A Review of  
*The Reluctant Donor* (2010)  
Author: Suzanne Ruff

Suzanne, the author, comes from a family devastated by polycystic kidney disease which has already taken the lives of her mother, two aunts, two uncles, two cousins and her grandmother, eight family members in all and now two of her sisters have PKD. While this hereditary disease seems to have spared her, the discovery that her sister has been diagnosed with PKD creates a very personal dilemma. Despite being distant and even openly angry with her sister for many years, Suzanne surprises even herself when she responds to her sister's lifesaving need by offering to be a living donor. Immediately after having made the offer she begins to wonder "What was I thinking?" And thus begins both a humorous and deeply insightful sharing of emotions and mental torment in the months leading up to undergoing the life-saving surgery her sister so desperately needs.

As we follow along in Suzanne's adventure in this excellent narrative that captures her inner feelings, self doubts, fear and eventual follow-through on that commitment, one cannot help but feel a part of her very human story. Typical of most families, relationships have their ups and downs over time, and thus the reader easily identifies with Suzanne's personal conflict so openly shared. Be prepared for moments of frustration, laughter and tears that mark her as a first class story teller which makes this both an easy and captivating read while also touching us with its difficult emotional content. The tension of this conflict continues right up to the day of surgery as her fears and inner voices battle between saving a life versus the inherent risks of voluntary and very serious surgery.

Throughout the book we are treated to an insightful education about many important aspects of living kidney donation in a way that gently blends in with her personal story. Without giving away the full story let me say that Suzanne and her sister rebuild their relationship after a very difficult life experience in a way that makes this book both inspiring and motivational for anyone involved with living organ donation and that includes not only patient and family but also medical professionals who can gain a deeper understanding of what both patients and caregivers go through in facing similar circumstances. Viewing this experience through the eyes of the donor patient in Suzanne's gifted writing we have the opportunity to improve the medical support and treatment for the growing number of living donors who despite such inner conflict each day offer the gift of life to others whose lives are often hanging by a thread. Also, if you know anyone dealing with kidney disease, this book shows how much more hope they have compared to the early years of dialysis when only a very limited number of dialysis machines were available, not to mention the progress in transplantation outcomes.
If you know anyone who is considering being a living organ donor, this book would make a perfect gift to both ensure they are making an informed decision while at the same time offering both support and encouraging inspiration as they deal with typical human doubts in facing what can often be a tough decision. With over five transplants in her family to date, the author certainly has the background for this story.

Suzanne, thank you for opening up your heart both in the lifesaving gift you gave to your sister, but in writing this book, extending that gift to so many others who follow in your footsteps of lifesaving gift giving.

Note: The Reluctant Donor is available in paperback at Beaver Pond Books <-- click here or type http://www.bookhousefulfillment.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&special=1&p=1054

Reviewer bio: Jim Gleason, receiving his own heart transplant Oct. ’94, retired after 37 years with Unisys Corporation in 2005, is a volunteer with NKF, UNOS and the Gift of Life Donor Program in Philadelphia, as well as a nationally recognized speaker and author. His own book, A Gift from the Heart, is offered in thanks to his donor family and can be obtained on a CD without cost by contacting him at GleasonJim@aol.com