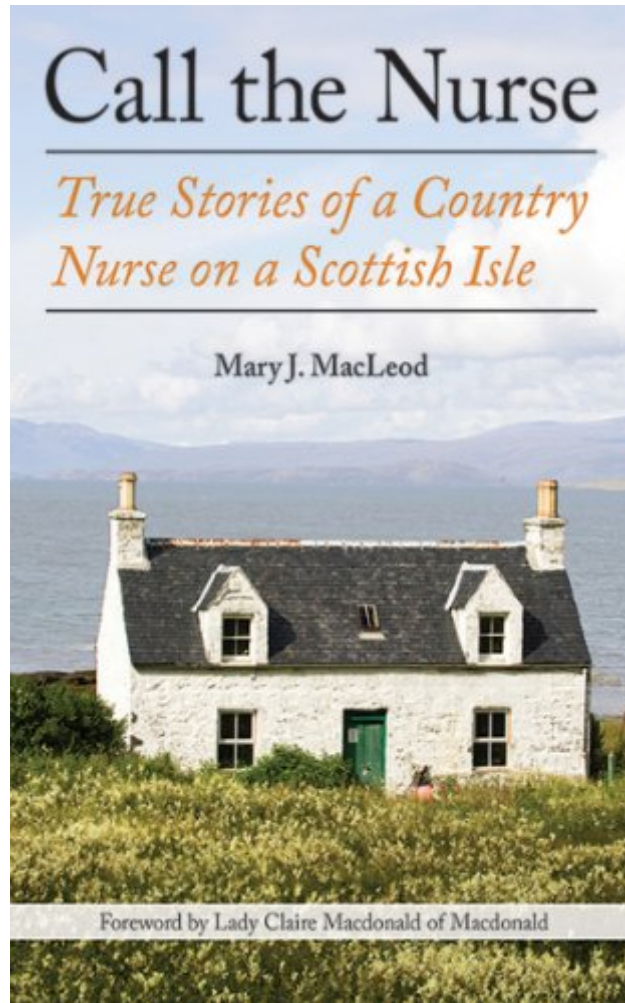


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Call The Nurse: True Stories Of A Country Nurse On A Scottish Isle



Synopsis

Tired of the pace and noise of life near London and longing for a better place to raise their young children, Mary J. MacLeod and her husband encountered their dream while vacationing on a remote island in the Scottish Hebrides. Enthralled by its windswept beauty, they soon were the proud owners of a near-derelict croft houseâa farmerâs stone cottageâon a small acre of land. Mary assumed duties as the islandâs district nurse. Call the Nurse is her account of the enchanted years she and her family spent there, coming to know its folk as both patients and friends. In anecdotes that are by turns funny, sad, moving, and tragic, she recalls them all, the crofters and their laird, the boatmen and tradesmen, young lovers and forbidding churchmen. Against the old-fashioned island culture and the grandeur of mountain and sea unfold indelible stories: a young woman carried through snow for airlift to the hospital; a rescue by boat; the marriage of a gentle giant and the island beauty; a ghostly encounter; the shocking discovery of a woman in chains; the flames of a heather fire at night; an unexploded bomb from World War II; and the joyful, tipsy celebration of a ceilidh. Gaelic fortitude meets a nurseâs compassion in these wonderful true stories from rural Scotland.

Book Information

File Size: 772 KB

Print Length: 320 pages

Publisher: Arcade Publishing (April 4, 2013)

Publication Date: April 4, 2013

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00C7XDYHO

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #32,967 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #21 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Medical eBooks > Nursing #30 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Medical #49 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National

Customer Reviews

The Hebrides, which are two groups of islands lying just off the west coast of mainland Scotland, provide the setting for this charming collection of anecdotal experiences of a country nurse during the 1970s. Throughout the book, MacLeod is so intent on preserving the privacy of the islanders that she refers to the "wild, exposed" island which she and her family made their home by the name "Papavray," so don't try looking it up on any map--you definitely won't find it. Despite her use of such a pseudonym, however, her experiences are made not one whit less real to us, her readers, who readily come to feel part of her innermost circle of friends, so welcome and beguiling is her approach. The delicacy and vibrancy of MacLeod's text resonates with the warmth and passion of the Hebridean islanders among whom she worked. Anyone who has ever lived close to the sea, and who has savored its salt tang on their lips, cannot help but become enthralled by the sensuous wonders of the landscape that she describes in such vivid and glowing terms. Almost at once, one feels close to her, and becomes intimately concerned with her own concerns, as she cycles her way around the island from one patient to another. Her description of the surrounding environs is close to mythical in the poetic cadence of her speech, fringing in its mysteriousness on much loved passages of Daphne du Maurier: "The sky had cleared and the winding road was bright in the moonlight, while the dark waters of small lochs sparkled among the reeds."

There can't be many writers who publish their first book aged 80. That is what Mary J MacLeod has done with 'Call the Nurse', and her memories of living life as a nurse on a remote Scottish island more than 40 years ago make for a fascinating read. In 1969 Mrs MacLeod and her husband George lived in the south of England. But they had become disillusioned with their way of life and all its pressures. They wanted to live a life less cluttered and frantic. They followed their dream and relocated with their young family to one of the remotest parts of the British Isles - the Hebridean islands off of Scotland's northwest coast. It was a world apart from the life they knew. On the island Papavray (the island's true identity is concealed to protect the privacy of those mentioned in the book) indoor toilets were still a luxury, while television was viewed with suspicion and even terror by some of the older residents. Nurse Mrs MacLeod soon became entwined in the lives of the island people, getting to know their stories, their troubles, their joys - and a few secrets - as she and her family found themselves increasingly touched by the warmth of the remote community. By the end of the book, the author refers to the many characters she met half-a-lifetime ago as 'the dear, unique people who still live on that remote, rocky island'. In 'Call the Nurse' (published in the UK as 'The Island Nurse') Mrs MacLeod takes us on a journey that captures the nuances of island life. It is a

touching memoir that traces many stories across the seasons of a year, from births and marriages, to tragedies and deaths. Keeping chapters short and fast-moving, Mrs MacLeod crams a remarkable number of vignettes and incidents into 300-odd pages.

"Call the Nurse" is a charming and interesting book of tales and memories from the author's experience serving as the local district nurse on an isolated island in the Hebrides beginning in the 1960s. As one of only two healthcare professionals on the island (the other an elderly doctor who lived on the other side of a mountain range), she was responsible for making rounds on local patients needing treatment, as well as responding to any emergencies that came up. This often entailed walking miles over unimproved footpaths to outlying cottages, or crossing the treacherous inter-island waters in a small boat to reach isolated cottagers on even smaller islands. Her patients exhibited the expected range of needs, and in some cases severe challenges, including dementia in elderly patients who could not face life away from their traditional "crofts" (small family farmsteads, worked by hand, often without machinery or electricity), and some cases of horrific abuse among isolated families with no oversight from the local community or authorities. Among her tales of attending to these patients, in trying and impoverished circumstances, she describes her own family's entry to the friendly but sometimes suspicious native island population (where some residents were still "newcomers" 60 years after moving into the local village), and her love of the wild countryside and its beauty. The stories are interesting but in most cases not dramatic. The author's writing sometimes reaches a truly poetic level, usually in descriptions of the country or the sky, but is often more pedestrian. The author details her colorful and sometimes eccentric neighbors and their remarkably cohesive, giving personalities, but not well enough that we truly come to know them.

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