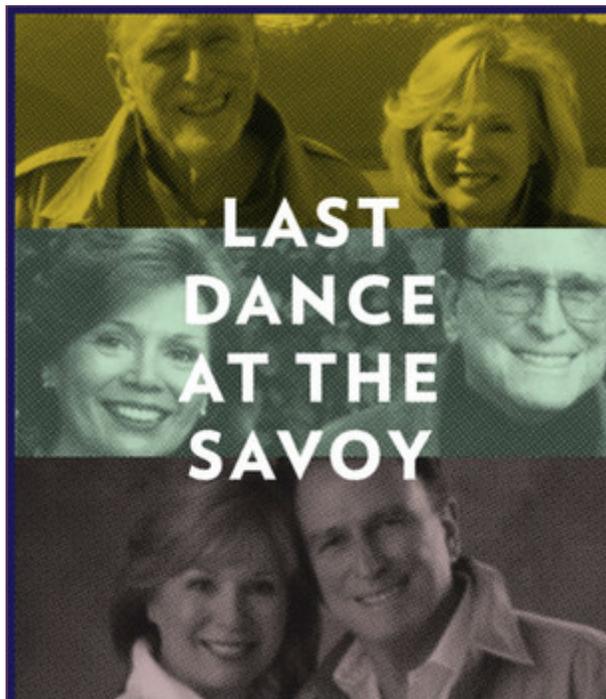


# Kathryn Leigh Scott's 'Last Dance at the Savoy' intimate memoir of a caregiver

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## Last Dance at the Savoy

Rating: ★★★★★

Actress and author [Kathryn Leigh Scott](#), no stranger to these pages, has written nonfiction before. She's relied on her personal experiences for some of those books: "The Bunny Years," a personal memoir interwoven with profiles of remarkable women who worked as Bunnies during the 25 year history of the Playboy Clubs, and behind-the-scenes accounts of the supernatural soap opera "Dark Shadows," relying in part on her own experience as a cast member, who played the characters Josette duPres and Maggie Evans on the show. But "Last Dance at the Savoy" is a particularly intimate memoir, centering on her relationship with her 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. The print edition of the book is now available in the United States, ahead of the official April 16th publication date, and can be ordered through Amazon.com.

The author's forward notes that names or identifying characteristics of certain individuals have been changed, and that certain events have been compressed or reordered. She also mentions, in the course of the book, that she was encouraged to keep a journal during her husband's illness, which may account for her detailed reconstructions of conversations.

This was a devastating time for both of them, not least because so little is known about the cause or treatment of a disease that affects some 20,000 Americans, a number similar to that of Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS). It is also a prime-of-life disease, often affecting patients (men slightly more than women) as young as sixty; people still active, vital, who should have good years left to them.

Kathryn Leigh 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. She writes that he "was tall and boyishly slim, with dark, curly hair, and looked a bit like Clark Kent with his boxy, black-framed eyeglasses." 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.

Scott writes: "In 1988, I'd written a coffee table book on film art that one of Geoff's editors selected for the magazine's December "Best Christmas Gift" feature. The editor proposed meeting him at the office prior to a lunch interview. On that fateful day, some twenty years after Geoff and I first met, he stopped by his editor's desk to congratulate me. We shook hands and I didn't want to let go. Nor, apparently, did he."

It should have been an idyllic romance, and seemed to start that way. That Kathryn Leigh Scott is a hardcore romantic is evident. And 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, "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."

Scott writes candidly about how PSP not only took her husband from her, but from himself as well. PSP not only diminished his balance, strength and motor skills, but his memory as well. The disease also produced mood swings and erratic behavior. Inevitably, Scott found herself at times losing patience, particularly when her husband insisted on exercising more independence than he was really up for. Outings became difficult, travel nearly impossible. Both of them began to lose weight. In a July, 2010 journal entry, she wrote:

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***“ I’ve tried to walk Geoff down the street and back for exercise, but he’s shaky. Therefore, his muscle tone deteriorates even more. We’ve had some rough nights when I was up at least five times helping him rearrange his body in bed or get him to the bathroom. I lost my temper twice out of sheer frustration and then went overboard trying to make up for it. There are times when I’m so frightened and it comes out in anger. “Damn it, move!” I snarled, when he froze in the middle of the room on the way to the bathroom. What do I do when we are both half-naked and it’s 3 a.m. and I can’t get him to budge?***

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As the story moves towards an inevitable conclusion – there is no cure for PSP – Scott writes with her accustomed assurance, candor and conversational ease. Missing is the humor that typically surfaces in her prose – this isn’t a funny story. She does recount one moment, on Valentine’s Day, no less, when she visited a cemetery to arrange burial for her husband, whose decline was hastening: “I drive to Holy Cross for my appointment—is this the most expensive place in Christendom to be buried? I’m shocked by the price, even with the ‘pre-need’ discount. Do they have sales? Coupons? My humor black, I wonder if Amazon might offer a better deal.” She’s hard on herself sometimes, and you can’t help wanting to tell her to cut herself some slack. It’s hard to be a caregiver and a spouse while trying to earn a living, and Scott’s experiences should provide hope to the many thousands in similar situations.

Scott provides a remarkably personal portrait of a romance that transcended tragedy – in sickness and in health, indeed – and along the way offers encouragement, support and practical advice to

caregivers in similar situations. Poignant, candid and almost painfully intimate, “Last Dance at the Savoy” is like having coffee with a close friend and discussing her recent loss. You’ll only wish you could take her hand while she talks.



**Jim Dixon**

Capital District Movies Examiner