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Working for the ambulance service is a job like no other. It is a career of contrasts; delivering emergency medical care requires quick thinking and calmness, and thrusts people into situations simultaneously tragic and comical; emergencies are unbelievable and removed from reality, yet they expose the minutiae of everyday life. In his memoir, *Emergency Admissions: memoirs of an ambulance driver*, Kit Wharton details his life working for the NHS (National Health Service) ambulance service in the UK. The book is a rip-roaring read at times, fast-paced and with dramatic jaw-dropping moments, as well as utterly sad realities and quiet reflections.

Within each chapter are mini snapshots of individuals' lives and these snapshot stories are grouped together by theme, or through interesting details that relate people in offbeat ways. There is no doubt that Wharton chose to include these stories because they are particularly memorable – for a variety of reasons, some of them eye watering. The memoir is partly an account of Wharton's encounters with the fascinating and characterful British public and partly Wharton's reflections on his own upbringing and past family life.

As the memoir progresses, there are an increasing number of flashback segments in which Wharton references his alcoholic parents or discusses prior jobs; who would have thought providing emergency medical care has aspects in common with journalism or furniture removal? Wharton dashes through his narrative, especially the details of his own life, and gives just enough information to tantalise the reader. There is a lingering feeling that his memoir could have filled two volumes; Wharton makes fleeting suggestions about life events that might have contributed to him finding his calling as an ambulance driver, but you get the impression that, were he to dig a little deeper, there would be more to say.

Each snapshot story is named after the person or couple it focuses on, but most stories begin with the initial information that ambulance staff receive about a patient; gender, age and symptoms. It reminds the reader that within the world of medicine, individuals are at first reduced to basic impersonal details; all the non-essentials stripped away, to focus on the patient's health. This reminder serves to amplify the positive impact ambulance staff can make on the lives of the people they help; medicine and healthcare can be frightening, so the empathy, care and interaction of ambulance staff can make all the difference to the individual who finds themselves unwell, or suddenly not in control of what is happening to their body.

At its heart, this memoir is about the bodily human experience. It situates us on the level of the senses and emotions. People are naked in Wharton's memoir, both figuratively...and literally. This is a visceral text and makes the reader consider the everyday experiences we take for granted and what it might be like to be unable to do those things.

Ambulance staff are entrusted with vulnerable people daily, but at times it is hard not to feel, as a reader, that the ambulance service is being taken advantage of by some and you wonder whether all recipients of care are equally deserving. Wharton's text, however, feels non-judgemental, although he, along with his colleague Val, enjoy their fair share of humorous quips and sarcastic remarks about patients. Also look out for characters Len and Fatima, who are highly entertaining when they appear. It goes without saying that ambulance service staff should be highly respected for the phenomenal job they do, but Wharton freely admits that they are not angels. Warts and all, he confesses when things go wrong and when the motivations of ambulance staff are not entirely selfless.

*Emergency Admissions* details the mundanity of everyday life, as we negotiate our own bodies and those of others. It is a reminder that we may be closer than we realise to our own death, or bodily fluids. Do not read this book whilst you are eating; from the stench of flesh that has not been cleaned, to urine-soaked sofas, Wharton tells all to the reader.

We get a strong sense of the individuals Wharton helps, through his accounts of them. The absurdity of what people consider to be normal within their everyday lives is interesting, and furthermore, the potential closeness of humour and tragedy in a situation is striking. However, at the centre of the stories are the commonalities we share as human beings and Wharton's accounts are humbling. We are also reminded that when dealing with patients, the family and friends of that individual require support as well and this can be a tricky balance. The stories show us that irrespective of our social status – how much money we have, or what we choose to do – we are all human beings and most of us will, at some point in our lives, require medical assistance. This might sound cliché, but Wharton weaves this acknowledgment into his narrative with subtlety.

Wharton's memoir is raw and it feels deliciously naughty at times. Sometimes rude, the text titters on the edge of indelicacy. The baseness of the language reflects the vulnerability and unrefined nature of the human body in heavily pressurised situations, when everything else is stripped away. From the revelatory details of patients' lives, to the coarse and colloquial language that frames some of the most pressurised, and some of the funniest, stories, you feel you are privy to secrets. It is surprising to find yourself nearly in tears and then close to laughing, whilst reading the same page. I did have to stifle a guffaw whilst reading the book on the train one day.

It does not matter if readers are unfamiliar with the UK's NHS or medicine in general, as you will find universally recognisable elements within the stories, and Wharton focuses on the human element, rather than the technical. What *Emergency Admissions* really highlights is that the ambulance service is a vital institution where medicine and humanity meet. Wharton's memoir is concerned with the drama of the everyday. You realise that the day somebody meets an

ambulance can be the worst day of their lives, or one they are most hopeful and grateful for. Either way, the presence of an ambulance in somebody's life will be highly emotive and evocative.