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# Two Lives Entwined: Love and Its Costs

By Peter Osnos

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**Necessary Sins**

By Lynn Darling

*Dial, 233 pages, \$24*

I met Lee Lescaze by telex in October 1966. I had just started a junior job in the Washington Post's London office and had been sent to do a story for Monday's paper about that year's winner of the \$50,000 Enrico Fermi Award. It must have been a slow news day. Overnight, I received a message from Lescaze, an assistant foreign editor. It made an indelible impression because it was about my first byline in the paper: "Fronted your Fermi," the note said, "rejiggered to make less dry if not more wet."

What that meant was that my story was on page one but rewritten from top to bottom to make it more interesting. I was both thrilled and chagrined. Well, you have to start somewhere, and I couldn't have started with a better rewrite man than Lee Lescaze. Over time my relationship with Lee evolved. We became colleagues -- as reporters and editors -- in Washington, in war-ravaged Indochina and, later, in New York. We were also close friends. Lee died of cancer in July 1996.

With "Necessary Sins," Lee's widow, Lynn Darling, has chronicled their life together and the events -- from joyous to unbearably sad -- that surrounded their relationship. In her acknowledgments, my wife and I are thanked for our friendship and for being, as Ms. Darling puts it, "an inestimable link to someone we all hold dear." I am clearly in no position to write a conventional review of "Necessary Sins." But the book does allow me to reflect on Lee's life and to praise (without any claim to objectivity) the poignant honesty of Ms. Darling's account.

Lee Lescaze was the son of a celebrated Swiss-born architect of the Bauhaus period who had come to live in the U.S. Lee himself grew up in a townhouse in midtown Manhattan, eventually attending a New England prep school and Harvard. By the mid-1960s he was launched as a reporter and editor at the Washington Post and soon enough, to use the old phrase, as a foreign correspondent. (His dispatches from Vietnam, especially during the bloody Tet Offensive of 1968, were notable for their emotional toughness and writing flair.) He was dashing and dapper, with a droll wit that could turn biting after a few drinks. He had a serious interest in art and literature combined with a newsman's fascination with war, politics and poker.



The late Lee Lescaze, working at The Wall Street Journal in New York

The story of Lee and Lynn begins around 1980, a heady time at the Post. It was still the era of Ben Bradlee, the charismatic editor, and of Katharine Graham, the legendary publisher. The newspaper had emerged triumphant from the Watergate years and now vibrated with ambition and energy as its circulation and status rose. Lee was then the Post's White House correspondent. Lynn, 13 years his junior, was a dazzling feature writer in the paper's Style department.

Ms. Darling describes how a flirtation with Lee -- then a married man with three children -- turned into an affair. It is clear from her account that both were quickly aware of the dangers of what they were doing. They obviously felt intoxicated by the good fortune of their having found each other and thrilled by their new-found love. But the stakes were high. Within the rapture and fresh sense of possibility there was, to judge by Ms. Darling's telling, an intimation of ordeal -- an awareness of the pain they were causing others and, inevitably, themselves. (The scenes of Ms. Darling's first, difficult attempts to get to know Lee's young children are especially vivid.)

When Lee was named assistant managing editor in charge of Style, their relationship became known to the rest of the Post newsroom and, naturally, occasioned a certain amount of clucking. More important, Katharine Graham, it was believed, did not approve. Lee and Lynn realized that their days at the Post were numbered. Now officially a couple -- they married in 1986 -- they left the Post and moved to New York. Lynn worked for Newsday and later Esquire and Harper's Bazaar. Lee went to The Wall Street Journal, where, among other things, he served as foreign editor and was instrumental in developing the Journal's Weekend section (eventually launched in 1998). They settled in a downtown loft and began a new life together.

Then, in 1989, Lee's 11-year-old son, Adrien, was killed in a Washington car accident, a tragedy so profound that it subsumed all that preceded it. The birth of a daughter, Zoe, revived their lives until the summer of 1995, when Lee was diagnosed with the vengeful cancer that killed him months later. The loft became a bunker in which Lee and Lynn, together with Zoe, fought the waves of pain and despair. Lee's illness was an inexorable and harrowing assault, but until the last days, I can personally testify, he remained a suave and engaged companion.

I can't imagine that Lee's first family is entirely comfortable with seeing this story told in such a public way. His first wife, Becky, now happily remarried, and his two daughters, with families of their own, have no particular reason to share what happened with the rest of us. But the book's justifying purpose is as a testament to humanity -- in all its confusion, hurt,

love and resilience. At Lee's last birthday party, there were eight of us at the apartment, including Becky.

"Necessary Sins" is literally a labor of love; it is moving without being maudlin, unsparing without being unkind. At many points, the people it portrays might have done things differently, but life seems to run that way. Such qualities help to make "Necessary Sins" something of a universal story. I came away persuaded that you do not have to know these people, or the glamorous milieu in which they lived and worked, to care about them deeply, as you would the characters in a fine novel.

***Mr. Osnos is the founder and editor-at-large of PublicAffairs Books.***

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