



# Death Becomes Us

*Pamela Skjolsvik*

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## **Death Becomes Us** Pamela Skjolsvik

Woody Allen once said, "I am not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens." For most of my life, that was my mantra. Almost everyone with a pulse fears death, but not everyone fears life. With crippling social anxiety, I feared both. But after an accidental call to a funeral home during my mid-life crisis trip to grad school, I reluctantly embarked on a journey to explore professions that dealt with death in order to come to terms with my own mortality. The result of this quirky trip is *Death Becomes Us*, a humorous memoir about what happens when a middle-aged, anxiety-filled, life-avoider attempts to investigate the last taboo of American culture. What started as an overzealous MFA thesis ended with my discovery that awareness of death, the one thing that collectively scares people the most is also the one thing that helped me to finally live. During my two years of research, I encountered an embalmer afraid of dying, a grieving EMT, an upbeat Hospice counselor, and a hopeful death row inmate. Emotionally I went from grieving at a funeral for my cigarettes to crying over a dead man's body just minutes after his execution; I went from avoidance and fear to eventual immersion and acceptance. I realized the importance of looking at death to fully realize the finite nature of life.

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