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My Degeneration: A Journey Through Parkinson's (Graphic Medicine)



Synopsis

How does one deal with a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease at the age of forty-three? My Degeneration, by former Anchorage Daily News staff cartoonist Peter Dunlap-Shohl, answers the question with humor and passion, recounting the author's attempt to come to grips with the "malicious whimsy" of this chronic, progressive, and disabling disease. This graphic novel tracks Dunlap-Shohl's journey through depression, the worsening symptoms of the disease, the juggling of medications and their side effects, the impact on relations with family and community, and the raft of mental and physical changes wrought by the malady. My Degeneration examines the current state of Parkinson's care, including doctor/patient relations and the repercussions of a disease that, among other things, impairs movement, can rob patients of their ability to speak or write, degrades sufferers' ability to deal with complexity, and interferes with the sense of balance. Readers learn what it's like to undergo a dramatic, demanding, and audacious bit of high-tech brain surgery that can mysteriously restore much of a patient's control over symptoms. But My Degeneration is more than a Parkinson's memoir. Dunlap-Shohl gives the person newly diagnosed with Parkinson's disease the information necessary to cope with it on a day-to-day basis. He chronicles the changes that life with the disease can bring to the way one sees the world and the way one is seen by the wider community. Dunlap-Shohl imparts a realistic basis for hope "hope not only to carry on, but to enjoy a decent quality of life."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I treat Parkinson disease for a living - I am a neurologist - and so as I flipped through this book, I was curious to see how the disease itself was depicted. I was surprised at the depth and care that was taken as the author chronicled the obscure details of daily life with Parkinson disease. It is rare that a patient has such insight into their disease that they can be right about everything, but I found nothing to quibble with at all. The story is vivid and it is true to life, at least the lives that my patients relate to me. I think we would have to go back to Oliver Sacks' "Awakenings" to find an investigation of PD with similar investigative prowess and narrative power. One thing I wasn't expecting was the slightly humorous, affectionate depiction of the artist's several neurologists. They were rendered finely, carefully - as human beings. Modern medicine in the US is perhaps only slightly less dehumanizing for the doctor than it is for the patient - and I was pleased to see real people inhabiting the white coats. I am divided as to whether or not to place this book in my waiting room. I want my patients to see it - but I don't want to lose it! I may have to buy a few copies and hand them out. I'd recommend it to anyone who has Parkinson disease, knows someone who does, or just wants to know more about this increasingly common illness.

Mr. Peter Dunlap-Shohl writes with honesty and humor in this book which is perfect for such a serious topic. He doesn't take himself too seriously but he also shows the gravity of the situation when being diagnosed. I love his drawings -- top notch. Graphic novels are so popular. They really speak to many people more than a typical book does. This is a great format to introduce someone to Parkinson's but also Dunlap-Shohl's own story with it makes it personal and real.

Conveys tons of important, up-to-date and accurate information about Parkinson's disease. How would I know? Because I am a physician who has advanced Parkinson's. This book delivers the goods, a great deal of what you need to know and what you want to know about "the disease which keeps on taking". I read scientific and clinical abstracts every single day about Parkinson's, and I learned from this book, this book consolidated my knowledge, and did so in an entertaining comic-book style tale, reminiscent of the best work of Harvey Pekar, the friend and disciple of the great genius of "underground" cartooning, Robert Crumb. This book is evidence of Parkinsonian creativity, that strange gift the disease slips you with its left hand while it is plunging its dagger into your back with its right hand.

A perfect blend of personal reflection and factual reporting distinguishes this graphic memoir.

Dunlap-Shohl is a well-regarded editorial cartoonist, which can be seen in the charmingly exaggerated style of each panel, but here he also demonstrates great skill in the conception and construction of a longer graphic narrative: he knows when to break down into several panels and when to go for an eye-catching full-pager. In less than 100 pages, Dhe provides not only an intimate account of the fears and anxieties that come with a Parkinson's diagnosis, but also a practical guide to the disease: its symptoms, its medications, their side effects, other treatments, the unique language that sufferers and their caregivers will come to know. Flashes of a humor that is wry and unafraid to be silly complement the drier passages. It's difficult to imagine a more compact and graceful presentation of so much varied information. The elegance of the memoir's construction is balanced by high-quality physical production, on excellent paper stock with ink that really makes the artwork pop. Readers of graphic memoirs and illness memoirs should not miss *My Degeneration*.

My husband has been coping with Parkinson's for 10 years. The laughter, empathy and treatment tips are better than a whole weeks supply of dopamine! I have bought this book for all of our friends suffering with any kind movement disorder, reviewed it with our physical therapists and doctors, insisted that the local book store and libraries maintain copies and wish I could be Peter Dunlap Scholl's publicist!

I am not a huge fan of graphic novels or comics, but I do like memoir, and people in my family have suffered with different diseases of the brain, so this one interested me even more. Also my 17 year old daughter has aspirations to join the field, so I try to keep current. This book blew me away. The information is presented in a clear way, giving the lay person info about Parkinson's, from both the medical side and the emotional side of the person with the disease. Because words are fewer than in a traditional written memoir, each word is even more significant, and the writer and artist relies on the panels to help the story. I uploaded two pics that were particularly resonant for me. In one, he's running "The more I try to unravel the reasoning that led to this moment, the more tangled it gets." The other one uses three frames to continue the narrative. Whether you are curious about Parkinson's, a fan of comics or graphic literature, or memoir in general, I heartily recommend this book.

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