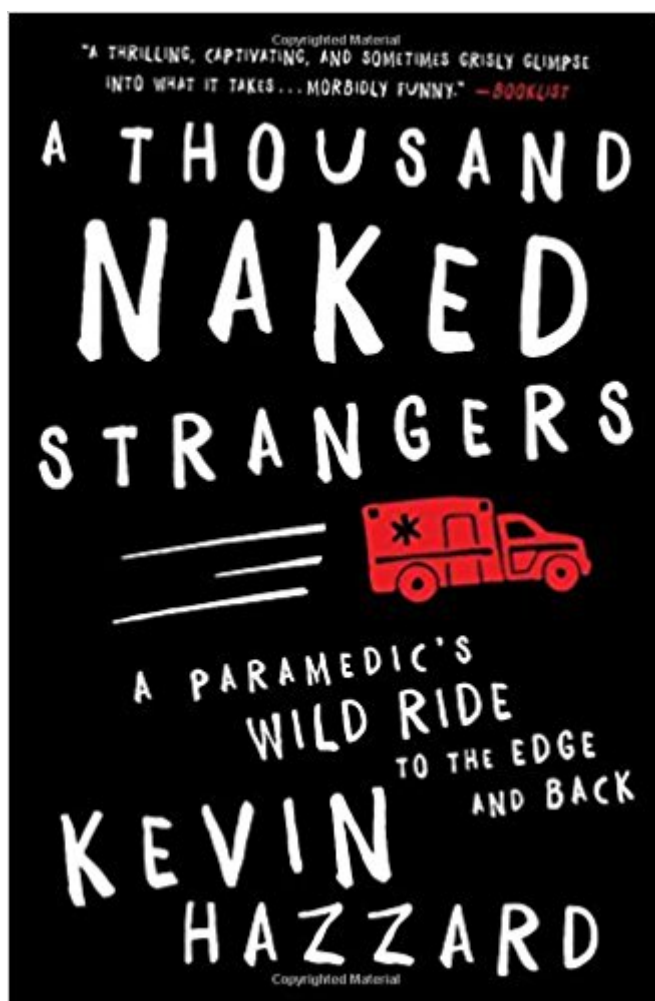


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# A Thousand Naked Strangers: A Paramedic's Wild Ride To The Edge And Back



## Synopsis

A former paramedic's visceral, poignant, and mordantly funny account of a decade spent on Atlanta's mean streets saving lives and connecting with the drama and occasional beauty that lies inside catastrophe. In the aftermath of 9/11 Kevin Hazzard felt that something was missing from his life—his days were too safe, too routine. A failed salesman turned local reporter, he wanted to test himself, see how he might respond to pressure and danger. He signed up for emergency medical training and became, at age twenty-six, a newly minted EMT running calls in the worst sections of Atlanta. His life entered a different realm—one of blood, violence, and amazing grace. Thoroughly intimidated at first and frequently terrified, he experienced on a nightly basis the adrenaline rush of walking into chaos. But in his downtime, Kevin reflected on how people's facades drop away when catastrophe strikes. As his hours on the job piled up, he realized he was beginning to see into the truth of things. There is no pretense five beats into a chest compression, or in an alley next to a crack den, or on a dimly lit highway where cars have collided. Eventually, what had at first seemed impossible happened: Kevin acquired mastery. And in the process he was able to discern the professional differences between his freewheeling peers, what marked each—as he termed them—as “a tourist,” “a true believer,” or “a killer.” Combining indelible scenes that remind us of life's fragile beauty with laugh-out-loud moments that keep us smiling through the worst, *A Thousand Naked Strangers* is an absorbing read about one man's journey of self-discovery—a trip that also teaches us about ourselves.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Action-packed” With blunt language and a raw narrative tone rich with gruesome detail, Hazzard immerses readers in the bloody, hardened reality of an emergency response team racing to accident scenes....[Features] anecdotes both thrilling and startlingly gory” A vivid, pummeling ride-along.” •Kirkus Reviews “Hazzard’s unblinking view of chaos is not for weak stomachs, but it’s variously raw, poetic, and profoundly hopeful.” •Publishers Weekly “A thrilling, captivating, and sometimes grisly glimpse into what it takes to be a first responder in the city of Atlanta. Hazzard’s prose is quick, witty, and fresh” This frank and morbidly funny memoir takes readers on a wild and unforgettable ride.” •Booklist “A shocking, utterly compelling tour de force that shows the dark heart of an Atlanta that I never knew existed” I couldn’t let the book go •it’s powerful enough to have turned me into an ambulance chaser in my own small South Carolina town, but it’s also very, very funny.” •Pat Conroy, author of *The Prince of Tides* and *The Great Santini* “No one has a closer view into our fearful hearts than the paramedic, and no one writes it like Kevin Hazzard. He’s given us a deep intimate portrait of the toll it takes to every day witness our most vulnerable moments.” •Joe Connelly, author of *Bringing Out the Dead* “Hazzard observes keenly, remembers faithfully, but also struggles to analyze his motives for loving those crazy nights on the bad side of town when the universe slips a gear and all hell breaks loose.” •J.Michael Lennon, author of the authorized biography *Norman Mailer* “More tragic and horrifying, but also more comical, than can be imagined.” •Katrina Firlik, author of *Another Day in the Frontal Lobe* “As absorbing as it is revealing.” •Bob Drury, coauthor of *The Heart of Everything There Is* “Buckle up and prepare for an eye-opening plunge into barely controlled chaos.” •Judy Melinek, M.D., coauthor of *Working Stiff* “Get ready to feel the gun-slinging, God-like power of running calls in the back of an ambulance.” •Julie Holland, M.D., author of *Weekends at Bellevue* “Take a terrific writer and put him in tragic, frantic, emotional, heartbreaking and freaking situations for years •you get *A Thousand Naked Strangers*” This book is one long rush.” •Phillip Jennings, author of *Nam-a-Rama* and *Goodbye Mexico* “An unstoppable adrenaline rush with lyrical moments of truth and beauty.” •Theresa Brown, author of *Critical Care*

Kevin Hazzard worked as a paramedic from 2004 to 2013, primarily at Grady Hospital in Atlanta. His

freelance journalism has appeared in Atlanta Magazine, Marietta Daily Journal, Creative Loafing, and Paste. He is the author of a novel, *Sleeping Dogs*, and *A Thousand Naked Strangers*. He and his family live in Hermosa Beach, California.

Kevin Hazzard, having already held positions in sales and journalism, decided in 2004 to take an Emergency Medical Services course at a local technical college. He passed the National Registry Exam and was hired as an EMT; later he would get the additional training needed to become a paramedic. Hazzard gives us a taste of the nine years he spent in Atlanta "running calls" in *A Thousand Naked Strangers*, a grisly, darkly humorous, profane, and at times poetic look at what it is like to live on the edge. Why would anyone willingly rush to pick up the pieces in the aftermath of violent domestic disputes; drug overdoses; horrific traffic accidents; and attempted suicides? Even if an individual were desperate for employment, why settle for a low-paying and sometimes thankless job that is stressful and potentially dangerous? The author sheepishly admits that, for him, altruism had very little to do with it. What kept him going was the camaraderie he developed with his partners and the challenge of dealing with crises successfully. Some EMTs get a high out of bringing men, women, and children back from the brink of death following a horrific car accident; delivering babies whose mothers go into labor sooner than expected; and knowing exactly what to do in situations that require experience, know-how, and the ability to act quickly under pressure. Hazzard's energetic, colorful, and punchy writing style (he makes excellent use of sentence fragments) has an intensity and immediacy that is electrifying. This is an unsettling work of non-fiction that will appeal to readers who want to see what an EMT sees and feel what he feels when the worst occurs. Nor does the author shy away from disturbing facts: There are EMTs and paramedics who are disrespectful of the dead and dying. Others are so incompetent, burned out, or anxious that they are all but useless. *A Thousand Naked Strangers* is a candid look at a period in Hazzard's life that must have felt like a prolonged episode of *The Twilight Zone*. How he survived emotionally is anyone's guess. Suffice it to say that few EMTs or paramedics are mentally strong and dedicated enough to become "lifers." Those who perform this vital service conscientiously, skillfully, and compassionately deserve our utmost admiration and gratitude.

If King's *On Writing* is the definitive must-read for authors, then Hazzard's *A Thousand Naked Strangers* is the same for EMTs, paramedics, and

anyone who wants to see a decade-long emergency medicine career from inception to burnout. Hilarious, touching, and often thought-provoking, *A Thousand Naked Strangers* follows a fledgling EMT through a series of cases so bizarre they have to be true. From the early days on a private bus to later days as part of Grady's elite, nothing about Hazzard's harrowing experiences will make you want to do this job (unless you're an adrenaline junkie or that rare breed with whom medicine clicks). I hail from a fifteen year medical field career myself, having known my share of second-guessers, "tourists," burnouts, and near-killers. A fantastic true-to-life telling of one of the most underappreciated occupations, I wish I could give *A Thousand Naked Strangers* ten stars. A must-read, can't-put-it-down page-turner because though the author may have been a paramedic, he's also one heck of a storyteller.

As an Atlanta citizen, a former medical assistant that cut her teeth in the ER, and a lover of medical autobiographies, I couldn't wait to get this book in my hands. It did not disappoint. It is medically accurate, raw in the truths of interacting with patients, and I found much of my story running parallel with Hazzard's. His method of writing is artistic as he paints pictures with his words and you experience what he experienced. He shows, not tells. Hazzard makes good on his promise to take the reader along on his wild ride to the edge and back.

Very entertaining, and well-written. His experience in journalism clearly shows. Having lived in Atlanta myself since 1992, I totally understood the references to Grady and the many slums and crack houses of the era. I read a million books and usually have about 600 in my wish list. I never ever write book reviews -- but I'm making a point to say how much I enjoyed this book. If the topic interests you at all (and why else would you be checking reviews?), get this book.

This book is an excellent synopsis of the journey of a tourist medic. He came in with a fire and it was quickly extinguished through no fault of his own. I have been a medic for thirty years and I remember when I reached the point where he was ready to quit. Instead I found myself overseas and loving the job again. Hopefully this book will inspire some to join a great profession and others to get out before it's too late.

Very well written and kept me very engaged. Very honest and witty. Made me better understand ambulance crews. Also made me realize how much they are taken for granted. It also showed how

their job impacted life, family and self. Medics do so much but do not get the acknowledgement they deserve. Thank you to ambulance crews everywhere

Kevin Hazzard writes a powerful and compelling revelation of a man continually wrestling with the underbelly of society. His commentary on the human condition proves to be nearly hypnotic at times, frightening quite frequently, pulling upon the full repertoire of emotion via the struggles of our existence: poverty, ignorance, indifference, death and addiction – every dark force within our modern life. He also shows our human strengths so often unrecognized or brought to our awareness except when we are given a break, a respite from the traumatic stresses endured, at such time we can gain our clarity and see that powerful forces of good nurtured us forward and helped us along the path.

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