



# Don't Mean Nothing

By Susan O'Neill

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In this debut fiction collection--the first by a nurse who served in Viet Nam--Susan O'Neill offers a glimpse into the war from a female perspective. These stories are about women, and men, who served in three combat hospitals in 1969 and 1970. They are interconnected, peopled by one-time "stars" and recurring characters, and they deal both with both the minutia of everyday life in wartime, and grander, more over-reaching themes--love and loss, faith and despair, morality, futility, military idiosyncrasy, magic, and the cost to the soul of a year in war's very particular hell. The stories are purely fictional, yet based loosely on the author's experiences, and they are laced as liberally with black humor as with pathos.

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## **Don't Mean Nothing** By Susan O'Neill Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2063346 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Serving House Books
- Published on: 2010-04-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .64" w x 6.00" l, .83 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 252 pages

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

It's a pleasure when a new writer has something to say and says it well. Former army nurse O'Neill's debut story collection captures the physical and psychological tensions of her 13-month tour of duty in Vietnam with refreshing maturity and a profound sense of compassion. The title, she explains in her penetratingly honest introduction, is "an all-purpose underdog rallying cry a sarcastic admixture of 'cool,' comedy, irony, agony, bitterness, frustration, resignation, and despair." It addresses the need of the Americans in Vietnam to harden themselves while maintaining their humanity a battle that often seems as unwinnable as the war. O'Neill presents a portrait gallery of nurses, soldiers, and natives, grouped into three sections reflecting the three hospitals where she worked. In "The Boy from Montana," a veteran nurse recalls a casualty of war along with her naïve assumptions about medical conditions under fire; "Butch" details the attachment an American soldier forges with a little Vietnamese boy. "Monkey on Our Backs" follows a nurse's efforts to rid the world of her commanding officer's annoying pet, and features a bizarrely funny confession and some unexpected entrepreneurial ingenuity. In another darkly humorous tale, "Commendation," an archetypal schemer named Scully provides a cynic's guide to bureaucratic logic. While many of the images Bob Hope's USO show, the secret war in Cambodia, the music of the times are familiar, they are made fresh through the nurse's viewpoint. O'Neill's stories are both entertaining and thought-provoking, especially when she depicts feigned indifference to all kinds of pain. Focused and sympathetic, this is a valuable contribution to the mostly macho literature of Vietnam. Agent, Nat Sobel. 5-city author tour.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-O'Neill served as an operating-room nurse in Vietnam from the spring of 1969 till early summer 1970. At the time, her anger and the need to forget kept her from writing about her experience. Now in middle age, she has the perspective to see the situation more clearly and offers a stark, often darkly humorous picture of her Vietnam War. Her stories are fictional accounts of her recollections from three very different hospitals in which she served. O'Neill reminds readers that while soldiers suffered the guilt of killing, the nurses felt the pangs of survivor's guilt. They faced dying and maimed soldiers, many of them in their teens, as well as Vietnamese men, women, and children caught in the war's destruction. Possibly most complex of all, as the only females in a world of battle-charged young men, they faced unrelenting, strident cravings for sex from the men with whom they served. Some women were used, abused, and even raped. These stories offer snapshots in the lives of a series of characters facing war's bloody results and dealing with it as they can-through drugs, through sex, through flaunting the rules, or even by putting a hit contract out on a monkey. Most of the players are barely beyond their teens and their attitudes and actions will strike a chord with most young adults. This is a fascinating glimpse of the Vietnam War from a very different perspective.

*Carol DeAngelo, Kings Park Library, Burke, VA*

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From [Booklist](#)

This collection of short stories is unique in its representation of a group from whom we rarely hear in the literature of the Vietnam War: the women who were sent there. Of course, these are not stories of combat, since at that time women weren't involved in the battlefield. But they were in nurses' uniforms and they were USO aides, and in other ways, too, they served in the war. Consequently, O'Neill's stories are of people who fight their battles outside the combat zone: a hapless grunt falls from the height of seven feet and now doesn't

feel anything from the waist down, a nurse determines the future of her out-of-wedlock child, and another nurse finds both the privileges and the perils of rank. *Don't mean nothing* is actually a term that, along with other expressions, had meaning to those who were "in country" in Vietnam. That the war haunted so many who participated in it is shown by the fact that O'Neill waited 30 years to give voice to her feelings in these stories. *Marlene Chamberlain*

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Cornell Smith:**

What do you about book? It is not important along with you? Or just adding material when you really need something to explain what yours problem? How about your extra time? Or are you busy particular person? If you don't have spare time to perform others business, it is give you a sense of feeling bored faster. And you have extra time? What did you do? Every individual has many questions above. They should answer that question simply because just their can do in which. It said that about book. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is appropriate. Because start from on pre-school until university need this kind of Don't Mean Nothing to read.

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#### **Isaiah Owens:**

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation or perhaps go to the outside with them

family or their friend. Do you realize? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or perhaps playing video games all day long. If you want to try to find a new activity honestly, that is look different you can read any book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent the whole day to reading a publication. The book Don't Mean Nothing it is rather good to read. There are a lot of those who recommended this book. These were enjoying reading this book. Should you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy typically the e-book. You can m0ore very easily to read this book out of your smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book has high quality.

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