

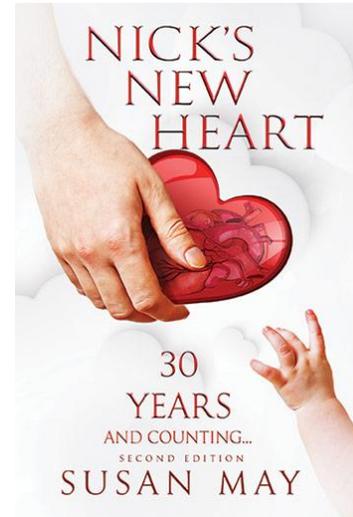
A Review of
Nick's New Heart, 2nd Edition

30 Years and counting . . .

Author: Susan May

Reviewed by Jim Gleason, heart recipient

Much of what I said in my 2008 review of Susan May's first book, *Nick's New Heart*, still applies to this new edition, but with more emphasis on those remarks given that about half of this new edition is an update to the first edition with added emphasis on Nick's family and parents' experience in dealing with his ongoing medical challenges through those first 207 pages. The remainder of this 364-page book follows Nick's life from late teen years up to the COVID challenged life he lives today with his devoted wife, Lacey, and their daughter (born in 2018), Ava Grace.



As with the first book, this is another of those “***I can't put it down***” books that grabs one's heart and ends up with tears and a single day of dedicated reading, and that combination makes for a top rating in my book. In ***Nick's New Heart***, Nick's mother, Susan May, shares her compelling story of family life when her child is born with a three chambered heart (instead of the normal four), a heart that will not support his life for long. From the moment of birth, the reader is taken along in a very close and personal way on doctor visits and hospital stays, sharing in the home dynamics of facing the impact such a focus has on the rest of the now six-member family, feeling the desperation and hope roller coaster ride as it develops over those first few months and years. Baby Nick struggles and inspires both his family and medical teams as they fight together for his life, described in detail for the first two years of life medical issues and too many complex cardiac operations that include a life saving heart transplant just weeks before his second birthday. For the next developing years, as he moves through becoming a teenager eventually facing college and career decisions, a dream come true for a mother who prayed to see this day, there is less detail as Nick grows in less dramatic and often normal ways, under the ever-watchful eyes of a loving family.

Back in 1991, facing Nick's failing heart news, Susan couldn't find information on others who had gone through similar challenges. A determined woman of action and later a discovery of being a skilled writer (***Nick's New Heart*** was her first book, followed by over 30 more books in the 12 years that followed), she took it upon herself to create a support resource with this book. In the telling, Susan and Nick give hope to those many other families who have been given equally poor prognosis yet fight against the odds every day, praying that they too may someday be able to celebrate their own child's young adult successes. This success is summarized in a 2008 graduation photo of 19-year-old Nick, dressed in tux, looking so healthy and ready to take on the adult world, a triumph of human spirit, family prayer, faith and dedication supported by evolving medical science.

In this new story of the dozen years that have passed since that 2008 release, we find more insight into the family and especially, Susan and her husband, Andy's roller-coaster ride as she deals with typical teenage challenges shared in a very open

and transparent telling. We feel for her dealing with that all too common transplant teen skipping meds and overcoming the inevitable consequences that follow.

An insight into the power of Susan's writing comes from Nick when he finally reads mom's book, so engaged in the subject's life story, that he comes up surprised in realizing the obvious, that he is that subject (again, subtle humor, that offers balance to the life threatening situations that continue over their 30 years now). ,

As I expressed before, **Nick's New Heart, 2nd Edition** is excellent reading for medical professionals seeking to understand what goes on in the family outside the doctor and hospital offices, giving insight into the hearts, minds, hopes and fears of parents. Be forewarned that if you are like me, there will be tears of joy, for example, as Dr. Kanter announces to an anxious family the heart transplant operation success of the yet to be two, child, and that's just one of many tear-filled reading moments. Later in life, in this extended story, the tragic news of inoperable cancer is replaced with a life-threatening infection that posed as a cancer growth in the scans, something that they now hope can be treated with surgery. Again, the reader is torn emotionally along with the family as Dr. Kantor comes out to share the success of a ground breaking lifesaving aorta replacement surgery that gives Nick back a 'normal' life. The author's writing skills come through in connecting to the reader's heart like that, in my own reading, feeling the terror of the long wait for a doctor's outcome report, but then I knew the end, that Nick would be still alive these ten years later. Family photos showing Nick's growing and his own family building years, make the telling even more personal. She seeds the many stories with subtle humor, balancing tears and laughter on some deeply serious life moments, part of the key to her family success in dealing with what would seem to most to be unsurmountable odds. Along the way to today, we get to celebrate Nick's 25th anniversary party, his romance and 2014 marriage to Lacey, who takes over from (but in partnership with ...) Susan, the day-by-day support of Nick's medically challenged life. And then, in July of 2018, Ava Grace is born and the family transition is complete, as they move on to celebrate with this 2nd edition book release on March 21st, 2021, the 30th anniversary of that heart transplant back before Nick was two. Susan would affirm, its all about attitude and moving forward, one day at a time, with the support of a team of family, friends and medical staff who become more than practioners, but loving 30 years of supportive extended family.

Important implied advice for patients comes through as we see Susan playing a very strong proactive role with their medical teams, fighting with earned experiential learning, for her son's life at times when even Nick was feeling like giving up with all of the pain and searching for answers time and time again, especially during those challenging teen years. I hope you too find laughter in seeing Susan as a caged animal mother defending her cubs take on doctors who don't listen to her sage advice when it comes in conflict with their medical book learning or too quick judgements when she knows her Nick so well. Their very special bond with his primary doctor can be seen in the often-humorous banter, adding spice to their mutual challenge insuring Nick's attention and care from one crisis to the next. All of this adds up to today with Nick being one of the longest living heart recipients, maybe the 5th longest? What testimony to the impact of great forward-thinking attitude leading to such successful living despite life-threatening challenges!

Nick's story also gives testimony to the power and impact of the anonymous gift of a donor family who gave Nick his heart when they couldn't save their own child, thus

recognizing both sides to such life experiences. Finally, Susan adds an Appendix, offering beneficial information and advice to help families dealing with chronically ill or transplanted children. With this writing, Susan May has again fulfilled her mission of providing that support resource she found sorely lacking in facing their own challenges those many long-suffering years ago, hopefully making it easier for those who follow with their own successes today. Nick's life story offers inspiration with the success of his still being alive, not just surviving, but thriving today, 30 years later. Keep in mind, just imagine, Nick was only one of her raising four children, each with their own challenges.

Susan, on my own behalf and those of your many readers who will come to know your story through this book, thank you for sharing your life and dreams with us in this wonderful heart-filled second edition expanded story of motherly love, dedication and perseverance. I pray that you and your husband, Andy, will enjoy many wonderful more years of a loving, growing family, now with healthy grandchildren who will come to know their family history in their years ahead, through your writings here, and maybe in a third edition some ten years from now to celebrate Nick's 40th anniversary and a Guinness world heart transplant longevity record.

Note: **Nick's New Heart, 2nd Edition** is available in hard cover directly from the author or [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com). You can learn more from her website at <https://www.susancmay.com/>

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 read on-line at .