

Clarion Review ★★★★☆

BIOGRAPHY

## Don't Ask Me How I Feel - I Have MS

**Stephen Knapp**

(December 2008)

Softcover \$15.70 (400pp)

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*The boundary condition of the universe is that it has no boundary.*

—Stephen Hawking

"I don't see a water glass as half empty or half full. I see the potential of what the water can do to make life better" Stephen Knapp writes in his memoir and inspirational book *Don't Ask Me How I Feel: I Have MS*.

On October 10 2002 Knapp was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Although he showed no significant symptoms at that time Knapp's neurologist called him a "walking time bomb." He experienced the whole emotional spectrum as described by Elizabeth Kubler Ross in her groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying*: Denial Anger Bargaining Depression and Acceptance. As the author examines his past and recalls occurrences of head trauma and other injuries that stem back to when he was a baby his book at first seems to be an attempt at exorcising his personal demons and a search for an answer to the obvious question "Why him?" More so *Don't Ask Me how I Feel* becomes an examination of key points in Knapp's life and his growth as a human being. Anyone who has faced some kind of harsh adversity can identify with Knapp and receive validation and inspiration from his story.

Starting with some of his earliest memories Knapp paints a vivid landscape of what life was like for a Baby-Boomer growing up in 1950s' Coffeyville Kansas: "It was a friendly safe small Midwestern town and a great place to grow up in." Knapp was one of the thousands of young men in post-World War II America who was given the chance at success that past generations were denied. "I was destined to the proverbial All American boy" Knapp writes. "I had everything going for me. I had every possible reason to succeed with every impediment meticulously removed to insure a wonderfully fantastic life."

But even as a child the author exhibited unrecognized signs of neurological impairment that seemed more prominent in the left side of his body. Sometimes he would stare off into space with his mouth wide open and he moved stiffly although he never actually felt the stiffness. As far as he was concerned his functioning was normal. At night as a child he would rock himself to sleep because of a "funny" feeling in his legs. Smiling was strange for Knapp: "My smile always bothered me. It was crooked. I smiled regular on the right side of my face but I couldn't make the left side of my face smile the same way." Like most people Knapp's family friends and teachers dismissed his symptoms as minor tics. "I was a walking enigma and clueless as to why I had MS all my life and just didn't know how to read the signs" he writes. "But then no one else did either...I have been plodding along for well over fifty years..."

Readers travel with him and will appreciate his honesty as he ascertains that the reasons *why* he has MS are not as important as the questions of *how* he chooses to deal with his disease and *what* he can do to enrich his and his family's life during the finite time he has left. His prose is exuberant and gorgeous full of self-deprecating humor. A captivating storyteller and humble philosopher Knapp's only shortcoming is that his book boils over with typos and spelling errors—sour-grapes to such a fine wine.

(August 21, 2009)

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