Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Humbled by the Gift of Life: Reflections on Receiving a Lung Transplant
Diane Tefft Young
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Diane Tefft Young's new memoir, *Humbled by the Gift of Life: Reflections on Receiving a Lung Transplant*, should be required reading for every adult facing the prospect of an organ transplant, either as a recipient or a donor. In fact, it would be well worth reading for anyone even contemplating checking the "organ donor" box on his or her driver's license renewal application. To read so simply about "what it takes" and "what it means" to be an organ transplant recipient is both an eye-opening and a comforting experience.

Young succinctly recounts the six-year period of her life from diagnosis of a progressive, potentially fatal lung disease to recovery from a successful lung transplant. Instead of focusing on medical details, she speaks of the emotional and spiritual strengths she developed, fine-tuned, and relied upon in order to face her illness and prepare for her future.

"Thoughts of even a partial recovery from the disease never entered my mind as I was told from the beginning that my disease was progressive and incurable," reflects Young. Feeling what she describes as "a spiritual emptiness," Young seeks direction, understanding, and enlightenment, all of which ultimately help her cope with her situation. Religion factors strongly into Young's life and helps her to maintain the "positive and hopeful attitude" she finds essential to not only surviving, but actually *living* whatever time she has left. She suggests neither obsessing over the past nor projecting into the future, but instead deeming every day the gift that it is and being grateful for it.

Naturally, the optimism suggested here is difficult to maintain; it is a goal rather than an ongoing reality. Terminally ill patients must cope in the ways they consider best, and even Young cannot always follow her own advice. She admits, "My thoughts frequently turned to my impending death, unwritten obituary, and unplanned funeral … I was haunted by thoughts of what I had left to teach my son and what I wanted my two young grandchildren to know about

me before I died." Hers is an honest admission that undoubtedly will allow fellow patients to understand that no one can make this journey unscathed.

Already past the donor recipient cut-off age of sixty-five when first diagnosed, Young is shocked when, some five and a half years post-diagnosis, her doctors recommend a lung transplant. "Initially, hearing about a transplant seemed so far beyond any treatment I had ever considered that I simply couldn't fathom it," she states. Such is the case with many patients facing a transplant, but the rigors of medical testing and evaluation quickly take over, followed by the anxiety-ridden wait for an available organ.

"The call"—notification that a potentially matching organ has been found—leaves Young "excited and anxious," and entering surgery, she feels "overwhelmed and numb." Her discovery that "transplantation was a much more sophisticated, complex, and lengthy process than [she] ever imagined" should be well noted, as should what she calls the "significant aspects of post-transplant life."

Humbled by the Gift of Life offers a well-written, easy-to-understand account of one person's journey through a serious illness and the medical procedure best suited to treat it. Young's words will bring comfort to many and perhaps inspire others to consider "the gift of life" that is organ donation.

Cheryl M. Hibbard