

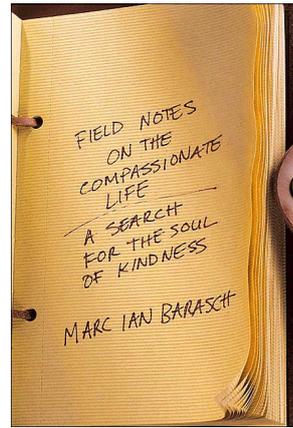
A Review of

Field Notes on the Compassionate Life

A Search for the Soul of Kindness

Author: Marc Ian Barasch

Reviewed by Jim Gleason, heart recipient



I accepted this book for review for its transplant related topic, but confess once I got into it I wasn't sure what this had to do with transplant and had some misgivings as I began reading. Imagine my surprise when I found myself very moved by the way this author covered the subject of compassion in the world today, across a variety of areas, one of which was in fact, organ donation (of course, now that I thought about it, a compassionate act of giving life to a stranger or equally so in the living donation event). My misgivings quickly fell to the side as I became engrossed in the stories of compassion told in a fascinating and compelling manner by this gifted author as he relates experience after experience from personal research that must have been emotionally inspiring in encountering such special people.

With stories ranging from St. Francis to the Dalai Lama and today's Buddhist monks, author Barasch brought me to deep emotion in reading much simpler but equally supportive modern day examples of his compassionate life thesis. My eyes filled with tears, for example, as I read of teenage girls transported from war torn Palestine and Israel (with its holocaust history) to a local New Jersey summer camp where these girls face each other for the first time, mortal enemies at home, transformed into more typical teenage life conflicts and friendships as they get to know each other as compassionate human beings. Tears fell again as I read about a lone worker at the World Trade Center disaster telling of his experience with "hippie-like kids" who helped him after a long emotionally draining day of clearing wreckage. These tattooed Red Cross workers came to where he sat exhausted on a curb, took off his boots and put dry socks on his weary feet. Later he was lifted by their compassionate cheering as he left the scene of that disaster (see page 284 and see if those two short paragraphs don't bring you to tears also).

Whether he's exploring the physical human heart and scientifically measurable communications from the heart in meditation (see the chapter "Heart Science, Heart's Mystery), observing a society of rare chimps that is based on compassion among that animal tribe, or the telling stories of altruistic kidney donations to a stranger for transplant (see the 22 page chapter, "The Giveaway"), this writing is both inspired and engrossing in ways that we usually only find in fictional mystery novels. His supportive first person interviews and encounters are told within the context of history and centuries old philosopher's writings. But additionally, Barasch often lives such experiments, like when he himself took on living the life of a homeless street person for a week, as part of his research, making it all the more a compelling narrative. This author has truly done his homework in every sense of the word and the resulting research makes for surprisingly fascinating reading.

Let me close this review with a quote (page 151) from a conversation between the author of a real-life made-for-TV movie storyline about a young teenage football player who

donates a kidney to save his grandmother's life (giving up a promising football career in the process) and a living donor inspired by that movie. When the kidney donor asks this author, "*So, how do you feel about that?*" (referring to his being moved to donate by her movie) she responds, "*You were behaving the way human being should behave and usually don't.*" That sums up what this book is all about, and isn't that a call to action for each of us in our own lives? Barasch believes that the compassionate life is our natural way and the world would be a much better place if we accepted that and lived according to our nature in everyday relationships with the world around us. Just imagine what that would be like if we all lived a fully compassionate life. This is one of those books I will keep in my library of favorites and read again and recommend to those who would look to a better world during their own lifetime, hopefully that includes you.

Note: For further information about **Field Notes on the Compassionate Life** and purchase options, click on Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble

Reviewer Brief bio:

Jim Gleason, received his heart transplant Oct. '94. Jim volunteers with NKF, UNOS and the Gift of Life Donor Program in Philadelphia as well as being a nationally recognized speaker and author. His book, [A Gift from the Heart](#), is offered both for downloading or on a CD free as thanks to his donor family and can be obtained by clicking of the title here or contacting him via e-mail at GLEASONJIM@AOL.COM.