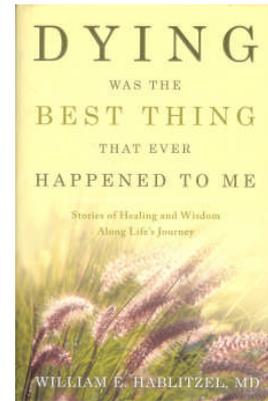


A Review of

***Dying Was the Best Thing That Ever Happened to Me***

Stories of Healing and Wisdom Along Life's Journey

Author: William E. Hablitzel, MD (July 2006)



Reviewed by Jim Gleason, heart recipient

Serendipitously I happened upon this beautiful collection of reflections under such a different title. Penned by a gifted physician whose healing and teaching skills are complemented by a writing style that allows him to share the many lessons in life learned from his patients over the years, they come truly from and are written for the heart. From reading a short piece he had authored in a compilation of many other authors, that title took me on-line to his website and from there I found myself reading a “free chapter” and from that sample I ordered the book which lead to this review. Let me say right up front, don't be misled by the first word of that title, as indicated by the rest of the title, this is the most uplifting book about dying that you will ever read, despite tears you may shed along the way.

Imagine my surprise to discover in its second chapter an inspiring story of a living donor transplant experience! A reviewer of transplant books, I was surprised at this story since I wasn't reading the book as a transplant resource. That story was so well written that I had to ask if the writer would offer not only that free first chapter download, but given its powerful inspiring message, would he do the same for this second chapter, allowing it to be posted on the NKF website where others could find it as a transplant resource there? He generously agreed and I was off and running, getting that message out while eagerly reading the gems of real life stories that followed it.

For thirteen enjoyable chapters we are invited along with this practicing physician and honored medical educator as he shares insights and inspiration gleamed over a long and fruitful career from his patient's lives. These were not always easy patients, often challenging even this doctor's patience to its core, sometimes taking many months to finally “see the person behind the reluctant patient.” Amid entertaining narrative of patient progress with its medical details, we find his careful listening to the present moment, that moment when his patients share their innermost insights of life, often as they face their own mortality under his watchful and loving care. In such listening comes insight and diagnosis that wins over some of the toughest. Each chapter in this beautiful book (and that is the right word for it) is an individual story told in the author's simple but eloquent style that makes for easy reading while capturing an often deep insight into what life is all about. As tempted as I am to offer a few brief summaries as examples, each so tantalizing interesting, I must resist so as to not take anything away from your own reading. As I looked back at his stories to prepare this review, I found myself lost again in their narrative, slowly being engrossed in the emotions of life lived in their simplest but most sublime moments, once more bringing tears from emotions that touched my heart in reading both before and now, and not just with one chapter, but tears came yet again with several of them. My shelves are filled with books that tell of courage, life challenges overcome through medical miracles supported by a personal faith

in both oneself and a spiritual life force beyond that many call God. Of those many books there are a few that I put back on the shelf with a resolve to revisit because their message is so strong and well presented but I confess that I seldom do as more excellent books arrive. But this book, with its strange but so interesting a title, is in a class of its own and my resolve to reread and this time reflect even more on its depth in those many lessons of life will not be lost in the days ahead. This is not a book to borrow from a friend or the library because after reading, you will not want to return it, rather keeping it nearby when your busy life needs a touch of simple human inspiration. For as the good doctor would say, take a single dose and return to see me again in a few weeks, and that is what you will do with his book.

While recommended for everyone, patients and medical professionals will especially relate in its reading. As promised in the book's jacket cover, "**This book will change the way you view life and death.**" Come prepared for, as it has my own, I predict it may do the same for you. Thank you, Dr. Hablitzel, for your gift in sharing these stories and their lessons of life learned from your patients' final days, collected along your own life's journey as a most extraordinary physician and teacher. You have found what many a medical student has gone into medicine in search of, but so few ever find, lost as they become in the hectic rush of life. Maybe in this reading, their life experience too will change, if only they learn to listen and be taught by their patients as you were.

Note: **Dying Was the Best Thing That Ever Happened to Me** is available in hard cover from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) or [BarnesandNoble.com](http://BarnesandNoble.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 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.