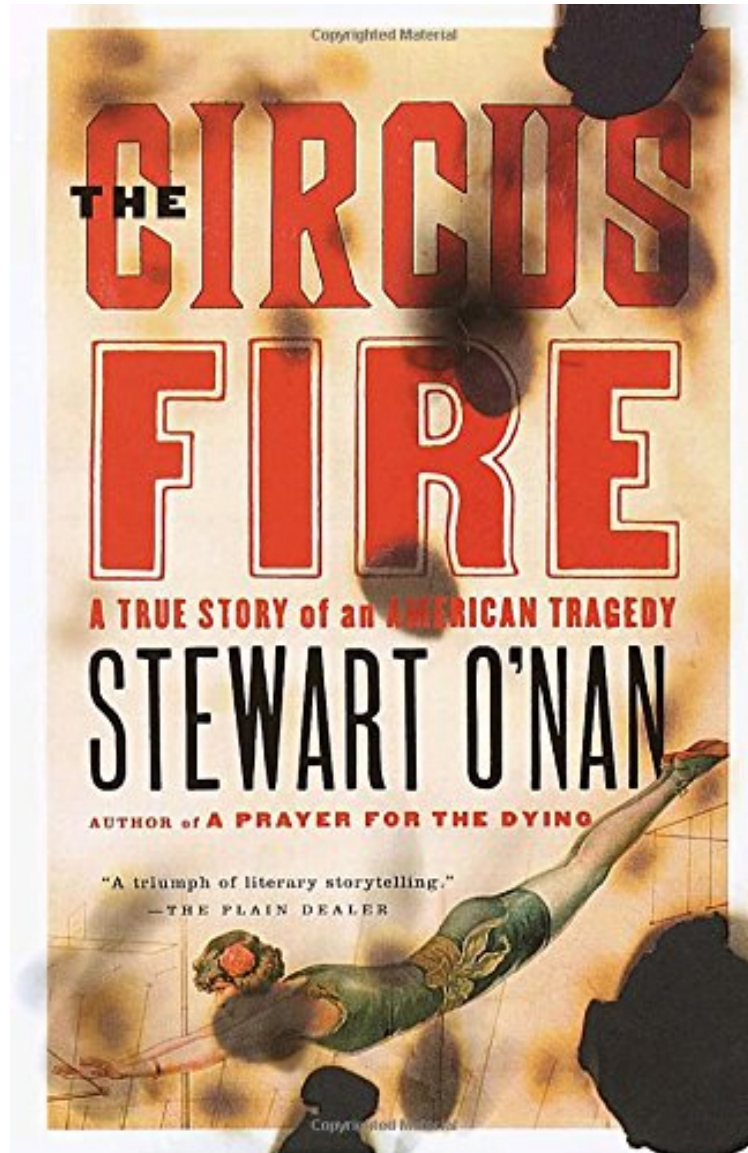


[Ebook free] The Circus Fire: A True Story of an American Tragedy

The Circus Fire: A True Story of an American Tragedy

Stewart O'Nan

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Stewart O'Nan : The Circus Fire: A True Story of an American Tragedy before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Circus Fire: A True Story of an American Tragedy:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Storytelling of a Tragic Event! By Crystal Garland I found this book after conducting a Google search looking for information about the Coconut Grove fire. I had no idea the circus fire even occurred nor had I heard about it. I purchased the book and couldn't put it down. The way O'Nan writes, you actually get a genuine feel for 1944; the way he describes the events taking place, I almost felt like I was

there! Even though the book is 370 pages, he talks about the fire early in the book (he makes reference to the Coconut Grove fire, the book I was originally looking for). I was wondering how he was going to fill in the remaining pages, but he will take you through not only the fire; but the victims recoveries (some would take years to recover from their burns); identification of the bodies; the political machine at the time and of course Little Miss 1565. The photographs in the book are haunting. There are a lot of characters in the book and I was having trouble keeping track of all of them, but was enthralled nonetheless. It will drive you to tears reading about this deadly fire, the acts of heroism and of course the deaths of many. This is a book I will unlikely never forget; well researched and written. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Heartbreaking and engaging By Piper's mama I've read a couple books about this fire, and this is by far the best written of them. It's a wonderful balance of facts and storytelling, fairly easy to follow the names of people and what happened to them. I have read it twice just to really follow the story along and it was much more clear the second time around. I rank this with "to sleep with the Angels" and "fire in the grove" both of those were very well written historical books about fires in the same vein of storytelling. 28 of 31 people found the following review helpful. A Remarkable Piece of Work By Roger Long This account of a ghastly event is extremely well researched and written. There is no hyperbole, no wringing of hands. The author simply lets the story tell itself through those who were there, for the most part. Here is but a single stunning example, from p.109: "Several survivors said the one thing they will never forget about the circus fire as long as they live is the sound of the animals as they burned alive. But there were no animals." How much more effective that is, as prose, than the alternative method of saying the same thing. Stories of individual selfishness and total selflessness abound, as they do in an accurate account of any great tragedy. The author does not omit either, so that the reader comes away with a feel for what it must have been like that hot July afternoon in Hartford, one month after D-Day. I had misgivings about how well this could be told, before I read the book. Not now. I'd recommend this to any circus fan, to anyone who wants to read something really well written and thoroughly researched. My only criticism is that the photos, many taken by amateurs, to be sure, are not well produced. I like the fact that they are on the pages where they fit, but in doing this on regular paper, details and drama are lost.

The acclaimed author of *A Prayer for the Dying* brings all his narrative gifts to bear on this gripping account of tragedy and heroism—the great Hartford circus fire of 1944. It was a midsummer afternoon, halfway through a Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus performance, when the big top caught fire. The tent had been waterproofed with a mixture of paraffin and gasoline; in seconds it was burning out of control. More than 8,000 people were trapped inside, and the ensuing disaster would eventually take 167 lives. Stewart O'Nan brings all his narrative gifts to bear on this gripping account of the great Hartford circus fire of 1944. Drawing on interviews with hundreds of survivors, O'Nan skillfully re-creates the horrific events and illuminates the psychological oddities of human behavior under stress: the mad scramble for the exits; the perilous effort to maneuver animals out of danger; the hero who tossed dozens of children to safety before being trampled to death. Brilliantly constructed and exceptionally moving, *The Circus Fire* is history at its most compelling.

.com As some 9,000 people watched the Wallendas begin their high-wire act on July 6, 1944, a fire started on the sidewall of the big top at the Ringling Brothers and Barnum Bailey Circus. The tent had been waterproofed with a mixture of 6,000 gallons of white gasoline and 18,000 pounds of paraffin; common practice for circuses at the time. In minutes, the entire tent was engulfed in flames. In the rush for the exits, people were trampled and burned—some beyond recognition. In the end, 167 were dead and 487 injured, of whom 140 required hospitalization. The city of Hartford, Connecticut, would never be the same. Stewart O'Nan brings his storytelling ability to the tragedy of *The Circus Fire*. Several survivors said the one thing they will never forget about the circus fire as long as they live is the sound of the animals as they burned alive. But there were no animals. O'Nan interviewed dozens of witnesses and examined police reports, newspaper accounts, and court documents while researching the fire. The result is an engrossing—though agonizingly painful—account of the great fire and its aftermath. He probes the tragedy's enduring mysteries—How did the fire start? Who are the unidentified victims? Who is Little Miss 1565?—and offers up conclusions of his own. He also provides remarkable vignettes of panic, heroism, and grief: Merle Evans and the band playing "The Stars and Stripes Forever," the circus disaster march, over and over; Bill Curlee, standing atop the wild animal chute throwing trapped children to safety; the Cote sisters, who made it home safely then broke down when asked why they were back so early. O'Nan tells their stories with compassion—albeit with a slight tendency toward the macabre. Moving, saddening, gruesome—yet car-crash compelling—*The Circus Fire* is a gripping read. Highly recommended. --Sunny Delaney From Publishers Weekly On July 6, 1944, the big top of the Ringling Bros. circus caught fire during an afternoon performance in Hartford, Conn., and quickly burned to the ground. One hundred and sixty-seven people were killed—most of them women and children—and hundreds more wounded. When acclaimed novelist O'Nan (*A Prayer for the Dying*, etc.) moved to Hartford 50 years later, he discovered that the town was still haunted by the tragedy. His history of the event is lyrical, gruesome and heartbreaking. At the heart of the narrative is O'Nan's harrowing, minute-by-minute account of the actual burning, during which nearly 9,000 people scrambled to

escape through just seven exits. One boy saved himself (and hundreds of others) by cutting a hole in the tent wall with his fishing knife. Another man literally threw children to safety before losing his footing and perishing in the blaze. Above them, the tent canvas, which had been waterproofed with gasoline andn paraffin, "rained down like napalm" on the necks and shoulders of the fleeing crowd. By the end, O'Nan reports, the heat was so intense that people died not from smoke inhalation, as in most fires, but by being cooked alive. O'Nan goes on to describe the bleak days after the disaster, when local families set about the morbid task of identifying loved ones, often possible only by using dental records. He also chronicles the four decades of detective work that led to the identification (in error, O'Nan believes) of a little girl whose body originally went unclaimed. This moving elegy does tribute both to the terrible tragedy and to O'Nan's talent as a writer. Bw photos. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalIn 1944, in Hartford, CT, the big top of Ringling Bros. Barnum Bailey Circus caught fire and burned to the ground in minutes. A capacity crowd of 10,000 was inside; many never got out. O'Nan takes us meticulously from the few steps before the setting up of the tent at the fatal site to the activities of some of the players into the 1990s. We encounter dozens of characters: people who almost went to the circus that day, families who did, along with the officials, investigators, and suspects. The cause of the inferno was never explained satisfactorily, but most observers eventually concluded that it was arson, and one unbalanced suspect seems the most likely candidate. The author devotes many words to horrible descriptions of injuries sufferedAthis is not a work for the squeamish. Interplay among the officials of the Ringling family is depicted, along with the political reaction to the disaster. Dick Hill's basic American intonations fit right in with this story; his approach is fairly emotionless here, and it works because the subject matter is so ghastly. A good selection for nonfiction collections.ADon Wismer, Cary Memorial Lib., Wayne, ME Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.