



It's All About Life: Love...Disfunction...Compassion

Harvey E. Lazarus

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(106pp)

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An insurance agent reflects on the ups and downs of entrepreneurship and personal life.

"You never know where life will take you," Harvey E. Lazarus muses in his memoir, *It's All About Life*. Despite a varied career full of setbacks and a home life marred by an ironic string of tragedies, this Boston-area life insurance agent remains upbeat about customer service and love.

At age four, Lazarus earned \$50 an hour as a clothes model. Alas, his later working life was much less reliable. He attended pharmacy school in Boston and co-purchased a pharmacy, but ads for generic drugs prompted a CVS lawsuit. Lazarus, by then married and a father, entered the remainder book business and was sued again, this time by publishers. After ventures into real estate development and restaurant ownership, he settled on life insurance, a field he still practices in today. Meanwhile, his personal life was blighted by a trio of suicides.

Lazarus's career is very much the focus of the memoir. By contrast, his early life, from birth through college, is condensed into seven pages. The first and fifth chapters, especially, are very rapid-fire. When he does slow down enough to detail particular scenarios, the dialogue is snappy and the incidents well remembered. For instance, when Lazarus opened his pharmacy, his Uncle Jack, a toy-store owner, butted in with unwelcome advice: "Too small. ... Bigger is better, guys. ... Gotta *expand*, Harvey. ... Not gonna be successful with a store this size."

"Nothing underscores the passage of time quite as dramatically as children," Lazarus observes. At times, though, his children can seem like afterthoughts. Indeed, whole years of their lives are often summed up in a sentence, as in "[Jess and his wife] subsequently moved to Boston, then Detroit and finally divorced while living there." Two chapter titles refer to family tragedies, chief of which was his first wife's suicide. Still, even this momentous event merits fewer than five pages, after which the narrative returns to the business world.

The relentless focus on Lazarus's working life means that the book sometimes suffers from an identity crisis. Portions read like a customer service manifesto, with long passages about insurance requirements and business philosophy. It also gives too much space to friendships with clients. More on the author's family and later-life return to Judaism would be welcome.

The final chapter, "Life Lessons," seems clichéd ("Do not be afraid to face life's challenges head on!"), and a careful edit is needed to eliminate typos and inconsistencies in the layout. Still, Lazarus is an engaging narrator. His story should appeal to fans of business-themed autobiographies such as Arianna Huffington's or Richard Branson's.

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