



ST JOHN OF GOD
HEALTH SERVICES

EXCELLENCE IN MENTAL HEALTH

NEW BOOK CAPTURES CRIME SCENE HORROR

Monday 4 July 2005 – Sydney, Australia – When Esther McKay entered the tough, male-dominated world of forensic investigation, she soon found herself at deeply confronting and horrific crime scenes, often working alone and without supervision.

Eventually it became too much to bear. After years of long, lonely, exhausting days and nights, Esther had a breakdown and was discharged from the police force.

Esther's experience highlights that police officers are an occupational group at high risk for the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to their frequent exposure to human suffering, violence and death.

Turning serious illness into block buster fiction, Esther McKay captures her experiences in the new novel, *Crime Scene*, which is hitting the shelves on Monday 4 July.

Crime Scene takes us inside the life of a forensic investigator, and reveals as never before the extraordinary demands and dangers of forensic work.

In 1999, Esther was diagnosed with PTSD – a disorder which can occur following exposure to extreme stress. Symptoms of PTSD include the traumatic event being re-experienced in various ways, such as distressing recollections, recurrent upsetting dreams, and flashbacks.

“Day after day, my life was consumed by killings, distress and gruesome sights, each one adding another piece to an ever-growing mosaic that seemed to be made up of bloodied disposable gloves, plastic bags and human waste.

“My mind became filled with these remnants, storing them for later, when a trigger would jolt them back into my memory.

“I lived in constant fear of an impending disaster – being run over or being shot. I feared for the children's safety constantly and was extremely nervous when out in crowded places,” she said.

Esther's remarkable journey to recovery began in 2000 when she was referred to the PTSD treatment program at St John of God Health Services (the largest not-for-profit provider of private mental health care in NSW) by Dr Selwyn Smith.

According to Dr Selwyn Smith, Consultant Psychiatrist at St John of God Health Services, Esther went undiagnosed for nine years and without treatment for more than 10 years.

“Research indicates that treatment for PTSD is most effective within two years following the incident.

“By the time Esther received treatment, she had developed anxieties, including difficulties with food, and was not able to perform simple tasks like grocery shopping or walking along the street with the children in the pram,” said Dr Smith.

Following approximately two years of intensive treatment and grief counseling, Esther is on the road to recovery from PTSD.

“I no longer dwell on the negative things that I cannot change. Each day I find one thing that I enjoy, whether it be a colourful bird or beautiful sunset or seeing my kids smile. I appreciate all that I have,” said Esther.

According to Dr Smith, the problem is that police officers are trained not to show weakness.

“Many believe that discussion of emotional problems or the demonstration of feelings is a sign of weakness,” he said.

The good news is that a range of treatment options and therapies are available. The PTSD program at St John of God Health Services is designed to help people explore and understand their experiences, and develop more effective ways to alleviate their symptoms.

About the Author

Esther McKay served in the NSW Police Force for seventeen years, attaining the rank of Detective (technical) Senior Constable. She worked in Forensic Services for fifteen years, specialising in crime scene examination and vehicle identification.

She has a Diploma of Applied Science in Forensic Investigation (NSW Police) and was awarded the National Medal for service in 2001. Esther lives in Sydney with her husband and two children.

**INTERVIEWS MAY BE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST WITH A
CONSULTANT PSYCHIATRIST FROM ST JOHN OF GOD
HEALTH SERVICES FOR THE PURPOSE OF PUBLIC
EDUCATION ABOUT THIS MENTAL HEALTH TOPIC**

CONTACT HAUSMANN COMMUNICATIONS:

**AMY MCINTOSH - (02) 8353 5718
KYLIE WHETTON - (02) 8353 5737**