

## Actress Kathryn Leigh Scott pens intimate memoir 'Last Dance at the Savoy'

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*Courtesy Kathryn Leigh Scott*

Actress and author [Kathryn Leigh Scott](#), has written nonfiction before. But “Last Dance at the Savoy” is a particularly intimate memoir, centering on her relationship with her late husband, Geoff Miller, as he struggled with the disease progressive supranuclear palsy, a neurological disease for which there is (so far) no cure and her role not just as wife but as caregiver to a loved one with a terminal illness. Geoff passed away on April 16, 2011. She was encouraged to keep a journal during her husband’s illness by one of her husband’s first doctors, which formed the basis for the book. She discussed “Last Dance at the Savoy” with Examiner at length.

Scott says:

"Almost everyone has been a caregiver, will be a caregiver or will need a caregiver. So the audience

for this could be very large. Writing this book has meant, and I was not going to write this book, by the way, a good year went by before I even considered doing it, but then I realized that I had that journal that one of Geoff's first doctors told me to keep, and I took a look at it and of course realized that I had a template for the book. There's nothing I write in the book that didn't actually happen. It was chronological and the progression of the disease was so clear. I think that's what really motivated me, that and every time someone asked me what Geoff died from and I would say PSP, and then I'd say progressive supranuclear palsy, and they had no idea what I was talking about. So it really had to do with raising awareness of the disease as well."

It wasn't easy to revisit those journal entries made during such a painful period of her life, to turn those entries into a publishable book:

"What I wrote at the time was very raw. And it's not that I altered what I wrote, but I had the benefit of a year, a year and a half. And so I had to deal with what I actually felt. And that's what's on the page. There was a never a time of day when I sat down to write when I wasn't in tears and had to get up and go and make a cup of tea or walk around the garden. It was very, very hard. One of the hardest experiences was actually reading the final draft of the book, and going into the studio and reading the book, because there's going to be an MP3 edition coming out very shortly, all three of those experiences were complete wipe-outs. It was very, very hard."

She also tried to limit the amount of her own emotional responses that made it into the finished book:

"When I did the rewrite on the book, the second draft, one of the things I found myself doing was taking out some of the emotional responses, which are really kind of heavy-handed. It didn't require that. Listen to the people who are relating their experiences of an earthquake on the six o'clock news, they're just telling it. And that's a good lesson."

The book she's written is frank, and almost painfully intimate. How does it feel to have such a revealing portrait of such personal matters out there for public consumption?

"I have a couple of book signings coming up," Scott says, "and many of the people that are going to be at these two book signings in Los Angeles are old friends and former colleagues of Geoff's. I'm already thinking about what I will say because when you write something so personal about somebody else—and in this case I have to keep reminding myself that Geoff was a journalist, that he was a writer, that he'd published some pretty hard-hitting stories—but still, how would he feel about me talking so plainly about very personal subject matter?"

Scott first met Geoff Miller at a party in New York City in 1968. She was a young actress on the TV show "Dark Shadows," he was editing the magazine "Los Angeles," which he'd also founded. Geoff Miller was very much in the prime of life when he was diagnosed with PSP, which eventually took his life. He was an accomplished professional, who had founded the magazine "Los Angeles," very much the model for the modern urban lifestyle magazine. She was at the party with her boyfriend, Ben Martin, a photographer for "Time," and Miller also had a girlfriend back home in LA. She admits to an

instant infatuation, but it was one she kept to herself for 20 years, when the two met again in LA, this time both single. Miller's longtime wife had finally succumbed after a long struggle with multiple sclerosis, and Scott was recently divorced. It should have been an idyllic romance, and seemed to start that way. She and Geoff Miller were both sophisticated urbanites with a taste for travel, jazz, fine dining and good wine. This should, by all rights, have been a perfect chapter II. Disaster was on the horizon, but it didn't announce itself loudly.

"Progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP) crept into our lives on cat's paws," she writes in "Last Dance at the Savoy," "insinuating itself without haste or fanfare. Looking back, there were early signs of its presence, but we couldn't have known it at the time. We mistook stiffening joints, forgetfulness, changes in vision, stumbles and even an occasional fall for nothing more than the vagaries of advancing years. There was no pain or suspicious shadow on an x-ray to alert us. There were no worrisome chronic conditions that couldn't be eased with Prilosec and a daily dose of prune juice. Until the falls became more frequent, more severe, and we came to realize something was wrong."

The change in circumstances created by a spouse with a life-threatening illness changes the relationship as well. She says: "When you're a caregiver, roles change...Caring for a spouse, or any loved one, the changing roles is one of the most significant things you have to deal with as part of the caregiving."

Still, Scott sees her book, among other things, as a romance:

"It's definitely a romance. Geoff has been the love of my life. We had a wonderful connection really from the beginning. And this is something I've wanted to address—when you are the caregiver for a spouse or a significant other, you meet with romance and one of the things I've wanted to address is something I always hear in support groups—I've been leading support groups lately—is the role-changing that happens within a relationship that people want to discuss. I address that straight on by saying that men may fall in love with their nurses, but they may perhaps fall out of love with the caregiver. It's a difficult row to hoe. When I realized that I was losing what had drawn us together in the first place, I really set about finding the connection within the circumstances we were dealing with."

Ironically, Geoff Miller had been a caregiver to a spouse himself:

"[I]n the beginning, he knew a whole lot more about what we were going to face down the road than I did. His first wife, Barbara, who I knew, had MS, and never went into remission. She was diagnosed shortly after they were married, I think within the first month, and she passed away 12 years later. MS is a motor neuron disease...it's a neurological disease and it has a similar progression. At the time she was diagnosed there was absolutely no treatment. So he really knew, when they told him he had a neurological disease, and that there was no treatment, no cure, what was going to happen. There were times he was more sensitive to what I was going through as a caregiver that I think perhaps somebody else would be. But he also didn't fail to remind me that he had done it for 12 years. And as

I say in the book, 'Yes, but you were 30 years younger than me and she was 90 pounds lighter.'"

Scott is candid, even hard on herself, in the book about times she lost her patience during her husband's illness. When this is pointed out, her response is surprising: "I took a bit of it out. Like my editor said, you're standing there with a whip flogging yourself. And I said 'But you never get over it.' Geoff, even 20 years after his wife passed away, and somebody would comment that he'd been so wonderful in caring for his wife, and he'd shake his head and he said 'All I think about are the times when I lost my patience.' I took out some of it because it was wearing. But I also wanted other caregivers to know that I get it, I've been there, I share those feelings."

"Last Dance at the Savoy" includes a lengthy afterword in which Scott lists resources for caregivers, particularly for those dealing with progressive supranuclear palsy, a disease which is often still misdiagnosed.

"I learned something from my husband, who was a magazine publisher. I'm a book publisher. The two worlds could not be more different. What I did learn from Geoff he said 'You know people will pick up a magazine at a newsstand and thumb through it, but you've got to give them something they need to take home. That's why they buy it.'...I realized someone could just thumb through the book and say 'Oh yeah, yeah I've been there,' but with the resource guide at the end it's something that becomes a reference. And also, I knew secondly how many of these things I needed to know as a caregiver, and it takes a while to find these things, so why not have it at your fingertips."

"Last Dance at the Savoy" also discusses, in some detail, the aftermath of Geoff's passing. Grief does not dissipate instantly.

"[T]hat's a whole long chapter," she says. "But again I was sort of referencing what Joan Didion did with her book about her husband and Joyce Carol Oates in her book, 'Widow.' The aftermath of caregiving is almost as important to talk about as the caregiving period itself. When you've altered your life to be able to assist somebody and then you no longer do that, you find yourself with a huge amount of time on your hands, and that time, unfortunately, is spent in a prolonged period of grief."

And not everyone gets it. Scott recalls a lunch with friends shortly after her husband's passing: "But one of my very closest friends, only two months after Geoff died, said 'Are you moving on—Are you seeing anyone?'"

And perhaps that says it all. Dealing with illness and grief is not, apparently, a natural skill. It has to be learned, all too frequently on the job. "Last Dance at the Savoy," in addition to being a compelling read and poignant memoir, is an instructive treatise as well.

Maria Shriver is going to publish Scott's blog piece on her website, [mariashriver.com](http://mariashriver.com) on the sixteenth of April, the fifth anniversary of Geoff's passing, as well as it feature in her newsletter. "Last Dance at the Savoy" is currently available in both print and e-book editions from Amazon.com, and an MP3 version of the book will be available soon. Reader reviews are particularly welcome. Additional

information is always available on Scott's own website, [kathrynleighscott.com](http://kathrynleighscott.com).



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