

A Review of

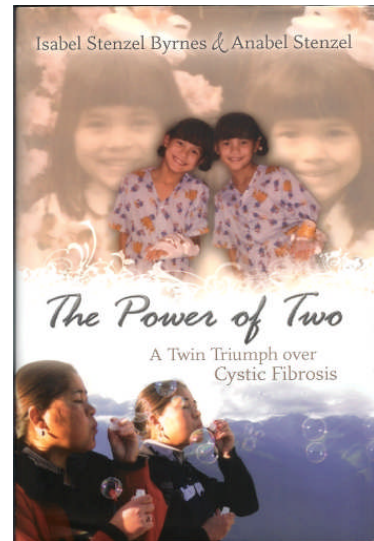
The Power of Two

A Twin Triumph over Cystic Fibrosis

Authors: Isabel Stenzel Byrnes & Anabel Stenzel

Reviewed by Jim Gleason, heart recipient

In this powerful first person life story by twin girls born 1972 with cystic fibrosis (CF), a time when doctor's advice given to their parents was ***"You are in this together. You will have to work very hard to keep your twins alive..."*** we see the capacity of family support and sibling love in overcoming, what was back then, almost always fatal outcomes. From birth theirs was a mountain climb that leaves both them and their readers literally "breathless" with vivid horrific descriptions of daily life with lungs constantly filled with suffocating fluid and threatening infections. This becomes even scarier when we read and feel Ana and Isa as small children living such fates. They describe surviving three decades to finally reap the benefits of modern developments in treatment options, beating the odds through self determination and caring medical staffs to eventually triumph over CF with life saving lung transplants, options that carried its own risks with often marginally successful surgery, quite different from the improved lung transplant outcomes seen today.



While this is a fascinating story of human perseverance, it is not for the squeamish as these twins alternate chapters, each describing in intimate detail what life was like for them and their befriended network of CF children (most of whom didn't survive to even young adulthood back in those days) living at death's door every day of their lives, coming to accept that as "normal living" for a CF patient. They live a lesson that most of us never learn, to enjoy and live life to its fullest each day. Even as new medicines and protocols are developed, those who lived to benefit from them faced a daily challenge filled with back pounding treatments for hours on end, repeated four and five times a day, filling the few remaining hours between with a life that is both inspiring to read and tempered with humor. Despite having faced my own near death with a heart transplant, given their gifted vivid writing, I confess to experiencing a physical fear in this reading as I imagined life fighting for breath, a daily suffocating experience. The day they receive gifts of healthy donated lungs transforms life into a celebration that carries us to the final chapter, describing a new life filled with energy and opportunities. But their story continues beyond those final pages with Ana facing death again, saved a second time in receiving a another lung transplant even as the book goes into print in July of 2007. And then, as recently as this January 1st, both are involved with the Donate Life float in the Rose Bowl Parade, with Isabel celebrating life by actually riding the float for the world audience to see the success of transplantation!

For medical professionals, the insights, especially the detailed in-depth childhood recollections of life constantly tempered with a threat of death despite the best and toughest of loving medical care, can be both educational and inspiring, especially for

those working with pediatric patients. For parents faced with raising children so medically challenged, this book provides both a model for parental support and hope in the face of what often is daunting and seemingly desperate childrearing situations. These (now) young ladies, living fruitful careers, share a gifted writing style that somehow carries the reader through a long life story facing life and death, of pain and trial, expanding into a celebration of victory rising to a life of joy and fulfillment post transplant. Today's child facing CF is no longer greeted with a death sentence, rather with early detection and improved treatment options, they can expect a very different story than the one told in this book. In reading Ana and Isa's life stories, one can fully appreciate the progress made over the years both in quality of life and in longer life expectancy for today's CF child. With strong loving family support, teamed sisters' determination, and modern medicine, their story proves that "anything is possible."

One final note: Be sure to read the book's two closing Epilogues in which Ana and Isa each share their excitement participating in the US Transplant Games and emotional meetings with their donor families, a reading that will leave you with tears of sadness and joy, as well giving pause to reflect on that next precious breath you take, too often for granted - until you read this story.

About the Authors

Isabel Stenzel Byrnes works as a community outreach coordinator, and Anabel Stenzel works as a genetic counselor in pediatric genetics, both at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford in Palo Alto, California.

Note: **The Power of Two** is available in hardcover from Amazon.com

Brief bio:

Jim Gleason, receiving his own heart transplant Oct. '94, retired after 37 years with Unisys Corporation in 2005, is a volunteer with The Gift of Life Donor Program, NKF and UNOS as well as a nationally recognized speaker and author. His own book, **A Gift from the Heart**, is offered free in thanks to his donor family and can be obtained by contacting him at GLEASONJIM@AOL.COM.