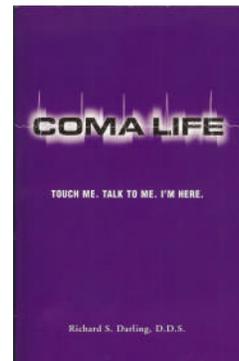


A Review of

Coma Life

Touch Me, Talk to Me, I'm Here

By Richard S. Darling, D.D.S.



Reviewed by Jim Gleason, heart recipient



“Been there, done that” may be a better subtitle for this book (although I really like the author’s sub-title). Besides being a unique sharing of what it was like living within a coma, receiving sensory input from his surroundings but without being able to respond, this is also an inspiring story of a man who had Hepatitis C, liver cancer, diabetes, a heart attack, and has undergone **three** liver transplants! Reading this, one has to ask themselves if **ONLY** dealing with one organ failure, “So what is **my** problem?” It’s all relative. Let me assure those readers who may be waiting for their first (and hopefully only) liver transplant, such repeated transplants are **NOT** the normal experience. But at the same time, this does provide reassurance that if something does eventually go wrong, there is the hope of a subsequent transplant.

What is life like while in a coma? While I admit that the first 75 pages of recalled fantasy dreaming inside that coma, often related to real life activity going on around him, were for me both slow reading and yet fascinating for what Richard reveals about the seemingly unresponsive patient in that situation. The importance of his recollections comes clear later, (as the tears ran down my face) in reading of sharing his coma experience with another terrified coma patient’s wife: "I have to tell you a few things..." - how wonderful to be able to turn one’s own challenge into such a supporting blessing for others as he shares hope that her loved one is truly hearing her, just not able to reply.

I cried again as he so beautifully described each family he reaches out to support. These are not just those easy to raise emotions we all know of in the early months/years of post transplant. Most recipients, even many years after their transplant, fill up with tears when the heart is touched by such scenes. The difference in this book from many others that also brought out similar emotions is that Richard did it again and again in the pages of stories that followed. Be prepared to “feel” his emotions as his words touch your heart too when he describes looking up and seeing his long time and geographically distant friend Jack coming down the hall to visit as he is dying and awaiting his hoped for liver transplant. Or when the “call” finally comes, ***“This is Arlene, your new transplant coordinator; we have a liver for you. Can you be here in an hour and a half?”*** Most transplant patients will never forget that long prayed for call. In reading such words even in print brings back those memories and the same tears we felt then.

Coma Life is good reading not only for families supporting a loved one in a coma state, but also for medical professionals who find themselves in contact with such patients. As Richard pleads, “Touch me, talk to me, I’m here!” There may well be a desperate life inside begging for such reassuring contact. His account is rare, as most patients who have had a coma experience do not have memory of life “inside” their coma life, but that

is not to say they weren't aware, maybe only that they can't recall. Richard not only recalls but shares that experience. Let us learn from his sharing and act accordingly.

Amidst the seemingly negative results (not common, but very real) of losing his first two transplanted livers, the author successfully turns the reader into the hopes and joys that go with life extensions through that gift of life that a donor family gives us at their time of grief. Patients may recognize themselves in the despair described and then get the message of hope and optimism that seeing a recovered patient conveys.

Yet another hopeful message in this book is the possibility of getting a transplant despite liver cancer. That fact is not lost on this loving couple as they excitedly react to the call to come to the hospital for the transplant. Also, easing the fear so many have of dying, Richard exposes even that as not being one that lasts. So many, myself included, report they had no fear of dying in going through the transplant experience, despite being on the verge of death just to qualify for a transplant. These are but a few of the inspiring themes that come through in Richard's story that hopefully will help the reader deal with their own concerns in approaching transplant.

Richard's story brings hope and encouragement to us all. His lesson that helping others at a time of challenge can be very healing is an important point. We all have such gifts to offer others. Coma Life is an example of one such gift. Sharing even while waiting in the hospital is another. So, as you internalize the inspiration this book offers, ask yourself, what is your own gift and how are you sharing that gift to help others.

In reading Coma Life, I hope that you too will relate to so many of their stories, shedding tears of joy of such successes with your own, especially at his life post transplant and eventually meeting with the donor families we all owe so much to.

Thank you, Richard, for sharing your complex story to help so many out there who always feel they are so alone and unique in going through their transplant experience.

Note: Coma Life can be purchased via e-mail at rdarling1@dc.rr.com

Brief bio:

Jim Gleason, retiring from Unisys Corporation in Feb. 2005, has moved on to found GOAL Systems, a company dedicated to helping people "turn their dreams into reality through goal directed living." In this endeavor he partners with transplant programs to offer workshops for heart recipients, using living examples of successful patients, to open up perceptions of life's possibilities post transplant, helping them set goals to realize their own dreams. Jim is a nationally recognized public speaker and author. His book, **A Gift from the Heart**, is offered free for the asking in thanks to his donor family for their gift of life. He received his heart transplant in Oct. '94.