

Baby Steps

John Rollo

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This memoir of life as an amputee affirms the beauty of life, even when the body undergoes drastic changes.

Baby Steps is John Rollo's graphic and inspiring account of his journey from near-death experience to recovery, aided by the love of his family and friends and his own unquenchable optimism.

Prior to the day his heart stopped beating, John Rollo was a man full of energy and zest for life, but everything changed drastically when a heart attack following spinal surgery led to a triple bypass. Intubated and in a drug-induced coma, he woke up to a nightmare—the knowledge that loss of blood flow to his feet would lead to his becoming a bilateral below-the-knee amputee.

A family man, retired business owner, and world traveler, Rollo had certainly not included life as an amputee in his playbook. Though he did his best to prepare for what lay ahead, he admits to having been “right-down-to-the-bone scared.” In Facebook posts to family and friends, and in the intimate narrative of the book, Rollo reveals his struggles with depression, shares what his treatments entailed, and gives glimpses of life in hospital wards and rehab leading up to his return home.

The narrative takes a no-nonsense, down-to-earth approach, offering firsthand insight into the world of people with disabilities, where the daily activities that the able-bodied take for granted become mountains to be conquered. Possessed of a survivor's resilient spirit, Rollo describes his struggle to keep himself anchored on the positive side, and his writing gives evidence of his lively and often wicked wit, his enjoyment of black humor, and his strength and vulnerability.

The prose is casual, written in the manner in which one would speak. A foreword by Rollo's daughter gives a loving glimpse of the author and neatly sets the stage for the events to come, though early context for the events leading up to Rollo's surgery is missed.

While Rollo gives the Canadian health care and rehabilitation system a positive rating overall, he laments the lack of attention given to patients' mental health and notes that many who were consigned to long-term care facilities might have been able to return to their homes had psychological support been available to them.

Crediting the power of music and poetry to elevate mood and spirit, Rollo has included some of his strong, heartfelt poems in the text and has also enhanced it with his own photographs. While some of these are filled with light, joy, and beauty, the images and descriptions of his treatments may disturb sensitive readers.

Filled with wise counsel and coping strategies for those facing the challenges of living as an amputee, John Rollo's *Baby Steps* strongly affirms that, although it will never be the same, life is still worth living, and can be filled with love, meaning, and happiness.

KRISTINE MORRIS (June 13, 2016)

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