

A Review of

## *Sick Girl Speaks*

Lessons and Ponderings Along the Road to Acceptance

Author: Tiffany Christensen

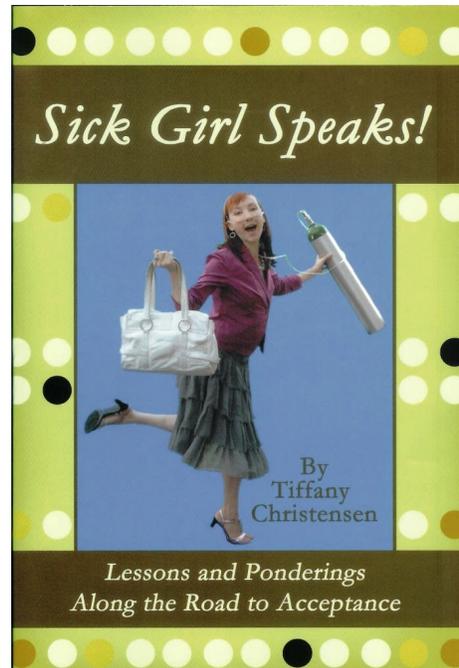
Reviewed by Jim Gleason, heart recipient

As a veteran of reviewing many transplant related stories and books, I have to say that this one is in a class by itself, a very interesting and different book filled with insights and sound practical advice for navigating what the author refers to as the Medical Maze. You get some taste of that different approach by both the title of the first chapter: "Still Not Dead" and in her opening salvo announcing its time for a medical revolution, moving forward into the age of patient empowerment. And that is what you will find in her first 32 chapters offered in a variety of formats including personal journal entries (subjects like That Which Is Important, poems, etc), letters (to her beloved, to medical trainers, to death, to doctors, to an intern), chapters of experience and advice, usually ending with "What I know now" insights and a dose of humor. Don't miss her "**Top 10 Opportunities of Illness**" as an example. All these chapters are short, often leading with a question and closing with the answer she has come up with for that same question. This brevity and variety make for easy reading, while the subjects themselves are far from easy, running the gamut of just about every medical challenge you hope you personally never have to face. Her wide range of topics cover from choosing a doctor (she doesn't tell you who to choose, only what to look for given your own individual needs); life purpose ("**Isn't that what most of us are looking for?**"); to facing death (facing death more than once and now working in hospice, she openly discusses death from many angles); dating and finding a lasting relationship given a long term illness and these medical issues in her life (yes, she finds her soul-mate, but not without some trial and error); and so it goes on for 193 pages and 70 total chapters, each unique in their perspective making for very interesting reading.

But the real power in Tiffany's writing is that she balances the brutally honest pains and drama of finding the way through that Medical Maze (and later in part 2, the Emotional Maze) with positive ways she has found to survive and in fact, thrive, through a life predicted to be very short with Cystic Fibrosis, but living today after life saving two double lung transplants, transitioning from spoiled sick kid, to mature writer, public speaker and loving wife, sharing life and survival tactics to help others. She offers deep, thoughtful insights for medical professionals, patients, caregivers, family and friends who find themselves dealing with the seemingly impossible day to day realities of long term illness.

Here are two quotes to give you a flavor:

Quote: ...on being wheeled in for her second lung transplant -- "I went under anesthesia with fear pulsing through me, and a deep understanding that my fate was up to someone much greater than I or my emotions. It was a truest moment of "**Give it to God**" I've ever known."



Quote: "In time, I learned that the illness wasn't my choice, but whether or not to suffer was. Every day, I had the choice to focus on my physical pains or my inner joy. What I never understood before going to hear the Lama speak was that the two can simultaneously exist."

Given the variety described above, you shouldn't be surprised to find that there is a closing "pop quiz," but have no fear, it comes with an answer key. I got 100% right after reading the whole book, so lets see how you do.

PS: Don't confuse this book with another recent publication, Sick Girl. The titles and medical challenges may be similar, but the approach and tone are much different.

Note: **Sick Girl Speaks** is available in hard cover directly from the author or [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). You can learn more from her website at <http://www.sickgirlspeaks.com>

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**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.