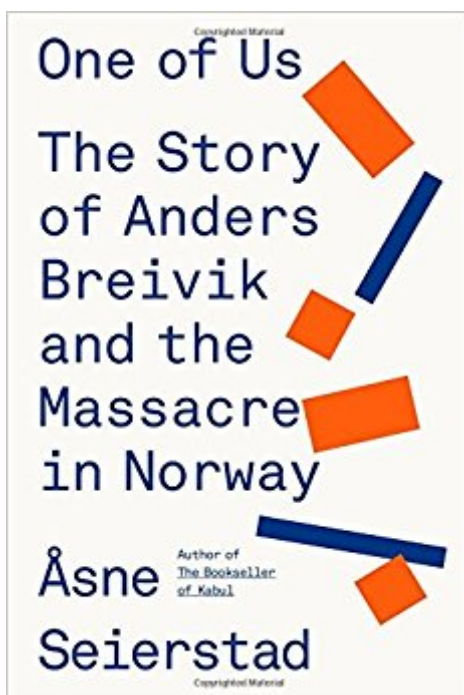


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# One Of Us: The Story Of Anders Breivik And The Massacre In Norway



## Synopsis

One of The New York Times Book Review's Ten Best Books of 2015 and a NYT Bestseller Widely acclaimed as a masterpiece, *One of Us* is essential reading for a time when mass killings are so grimly frequent. On July 22, 2011, Anders Behring Breivik detonated a bomb outside the Norwegian prime minister's office in central Oslo, killing eight people. He then proceeded to a youth camp on the wooded island of Utøya, where he killed sixty-nine more, most of them teenage members of the country's governing Labour Party. In *One of Us*, the journalist Siri Seierstad tells the story of this terrible day and its reverberations. How did Breivik, a gifted child from an affluent neighborhood in Oslo, become Europe's most reviled terrorist? How did he accomplish an astonishing one-man murder spree? And how did a famously peaceful and prosperous country cope with the slaughter of so many of its young? As in her international bestseller *The Bookseller of Kabul*, Seierstad excels at the vivid portraiture of lives under stress. She delves deep into Breivik's childhood, showing how a hip-hop and graffiti aficionado became a right-wing activist, a successful entrepreneur, and then an Internet game addict and self-styled master warrior who believed he could save Europe from the threat of Islam and multiculturalism. She writes with equal intimacy about Breivik's victims, tracing their political awakenings, teenage flirtations and hopes, and ill-fated journeys to the island. By the time Seierstad reaches Utøya and relates what happened there, we know both the killer and those he will kill. In the book's final act, Seierstad describes Breivik's tumultuous public trial. As Breivik took the stand and articulated his ideas, an entire country debated whether he should be deemed insane, and asked why a devastating sequence of police errors allowed one man to do so much harm. *One of Us* is at once a psychological study of violent extremism, a dramatic true crime procedural, and a compassionate inquiry into how a privileged society copes with homegrown evil. Lauded in Scandinavia for its literary merit and moral poise, *One of Us* is the true story of one of our age's most tragic events.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Named among the Best Books of the Year by The New York Times Book Review, NPR, The Boston Globe, The Guardian, BuzzFeed, Publishers Weekly, and Men's Journal. Finalist for the New York Public Library's 2016 Helen Bernstein Book Award for Excellence in Journalism. "One of Us has the feel of a nonfiction novel. Like Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, it has an omniscient narrator who tells the story of brutal murders and, by implication, sheds light on the society partly responsible for them. Although those two books are beautifully written, I found *One of Us* to be more powerful and compelling . . . As Seierstad weaves the stories of Utoya's campers with her central narrative about Breivik—revealing the mundane details of their family lives, their youthful ambitions, idealism and naiveté—the book attains an almost unbearable weight. This tragedy isn't literary and symbolic; it's the real thing . . . Seierstad has written a remarkable book, full of sorrow and compassion. After spending years away from home as a foreign correspondent in Afghanistan, Chechnya and Iraq, bearing witness to the crimes of other nations, she has confronted Norway's greatest trauma since the Nazi occupation, without flinching and without simplifying . . . *One of Us* must have been difficult to write, and yet from the opening pages it has an irresistible force." —Eric Schlosser, *The New York Times Book Review* "The roughly 70 pages Ms. Seierstad devotes to [the attacks] are harrowing in their forensic exactitude . . . These scenes are balanced by moments of tremendous heroism, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't read the final half of *One of Us* with perpetually moist cheeks . . . The nonfiction horror story told in *One of Us* moves slowly, inexorably and with tremendous authority . . . The epilogue, about her methods, should be required reading in journalism schools . . . It's said that exact detail is uniquely helpful when it comes to mending after terrible events. If it is true, as Stephen Jay Gould contended, that 'nothing matches the holiness and fascination of accurate and intricate detail,' then Ms. Seierstad has delivered a holy volume indeed." —Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* "Engrossing, important . . . There are many, many indelible images in Seierstad's account . . . As hard as it is to read about the attack, as frustrating as it is to learn how many delaying mistakes the first responders made and as monstrous as Breivik is, [his

victims] on that island that day were beautiful in their idealism. They deserve to be witnessed, which is the ultimate reason to read *One of Us*.

—Maureen Corrigan, NPR

“Fresh Air”

“One of Us is a masterpiece of journalism, a deeply painful chronicle of an inexplicable and horrifying attack that we’ll likely never understand . . . [A] brilliant, unforgettable book.”

—Michael Schaub, NPR

“One Of Us reads like a true crime novel, but it has the journalistic chops to back it up . . . Not only a stunning achievement in journalism, it’s a touchstone on how to write about tragedy with detail, honesty, and compassion.”

—Samantha Edwards, A.V. Club

“Unforgettable.”

—Kate Tuttle, The Boston Globe

“A vivid, thoroughly researched, and suspenseful account of the 2011 massacre that killed 77 people in her native Norway . . . The book features evocative portraits of some of the victims and brims with vivid descriptions of the villages, city squares, buildings, and fjords of Norway, touching on the country’s politics, changing demographics, and cultural shifts. With a reporter’s passion for details and a novelist’s sense of story, Seierstad’s book is at once an unforgettable account of a national tragedy and a lively portrait of contemporary Norway.”

—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

“Asne Seierstad’s *One of Us* is almost unbearable to read and absolutely impossible to turn away from: its account of an unthinkable tragedy is reported with staggering rigor and recounted with grace. It’s hard to leave this book without feeling incredible grief, without feeling shaken to the core, without feeling urged toward essential questions about what we call evil and how it comes to pass.”

—Leslie Jamison, author of *The Empathy Exams*

“A chilling descent into the mind of mass murderer Anders Breivik . . . [Seierstad’s] explorations of Breivik . . . have the unsettling quality that readers will associate with novelist Stieg Larsson . . . [One of Us] packs all the frightening power of a good horror novel.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“An exhaustive account . . . This book throws a great deal of light on the life and times of a miserable killer.”

—Ian Buruma, The Guardian

“This is journalism at its very best . . . Undoubtedly Seierstad’s most powerful narrative to date.”

—Matthew Campbell, The Sunday Times

“An astonishing piece of work . . . One of Us looks straight at horror and doesn’t flinch: it is classic reporting . . . We need to take note.”

—David Sexton, London Evening Standard

“Scrupulously researched . . . [Seierstad] has a remarkable eye for the haunting detail, particularly of empathy, and of grief.”

—Craig Brown, Daily Mail

“Powerful . . . It’s hard to see how, as a definitive account of what happened that awful July day, it could ever be bettered.”

—Eilís O’Hanlon, Irish Independent

“[A] masterful and forensically detailed account of what may be the first cultural-ideological spree killing in history.”

—Stav Sherez, The

Telegraph – “A stunningly good piece of journalism . . . a rich and timely study.”

– Jonathan Green, Sydney Morning Herald – “Seierstad’s enormously well written depictions of the perpetrator, the victims, and the Norway where this could happen makes the abstract real and shows us that the most horrible things can take place among all that we perceive as safe and normal. The wounds from Utøya will not heal on its own. They need Seierstad’s brave, sensitive, and competent treatment. Seierstad succeeds in writing the dead back to life, even though the story inexorably pushes them to a tragic ending.”

– Sam Sundgren, Svenska Dagbladet – “It is a broad, well written, and important story, in form and writing much like a novel. Seierstad follows some of the people whose destinies abruptly cross one another on the island of Utøya, partly the perpetrator and partly some of his victims. She meets them all with compassion, at eye level--a close-up technique that makes the moment when the bullets start to fly almost unbearable. I have seldom read a depiction of violence under such great agony.”

– Lars Linder, Dagens Nyheter

Seierstad is an award-winning Norwegian journalist and writer known for her work as a war correspondent. She is the author of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, *One Hundred and One Days: A Baghdad Journal*, and *Angel of Grozny: Inside Chechnya*. She lives in Oslo, Norway.

Beautifully written by the talented Norwegian journalist Seierstad, “One of Us” is the story of Anders Breivik who, in 2011, committed the most horrendous mass murder in Norway in modern times. Seierstad draws on official documents, extensive interviews and courtroom observations to detail Breivik’s life from his troubled childhood, through his illegal “tagging” and descent into gaming and the paranoid world of anti-Muslim ranting. His fevered bomb-construction and murderous explosive attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister leads him to the island where a group of teenagers are enjoying a summer holiday. The cold-blooded murders of sixty-nine youngsters is so powerful that it had me weeping as if those children were my own. In following Breivik’s warped life, Seierstad scrapes away the gloss on Norway’s efforts to integrate refugees into society and lays bare the gross failings of Norway’s police effort. The trial of the murderer, Breivik, and his early life in prison is part of this engrossing tale. It’s absolutely the most powerful book I’ve ever read.

ONE OF US is the story of a monstrous crime and bizarre act of terrorism. Its culmination is the gruesome 72-page chapter “Friday,” which reconstructs

Breivik's bombing of the Norwegian Prime Minister's office (eight killed and at least 209 injured) on July 22, 2011 and his massacre a few hours later of 69 people, mostly defenseless teenagers, at a summer camp. ONE OF US is journalism and Asne Seierstad does a tremendous job at presenting the backstory and facts of Breivik's crimes. As she points out in her epilogue, there is a voluminous record of these crimes, due to police interrogation of Breivik, the prosecutor's decision to investigate and document each murder, and analysis of Breivik by numerous court-appointed psychiatrists. This record enables Seierstad to present the sequence and details of many murders at the camp and even enter Breivik's mind during his murderous spree. For example: "He fired at someone swimming. Between the trees he spied two figures. A Norwegian man and an Arab woman, he would later call them. They looked very disorientated, he thought. I read ONE OF US with several questions in mind. These included:

- o Who could commit such a heinous deed? Breivik was an ambitious and delusional narcissist who, before committing his crimes, spent five years alone in his room playing intense computer games, visiting lunatic-fringe web sites, and trying to develop relationships with right-wing bloggers. Observed a court psychiatrist:

"At his core, there is just a deeply lonely man. We have here not only a right-wing extremist bastard. His personality and extreme right-wing ideology combined in an effort to get out of his own prison."

- o What actually happened? Seierstad gets an A+.
- o Did the police respond competently? Throughout the chapter "Friday", Seierstad shows how the police reacted as Breivik detonated his bomb and carried on his hour-long massacre. This response was utterly incompetent. But it is also overpowered in the narrative by the egregiousness of Breivik's actions. As a result, I was pleased when Seierstad, near the end of her book, allowed a father of a murdered boy to recapitulate the policing debacle. "Could one say that the police were inattentive on 22 July? Could one say the authorities were inattentive beforehand? Could one say it was irresponsible that the crew of Norway's sole police helicopter were all on leave for the whole of July? Could one say that individual police officers had not followed the instructions for a 'shooting in progress' situation, indicating that a direct intervention was required? Should anyone be charged with negligence?"
- Nonetheless, there is a flaw in this book that I found distracting. It is that Seierstad, a journalist, doesn't do very good character sketches. As a result, her portrayals of the victims of this atrocity are dull and unconvincing. Yes, these were elite and successful teenagers at the Utoya summer camp and Seierstad wants to show respect to them and

their parents. But in doing so, she makes the victims virtuously bland. Not an easy read but recommended.

If you're just looking for cheap thrills, you'll probably be impatient with "One of Us," because I can't remember the last time I read a true crime book with such vivid detail, about both the killer and his victims. I was fascinated by Anders' backstory and how he developed a motivation for his horrible crimes. That said, this book is hardly clinical--Seierstad's description of the massacre left me breathless and petrified. And the fact that the author takes the time and care to tell us about some of the victims' lives makes everything so much more powerful--the only thing I can compare it to Robert Kolker's "Lost Girls," in which the author *only* can write about the victims' lives (as their murderer is still unknown). Letting us get to know some of the victims makes the inevitable tragedy that much more "real"--and I felt like I was mourning the victims for days and days after I finished reading the book.

Yes, it's long and full of details but in order to know the full story of the massacre, you had to learn about his childhood and his friends. When I was first reading this book, I had to look at the description once more to make sure that it was NON-fiction. I didn't see how she could have possibly researched this material in such depth. I sneaked a peak to Wikipedia. It has a long description of the massacre, but doesn't tell about the others who were once his friends. This is what made the book so interesting. One thing that made me pause was how many social services were offered to the family and to Anders when he was small. They all tried their very best to help, but evidently pouring money into social services doesn't always work. Seierstad should have received awards for this book. She is an excellent author. I'm going to order another of her books.

This was a stunning read, richly researched, carefully but excitingly written, a book very difficult to put down, and once out down impossible to forget. I can hardly remember another book I have read that gripped me so deeply. It raises many crucial questions in this age of terrorism. First, just how is terrorism to be defined? Was Breivik terrorist or murderer? Second, was he mad or a reasoned political actor, whose actions were murder for a cause? Third, was he only delusional in his notion of being a commander in the Knights Templar movement, of which there seems to be no evidence of its existence, or was a sort of victim of right wing internet absurdities? Much of his trial and conviction revolved around these sorts of questions. He is in prison in Norway because he was found responsible for his actions, but precisely how that responsibility is to be construed is far from

clear. This is masterful reporting in every way, and I urge you to read this extraordinary book. It will haunt me for a long time.

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