



By KAREN DAY

*The Last Time
I Committed Suicide*

A FUNNY MEMOIR ABOUT LIVING DANGEROUSLY

THE LAST TIME I COMMITTED SUICIDE

Contrary to its suggestive title, THE LAST TIME I COMMITTED SUICIDE is not a shocking confessional about sliced wrists or another heartbreaking “my-mother’s-keeper” memoir. Granted, there’s plenty of genocide, rape, torture and tears in these pages, but this story is more serious comedy than laughable tragedy, chronicling how I, working as a third-world journalist, learned to survive the world’s most dangerous places, which included my mother’s arms. More importantly, the journey allows me to find grace, beauty and forgiveness in the midst of humanity’s deprivations and ugliness, which includes my baggy thighs.

“Milk and Cookies with Dr. Anthrax.” “Victoria has a secret in Kabul.” “Gods and Momsters.” These are three of twenty chapter titles in my journalistic journey to becoming a better writer and an accidental human being. Afghan warlords, Saddam Hussein’s henchmen, Cuban voodoo practitioners and my suckling baby--they all prove easier to escape than negotiating my way in and out of the Burmese jungle and meetings with the military dictators who hold the Noble Peace Prize Winner, Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. I might be there still, if I weren’t a quick-talking, ancient and new and lactating mother. (Chapter Ten: Myanmar is not a Deli on E. 57th) Forget watching “Sopranos” reruns. This story has plenty of murderous crooks in far more exotic locales. The ending, however, is happy. Almost.

Ten years ago, the predictable luxuries and woes of middle-age and five years of struggling to become a failed fiction writer sent me into an identity crisis. My solution was to become a third-world journalist. The story begins backwards, as Chapter One, “Maybe Baby?” draws unlikely similarities between my experiences in the world’s most depressing and dangerous places and having a baby at 53. From that point, the story circles back to ten years earlier, where my life fell apart in order to finally start coming together.

“What doesn’t kill you makes your therapist rich,” is my personal twist on the old Darwinian cliché of evolution, which most people paraphrase as, “survival of the fittest.” My percentage of body fat alone disproves their theory. Darwin, in fact, argued the case for “survival of the most adaptive.” And I would agree, having spent more time than most testing the odds in post-war zones.

How and why I began my journalism career in Kabul, six months after the Taliban fell, is where Chapter Two begins. From that point, each chapter chronologically unwinds my adventures in Iraq, Cuba, Rwanda, Myanmar and life until the story returns to its beginning in Chapter Twenty, the conclusion, which explains the reasons I continue such madness—even with a new husband and baby at home.

“How do I handle all the tragedy without getting depressed?” That’s the *second* question people usually ask me on radio talk shows or at my public appearances, raising money for NGOs. This book answers by recounting my meetings with people great and anonymous, good and wicked, powerful and destitute. The universal humanity that emerges is wondrous and hopeful and the stories are amazing and true: like meeting the Afghan woman who lay atop her children to protect them from the US bombing. She survived, but her children died under her. Then there was the Dalai Lama, which brings up the *first* question that people usually ask me. “How come His Holiness is so happy when everything is so bad?” *Thirdly*, they ask if I can get them Richard Gere’s autograph.

This is not a self-indulgent trip to self-realization. Hard facts, sad realities and in some instances, even sadder outcomes tell the reader that the world is broken in many places. Still, hopeful anecdotes and solid alternatives woven between my personal revelations and humiliations show the simple and heart-rending ways people can and do make a difference. It’s still *all about me*, of course, but without the typical angst-to-grind, THE LAST TIME I COMMITTED SUICIDE is more like an entertaining diary about how I healed my-messed-up-self while trying to change the world-- without forgetting how to laugh. My attitude is often bad and funny, the adventures are true and unique, and the journey to self is universal and somewhat embarrassing. By the end of the memoir, both the readers and I discover that writing the world into a better place is not only my life’s work—it’s the purpose of my life.