



My Sister's Funeral

Stephen Bush

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In 1973 James's seventeen-year-old sister, Maria, disappeared while on her way home from school. Her disappearance not only shattered her family, it had strange, far-reaching repercussions for her ten-year-old brother. He was too young to fully understand what had happened but was left to cope alone while his parents struggled to deal with his sister's disappearance.

Over thirty years later the police arrive on James's doorstep to tell him that Maria's remains have been found outside Broken Hill, an isolated mining town nearly half way across Australia from where she was last seen. But it is a town that had strong connections with his family back when his sister went missing.

Now James knows she was murdered, and where she was hidden for all these years, he has to ask was it family or a friend who killed her. Or a stranger.

With her discovery Maria becomes more real for James, she is a sudden violent death in the family, and he sets out to try to discover what his sister was really like as well as what happened to her, while he struggles to come to terms with what her disappearance meant for him in the past.

As he seeks answers James discovers the different memories people have of that time long ago and of a young woman standing on the edge of adulthood, who may have been quiet and shy or who may have been spoiled and living dangerously.

My Sister's Funeral Details

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From Reader Review **My Sister's Funeral** for online ebook

Glenkes says

An intriguing and heartbreaking little gem of a tale of a man's search for his sister and the meaning of her disappearance even after she's found--and, ultimately of a man's search for his own identity and to discern what is true in all that is false in the world around him. A truly masterful write (and read) for a debut novel.

Lynda says

My Sister's Funeral was an interesting read. Stephen Bush's carefully crafted main character, James, has a very strong personality and acts as the narrator throughout the novel as he discusses his memories regarding his sister's death 30 years previously and the current events surrounding the find and burial of her remains.

I enjoyed most of the writing although towards the end, some parts seemed a bit disjointed and disappointing. Perhaps this is a cultural difference as the author is Australian and I am American. It was a fairly short read and I do not regret the time spent reading it. I believe this book may be interesting to those who enjoy family drama, murder mysteries or Australia.

I received this book from a Good Reads Giveaway.

Dats says

I really liked this book. Kept me turning the page. Couldn't put it down. Although I have to say it is hard for me to read about a kid disappearing. Pretty much a parents worse nightmare. At first this book kind of reminded me of the Deep End of the Ocean. But it still kept me interested all the way through.

Todd Fonseca says

Greeting mourners as they arrive at his sister Maria's funeral, James knew this day was inevitable. Though she had disappeared when he was only ten, the aftermath of that event had effected every aspect of his life including his troubled relationship with his parents, confused sexual urges, and eventual disintegration of his marriage. But after all these years, the question still remained, what had happened, who had killed her, and why? Was it one of these very people who had come to pay their respects or had fate already gotten even and taken the life of her murderer?

My Sister's Funeral, by Stephen Bush, is a gripping murder mystery read. Through vivid characterization, Bush describes an eclectic mix of friends and family all with varying motivations to have possibly committed the murder. His unveiling of Maria's past is well paced though at times it was bit difficult to follow the time line – what was happening in the present time versus the frequent flashbacks. Bush is strong with his narrative and uses dialogue sparingly.

What I enjoyed most in this book, though, was how well Bush gets the reader inside James' confused head and his need for closure on so many levels whether with his family, ex-wife, or his murdered sister. And while Maria was killed, in many ways James suffered a longer and more painful torture that Bush conveys thoughtfully. I will admit I had no idea who the murdered was until it was finally revealed; perhaps those more astute than I will pick up on the subtle clues and while the question of "who done it" drives the story forward, I think *My Sister's Funeral* is best appreciated as a character exploration.

Note: A complementary copy of this work was provided in return for a review.

Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

Seventeen year old Maria was on her way home from school in Newcastle when she vanished without a trace. Now, thirty years later, her remains have been discovered in a wooden crate buried under a culvert more than 1000 km away in Broken Hill. As James prepares for his sister's funeral, he reexamines the mystery surrounding her disappearance, speaking to family and friends in a desperate attempt to make sense of his sister's fate.

James was just 10 years old when Maria went missing, leaving him with a half formed, childish impression of his sister as a spoilt, promiscuous and rebellious teenager. Her disappearance shattered his family, while his mother searched endlessly for her daughter in this world and the next, James's father turned against Maria's memory and just three years after Maria vanished, they acrimoniously divorced. James remained with his mother who made him the target of her increasing rage against all men and during the turmoil of puberty James began to over identify with his sister resulting in a confused emergence of his sexuality that later poisoned his marriage. Using the first person narrative, Bush invites the reader to experience James's pain, uncertainty and desperation in his search to understand both his sister, and himself. His character feels authentic and I had a great deal of sympathy for the man who became a victim of such tragic circumstances.

Upon Maria's body being found, James is prompted to learn more about the sister he barely knew and piece together the old and new rumors, evidence and speculation that surround her death. He is told of a rumor that Maria was pregnant, he discovers his sister's remains were found in a crate similar to those used by his uncle's business, and he talks with an old school friend of his sister who admits she suspected Maria had a secret lover, each new piece of information contributing to a theory that points to a shifting cast of suspects. When the truth is finally revealed, it makes sense and finally gives James the closure he needs to move on with his life.

While the characterisation and the plot of *My Sister's Funeral* is strong, there are some weaknesses in the writing. The narrative rambles at times, not helped by the lack of clear boundaries between recollections of the past and the events of the present as well as the occasional mixing of tenses. There are some minor inconsistencies in the details and the occasional editing error, however the pace is good, and the suspense is maintained throughout the novel.

My Sister's Funeral is a thoughtful story that explores themes such as loss, grief, family and identity within the framework of an interesting murder mystery.

Brenda says

When James was 10 years old, his big sister Maria, disappeared. She vanished on the way home from school near Newcastle, NSW...she was with her girlfriends on the train, and after she had alighted at the station, no-one saw her again.

Now, over thirty years later, Maria's remains have been found near Broken Hill, and everything comes crashing back. James finds himself reliving all the trauma, the devastation and horror that occurred after Maria went missing, the breakdown of the family, the rapid growing up he had to do, having to prepare meals for himself, iron his own school shirts, all the things his mother would normally do, except she was distraught, and in no way capable of anything anymore.

While James is organising Maria's funeral, he revisits family members with whom he had lost contact over the years, trying to find some answers...he visits Maria's girlfriends from her school days, looking to get more information. He also goes to his estranged father's nursing home, but the anger is palpable. And all the while his Aunt Rose is there for him, having a meal now and then, helping James more than his mother ever did.

The re-appearance of Allison, James' ex wife, has him more confused than ever, as he needs to confront his past in a way that makes him very uncomfortable. And when they are all together at the funeral home, things come together in a way that will surprise and shock you.....

This novel is a very well written murder mystery, with twists and turns throughout, until the sudden, unexpected ending! A very enjoyable quick read!

Stephen says

A wonderful book of family secrets and the shattering effect of a sister's disappearance as seen through her much younger brother's eyes and life. A murder mystery, in every way, with a very unexpected ending.
