

A Review of

Life in Limbo

Waiting for a Heart Transplant

By Lisa Stiles Nance

Reviewed by Jim Gleason, heart recipient



At first glance this book cover leads the reader to believe it is another story of a heart patient waiting for their gift of life or death. As a heart transplant recipient almost 10 years ago who has written my own book on that subject, I eagerly pick up such works to read their amazing stories. This, to my surprise, was not such a book. This is the caregiver's side of the story with the patient's spouse sharing her wait, a trial that I truly believe is even harder than being the patient.

Lisa Nance honestly tells it from the heart as she watches her soul mate, Miller, slowly weaken and face death as his heart fails. Her husband of 18 plus years, approaching 40 years of age with congestive heart failure, was a candidate for this modern day miracle of a life saving heart transplant. But between being a candidate and actually receiving that new heart is a long road. Lisa gets to travel that road in a very different sense when their insurance places them in, not in one of their four local transplant centers, but in one that is 500 miles away from home. But they are in the Cleveland Clinic's Heart Center, rated #1 by U.S. News and World Report for the past five years, a place they would call home for six long months of waiting. Lisa drives that 16 hour round trip to visit Miller every other weekend, caring for the family business between visits, giving up her own career for the duration.

Her story is both unique and at the same time, similar, to that of so many other wives with whom she shares the wait as loved ones die waiting and others are saved by the gifts of new hearts from anonymous donor families. Will her Miller be one of those saved? This unknown fate weighs heavily on the whole family, but especially Lisa. Her life-long faith in God, with the support of many "angels" she discovers along the way, carries her through many tough moments. Family challenges bring forth tears and determination, as their two children must also face this impact on their own young lives as teen and college student.

Life In Limbo is short (105 pages) but encompassing with well-titled chapters that allow the reader to focus on all the human elements of such a challenge. She presents the facts of transplantation along side the emotions of living through that experience. The reader "feels" her soul as Lisa shares her poetic writings that helped release inner emotions during those months.

Families facing a transplant challenge will get comfort in seeing they are not alone, that their feelings and frustrations are "normal" as seen through Lisa's sharings. Professionals and friends who interact with such families will gain a fuller understanding of what is involved in being the caregiver, allowing them to better support such families with an understanding that otherwise can only come from actually living it themselves.

Finally, let me forewarn the reader that even with my own transplant experience, or perhaps because of it, I found myself overwhelmed with tears when their news is finally delivered: "There's a heart for Miller!" Lisa is a gifted writer who captures that moment in words that truly touch the heart of the reader. Be prepared, for you too may shed tears of joy as I did in reading it and as both Lisa and Miller did in living in "limbo" and finally sharing that long awaited moment together.

(note: 587 words in the review article itself)

Brief bio:

Jim Gleason works in telephony engineering management for Unisys Corporation, in Blue Bell, PA. He received his heart transplant in Oct. '94 and is an accomplished public speaker and author of the book, A Gift from the Heart.