

On the shelf: 118 Days: Christian Peacemaker Teams Held Hostage in Iraq, edited by Tricia Gates Brown

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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When four men affiliated with [Christian Peacemaker Teams](#) were abducted in Iraq, [media coverage](#) made little mention of the fact that one of them is gay. This wasn't because we'd finally gotten to a place where this was not considered newsworthy. Instead, it was the result of a coordinated effort to keep Canadian Jim Loney's sexual identity quiet for his own safety.

In March 2006, American Tom Fox [was killed](#) just two weeks before the other members of the team [were freed](#).

CPT gathered various accounts of the crisis for a book, and the publisher assured the organization that it would not cut passages dealing with same-sex relationships.

But, as the introductory material to *118 Days* [explains](#), after two successive publishers insisted on cuts to a piece by Loney's partner, Dan Hunt, CPT decided to self-publish instead, releasing the book this past summer. Now [Cascadia](#) is putting out an (uncensored) edition.

CPT's

unwillingness to cave is a service to readers—Hunt's piece is one of the book's most moving. He describes trying to cope with his partner's captivity while also struggling to be acknowledged as Loney's next-of-kin. Also striking is a chapter by William Payne, a member of Loney and Hunt's Toronto [Catholic Worker](#) community, that explores the wrenching decision to hide Loney's sexual identity during his captivity and the difficult task of carrying this

out.

[Michele Naar-Obed](#)

tells of a trip to the chaotic local morgue to look for the four captives' bodies. The horrifying story makes its point: in crisis mode, CPT was participating in what was just another day for Baghdad's population. Beth Pyles, who accompanied Tom Fox's body as far as the U.S. military plane transporting it to the States, was struck by the care and respect with which the soldiers treated both Fox's remains and those of an Iraqi detainee on the same plane. "Even in death," writes Pyles, "Tom accompanies an Iraqi safely to his destination."

There's a general thread of media criticism in *118 Days*, and [Simon Barrow](#) and [Tim Nafziger](#)

take on the press directly, telling how journalists and editors "wrote peace out of the script" by adopting a narrative that presented CPT and the hostages as naive, idealistic, even anti-American.

The book might be stronger if it were leaner, if the all-angles-and-voices approach were reined in a bit. Yet some of the less obvious contributions are essential. Watani Stiner, who's serving a life sentence at California's San Quentin State Prison, relays a debate he had with two fellow prisoners after hearing the news of the abduction.

"Why would they go all the way over there in the first place?" asks his friend. "So many ways to lose your life. Why give it away voluntarily? Once you're dead, you're dead!"

Each part of this quote begs for a Christian response. And like CPT, Stiner—a longtime fugitive who turned himself in in exchange for his family's safety—understands that this response is never passive, that peacemaking means so much more than just denouncing violence and steering clear of it.

"I loved my children more than I hated my incarceration," he explains. "Tom Fox, Harmeet Sooden, Jim Loney, and Norman Kember must have loved peace more

than they hated war."