

READERS' GUIDE

Aftermath: A Firefighter's Life by Bryan Ratushniak

INTRODUCING *Aftermath*

Who doesn't run to the window when a fire truck rushes by? Bryan Ratushniak, has spent a thirty-two-year career working on the busiest fire trucks in Canada and has detailed his adventures in this insightful memoir.

The book details the emotional damage inflicted by the horrors of the job and how the author came out the other side more or less in one piece. Ratushniak shares the ups and downs of balancing home and professional life while trying to hold on to his sanity.

Aftermath: A Firefighter's Life is filled with candid, humorous, tragic, and hopeful stories from behind the "big red doors."



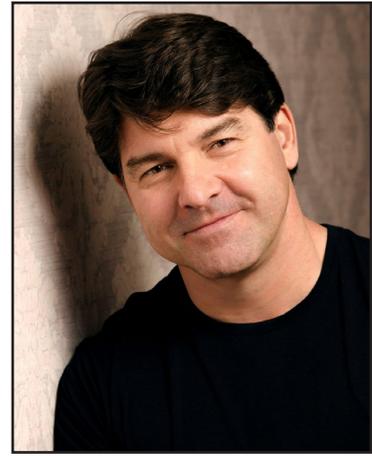
IMPORTANT THEMES

Mental Health – *Aftermath* is an open and honest account of how the amount of tragedy Bryan experienced on the job on a daily basis affected his mental health.

Resilience – Although Bryan struggled with anxiety and depression, he persevered, received help and is able to remember the good stories along with the bad.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why was it so difficult for Bryan to ask for help? Discuss the stigma around mental health issues, and how being thought of as a hero could make one reluctant to speak out about mental health issues.
2. If you were a first responder, how do you think you would handle the unique pressures of the job?
3. In Chapter 2, Bryan writes, "Still, I wonder if people really knew what emergency workers go through on a daily basis, would they begin to understand our frustrations and our occasional lack of empathy?" After reading *Aftermath*, how would you answer that question?
4. There were many devastating fires in Bryan's hometown while he was younger. Do you think there was a specific fire that influenced his decision to become a firefighter or was it a combination of everything he had experienced?
5. How does telling the story of a trauma or negative experience help the person process it?
6. How does humour help?
7. Have you ever felt the level of camaraderie in a workplace that Bryan describes with his fellow firefighters?
8. Which of the stories recounted in *Aftermath* stand out to you the most? Why?
9. Has reading *Aftermath* changed the way you think about firefighters and firefighting as a career?



ABOUT BRYAN

Originally from Geraldton, Ontario, Bryan Ratuszniak moved to Toronto as a young man to become a firefighter. He was promoted to the rank of Firefighter Captain before retiring. He received three letters of commendation for rescues made on the job. As a firefighter, he started competing as a bodybuilder and won Canadian Drug Free Athlete of the Year 2004 and Natural Mr. Canada 2005. He was October for the 1999 Toronto Firefighters Calendar, published in support of the Princess Margaret Hospital. Since retiring, Ratuszniak has worked in the film industry as a screenwriter and producer. He has two adult sons and lives in Toronto with his wife and dog.