

A Review of

## ***After the Diagnosis: Transcending Chronic Illness (August, 2010)***

Author: Julian Seifter, MD with Betsy Seifter, PhD

As both patient and physician, the author writes candidly from a unique perspective about both his own life dealing with diabetes as well as the many lessons he learned in his practice with patients of all walks of life and illness. As we read about his ignoring that illness in favor of an ambitious medical residency and growth into a renowned kidney specialist, we witness a personal and professional transformation in both facing his own chronic disease, once he accepts it, and the patients who become teachers to this open and empathetic doctor. Sympathetically coming to grip with the reality that for some patients they are not able to change, he writes, “***With kidney disease, I was beginning to see that the art is often in helping someone live with it, not in***

***curing it.***” First hand he shares medical insights from the 70’s and great progress over four decades along with the long term effects of that illness as it takes its toll on his life and career, especially in the later chapters.

Throughout we hear patient stories that add colorful support to the insights that are the real message behind this book, a concise list of six truths that he lists on the cover flaps for easy reference, something to come back to AFTER reading the wonderful sharings that draw the reader from chapter to chapter of enjoyable, emotional and informative reading. Whether you are a patient, medical professional or caring family/friend, this reading of eight seemingly simple strategies (that are introduced early on page 2!) for coping with long term illness will make the reading time well spent, especially as you take those lessons to heart in facing your own life challenges. Be forewarned, throughout there is much medical terminology in the true life story telling, but thankfully each is accompanied with his layman’s language explanation of those terms.

You come to see that Dr. Seifter is one of those very special friends who is “willing to listen” even under the time pressures of today’s modern medical practice and from that empathetic listening he draws his message supporting stories. In summarizing one man’s story and lesson, he writes, “***The chief message of all this: you’re alive until you die. Every minute counts, and relinquishing hope, playfulness, distraction, pleasure consigns you to a premature death, even when death is knocking at the door.***” Believe me, that’s the kind of doctor I want when I am facing those long term illnesses or even death, someone who understands that even in that state, it can be ok “***...to let imagination and memory roam free of the current facts.***” On behalf of fellow doctors, he argues for greater acceptance of human frailty and error given that despite what we all wish of our doctors and despite what some of them may think of their own omnipotence, they too are only human and cannot account for the randomness of all the variables that affect our health. While we should all strive to do the right things, he points out, there is

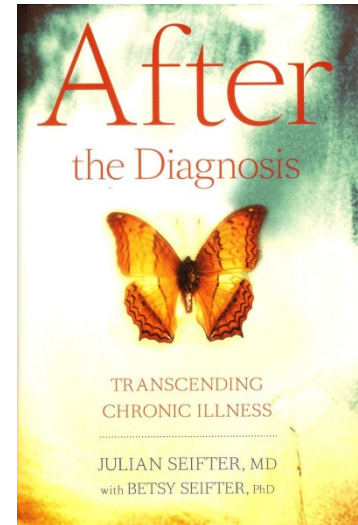


Figure 1: hardback cover

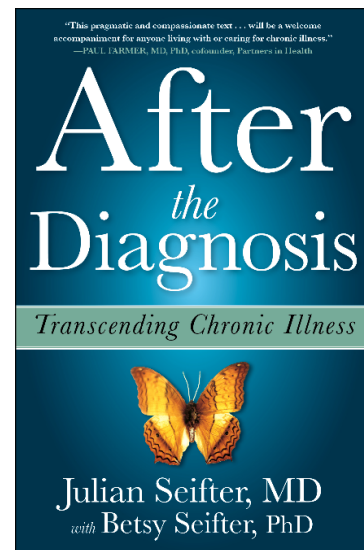


Figure 2: new paperback cover

no guarantee that we will remain healthy, rather strive to do those things but accept that some are beyond our control and fully embrace the lives we have, for the time we have.

His writing is peppered with inspirational phrases that I found myself (and recommend to you, my fellow readers of...) taking notes to reflect on, such as, "...being sick opens up unexpected opportunities for creativity and growth..." and concepts such as, "...being outside the illness..." which is very different than denial. His whole book is about "thriving after the diagnosis", avoiding the traps of "being too sick" or "not sick" but rather being "just sick enough," of "not defining self as the sickness." Enough, I don't mean to re-write his whole book here, but hope those few snippets of his messages will entice you to go out and read this inspiring and enriching memoir. There really is something for everyone in his stories and messages. In closing, let me say "Thank you, Julian!" for so openly sharing your life lessons with the world this way.

One final point: don't miss both the bibliography and excellent Notes sections in the back of the book. Therein are some treasures of insight and background that add still more to the richness of this gifted reading.

PS: Just received the newly released paperback edition. Couldn't help but glance into it again and found myself captured by his stories leading to a re-reading of this fascinating and enjoyable book. Being very busy with so many books and reviews, I never get the luxury of going back to read a book a second time. This was an exception which is further testimony to the recommendation and review above.

Note: **After the Diagnosis** is available in both as an e-book and in hardback from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) (← click here to link to this book) and now (8/2011) in paperback too. The author's web site can be found at <http://julianseftermd.com/>

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**Reviewer bio:** Jim Gleason, receiving his own heart transplant Oct. '94, retired after 37 years with Unisys Corporation in 2005, is a volunteer with NKF, UNOS and the Gift of Life Donor Program in Philadelphia, as well as a nationally recognized speaker and author. His own book, **A Gift from the Heart**, is offered in thanks to his donor family and can be obtained on a CD without cost by contacting him at GleasonJim@aol.com