

A Review of

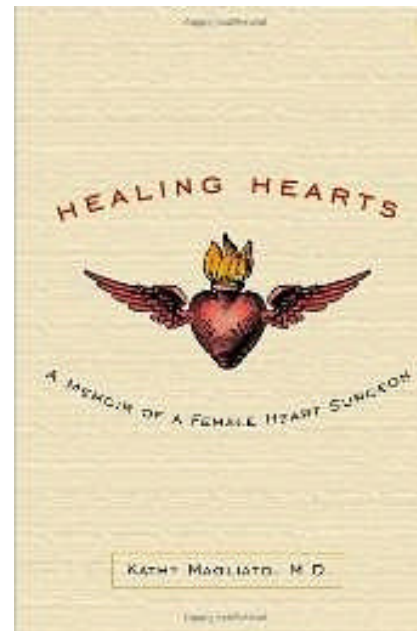
Healing Hearts: A Memoir of a Female Heart Surgeon (2010)

Author: Kathy E. Magliato, MD

Feeling overwhelmed in your life? Pressured? Then read this book and feel what overwhelming and pressured is really like through the eyes of this heart transplant surgeon, not just any surgeon, but a female who is also mother with children and sharing life with a husband who is a liver transplant surgeon. Talk about balancing busy and stressful lives! This is an exciting read, following the transformation of a young girl's dreams into the reality of living her passion for the heart as one who daily touches and cuts into that amazing organ to hopefully save lives.

This reading is not for the “faint of heart” as she describes with powerful lifelike and detailed descriptions of not only the complex operating room surgeries, but also candidly sharing what is going on inside her own mind and heart. Sometimes that is a description of being “afraid” and sometimes the outcomes are not ideal, and when you are dealing with a patient's dying heart, that outcome, despite everything she can do, is death. Spiced with many patient stories, the narrative is never peaceful, with racing car trying to respond to the hospital's call for one emergency after another, not all in the middle of the night with light traffic to contend with, leaving the reader “feeling” the stress of the event as few books do. Days and nights of impossibly long working hours of residency in a highly competitive environment where there is not only lack of belief that a “woman” can handle the male dominated arena of heart surgery, but also outright animosity and strong prejudice against her succeeding, only serve to push her even harder, finally graduating into her “first paid job” at the age of 36!

Some of her stories left this reviewer in tears as she too described (see page 60) her own being brought to tears, for example, when she is sent out to do her first organ recovery run only to find that the heart she is to surgically remove is from a tiny brain dead infant. That shock almost has her deciding to change this early career only to rebound when she later is offered the opportunity to see the other side of the donation and hold the baby who had received that “silver dollar” sized heart by the young mother who is about to take her recovering baby home after the lifesaving heart transplant surgery. She writes of that moment, ***“I took that little child in my arms and cradled him with one hand while putting my other hand on his chest to feel the heartbeat. The heartbeat was strong. It was persistent. Life is persistent, love is persistent, and yes, the heart is persistent.”*** Then there is the story she shares on page 208, but I'll leave those tears to your reading. So many moving patient stories support her own personal story of becoming a truly accomplished heart surgeon. Eventually she is transformed from the safety of her “emotional steel jacket” critical to the success of survival in this career up until now, opening her own heart to being



touched by a liver surgeon suitor leading to marriage and together they begin to raise a family despite very busy and stressful careers. Thereafter the stories get even more amazing as we follow complex daily lives (more often late into the night or sleep interrupted early mornings) with those emergency calls for either surgeon that make for trying moments of life saving emergency priorities while at the same time making their growing children both a priority and integral part of their lives.

After all of this tension filled story, be sure to read her Epilogue where the author closes with a beautiful and heartwarming piece describing a very special interaction with a hummingbird, drawing from it special significance which she turns into advice for all of us. Spoken truly from the heart, but I will leave it to you to read that final special gift, not ruining it by giving away that part of her story here.

Doctor, patient (heart or otherwise), or just someone in search of a good read, I strongly recommend this amazing book of candid insight into the amazing world of cardiac medicine and the humans who practice the art.

PS: Don't miss the appendix which lists everything you ever wanted to know about heart disease "by the numbers" which is followed almost unnoticed by another appendix filled with her good advice about **How to Avoid "Going Under the Knife"** in knowing your critical metrics and symptoms - keys to a life of good health.

Note: This hardback book is available on-line at Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com

Visit the author's web site at <http://www.kathymagliato.com/>

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, TRIO 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