a book about her personal impressions of the murder and how it affected her?

quinnster says

I have a hard time with this book. It would have been interesting if I didn't find out that much of Butcher's account is fiction (as claimed by other friends of Kevin's). I feel like this is one of those girls who is touched by something horrific and scandalous and wants to insert herself more into the story to give herself more importance. I noticed how she was already trying to defend herself against these sort of accusations by stating "some may say Kevin and I weren't really friends, certainly not best friends". She goes on to describe in detail the first time she and Kevin met. Then much later in the book talks about how the "trauma" she has experienced has caused her to make up "false memories" and now she doesn't know what was real and what she made up, including that first encounter with Kevin. Whaaaaat? She repeats several times that she was the last person who saw Kevin before he murdered Emily, but later acknowledges that he had actually spent a half hour with a friend named Wilson, watching TV before he went home that night.

Though I don't doubt that she experienced some horror and, because of her own issues, some PTSD from something like this happening to a student at her school by an acquaintance of hers, I think the fact that she wrote a book about it is insulting.

So at this point when, all of a sudden, she reveals she herself had been contemplating suicide as a young child, I didn't buy it. And then trying to say somehow that her suicidal imaginings and Kevin's complete and utter breakdown were pretty much the same was the icing on the very fake cake.
