



Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

The Healing Hour: Sometimes two lives can be irrevocably changed by what happens in one hour

V. C. August

Smart Beagle Books

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Four Stars (out of Five)

Poignant and often funny, this ode to her psychiatrist and friend asserts August's gift of empathy.

A patient and her psychiatrist each struggle with devastating illnesses in V. C. August's tender and moving memoir of a love that transcends traditional doctor-patient roles.

August, a strong, independent, feisty New Yorker and self-made businesswoman was diagnosed with lupus and Sjögren's syndrome in 2002. The story of her torturous and costly round of visits to insensitive doctors, first to obtain an accurate diagnosis and then to attempt to alleviate her intense suffering, could have been a sad and dispiriting tale—but it's not. Instead, August brings to her book characteristics allowing her to not just survive but thrive in a competitive world despite the compound effects of an unsettled and abusive childhood and serious illness. Her gifts of wit, empathy, courage, and humor come through in this, her first book, making it a pleasure to read.

With a thriving career as a medical recruiter and a solid relationship with "C" (Carol), her partner of twenty-three years, August seems to have it all, until strange symptoms causing debilitating pain take over her life. Confronted with the possibility that her illness might destroy all that she has worked for, and stressed by dealing with a medical system in which compassion is in short supply, August contemplates suicide. Her description of the emotional turmoil, confusion, and despair she experienced is compellingly real and frightening.

Reluctantly, August begins to see Dr. Alex, a gifted psychiatrist with whom she soon forms a deeply spiritual, loving connection. When Dr. Alex is diagnosed with a terminal illness herself, August's gifts of empathy and compassion come into play as the two women comfort

and support each other until the doctor's untimely death. A tribute to her psychiatrist's life and work, *The Healing Hour* brings to the forefront the difficult issue of patient-psychiatrist boundaries and the delicate balance that allows love and compassion to shine healing light onto both sides of that relationship.

August explores the harsh realities of living with chronic illness and its effects on relationships, career, and self-esteem, revealing how the lack of real caring in the US health-care system compounds patients' suffering. This powerful and moving memoir also shows the importance of surrounding oneself with a community of friends, family, and caring professionals who can provide the loving support so crucial to the human spirit in times of illness. Also important is the author's example of how reaching out to others in their time of need is one of the best antidotes to one's own suffering.

Conversational, poignant, funny, and sometimes deeply sad, *The Healing Hour* is characterized by down-to-earth dialogue, quirky characters, and overall good pacing, though there is a tendency toward repetitiveness in the dialogue during psychiatric sessions.

With its insight into the effects a broken and insensitive health care system can have on patients, this memoir is recommended reading for those suffering from debilitating chronic illness, their loved ones, and the medical professionals who care for them. August makes plain how respect, compassion, and community can facilitate wholeness, even when a cure is not possible.

Kristine Morris