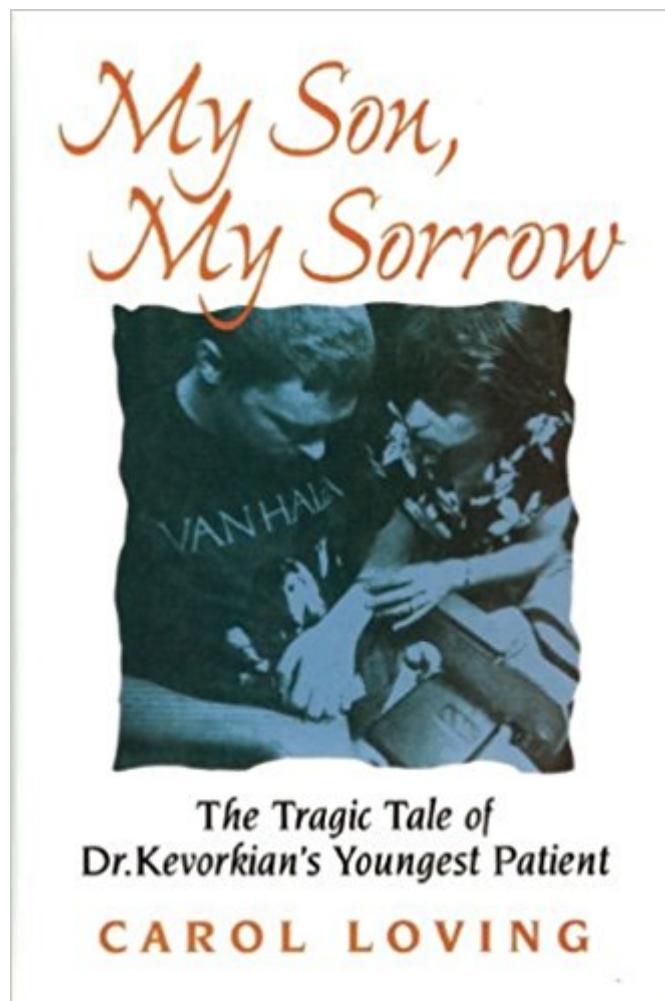


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My Son, My Sorrow



Synopsis

Carol Loving's son Nick went from athletic and high-spirited to debilitated and depressed within two years of being diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease. Unable to walk, feed himself or speak clearly, Nick begged his mother to help him die. Reaching the most heart-wrenching decision of her life, Carol turned to Dr. Jack Kevorkian for help. *My Son, My Sorrow* is an eloquent contribution to the debate over "the right to die, " which only someone who has lived through the experience with a loved one can provide.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Deserted by her husband early on, Loving raised her five children in desperate poverty, continually struggling to better herself through education and work. In a family that seemed destined from the start for recurrent misfortune and misery, the news that a robust, athletic young family member was dying of Lou Gehrig's disease hit hard. In his mid-20s, one of Loving's twin boys, Nick, was considering a stint in the military to pay for his college education. Instead, what followed his diagnosis were two years of agonizing physical deterioration and its accompanying emotional toll on him, his mother (and main caretaker) and the entire family. Nick unsuccessfully attempted suicide three times, "in searing rage against the disease that forced him to suffer, yet refused to let him die." A call for the legalization of merciful euthanasia, this book also provides a disturbing look at the "cold" and "condescending" medical profession and at the government of a society that "is not mature enough to accept death as a natural part of life in the given order." The peaceful passing Nick finally achieved with the help of the notorious Dr. Jack Kevorkian contrasts dramatically with

the two years of torture and insensitivity this young man and his family endured. This book adds an important voice to the debate on euthanasia. Author radio tour. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This contribution to the debate over euthanasia is one which only a person who has lived through the experience with a loved one can provide. It drives home the hotly-contested question of whether we have the right to end life in the wake of intense suffering. When Carol Loving's talented, athletic, college student son Nicholas disclosed late one night that he was having difficulty grasping a football, uttering certain sounds, and moving his body, and feared he's becoming paralyzed, she rushed him to a hospital. After a myriad of tests, he was diagnosed with a fatal degenerative illness - Lou Gehrig's disease. Carol devoted herself to caring for Nick. Mother and son fought the debilitating effects, gallantly. However, within eighteen months, Nick was unable to walk, feed himself or speak clearly. Moreover, they knew the worst was yet to come. After failing at suicide three times, Nick pleaded with his mother to help him die. Reaching the most heart-wrenching decision she would ever have to make, Carol agreed. Frantically searching for the means, Carol canvassed friends, pigeonholed medical and government personnel and scoured the streets. No one would help end her son's agony. Finally, Carol contacted their last hope, the renowned advocate of assisted suicide, Dr. Death - Dr. Jack Kevorkian, begging for his deliverance. From Carol Loving's unique vantage point, as the public controversy rages, we meet and get to know the private man never revealed by the media barrage surrounding him. We learn why he believes aiding the dying is his mission.

The author went through hell taking care of her son as he suffered the debilitation effects of Lou Gehrig's Disease. To her credit, she keeps her son at home and takes constant care of him. She certainly gives us an excellent idea of what she and her son went through during this time. However, I would not recommend this book to someone who is facing the same situation or who has a terminally ill family member. The author is too angry and has no sense of perspective. It makes perfect sense that she would feel this way while actually going through the ordeal. But in the process of writing a book about it, you'd expect her to have dealt with some of her anger and resentment and to be able to give a little more balanced account. That's not what's presented here. Throughout the story, which starts with her early marriage and goes on through the next 25 or so years till her son's death, the author blames society, the medical profession, the hospice system, the social security system, the welfare system, her employers, landlords, ex-husband, etc., etc.,

each time something goes wrong or she isn't able to reach an expected outcome. Over and over, she asks why the medical profession can't help her son to die with dignity, and indeed this seems to be the argument the book is meant to make. Most of the book seems to be an attempt to push euthanasia legislation so situations like hers and her son's can be handled more humanely. However, she doesn't acknowledge the fact that euthanasia was illegal at the time and that any doctor who assured her that he would euthanize her son "on call," so to speak, would have been put on trial for murder. She takes it personally that no MD is willing to give her the assurance she wants. Much of what she writes is contradictory or confusing. For example, she sees Dr. Kevorkian on TV very early on in her son's illness, but then says that she had no idea of how to get in contact with him. (This from a woman who had once traveled to Taiwan to work.) Then, at some point, she gets hold of a copy of the Hemlock Society's book which provides easy "recipes" for committing suicide/euthanasia. But she then claims that, though she searched high and low, she couldn't find the medications necessary. Later, when hospice nurses provide her with sleeping medication for her son, she complains that, even when doubling the dose, he still couldn't sleep. Yet, she doesn't continue to increase the dose, even though she was looking for meds to help him end his life. I'm not blaming her for this or saying she was being dishonest - she was under a horrible amount of stress and no doubt was not always thinking clearly. But, in writing the book, she should have noted that and not blamed the hospice nurses, whom she seems to still hate with a passion. (I have to admit that I myself am a nurse and didn't feel it likely that almost every single nurse sent to her house was both stupid and mean. She has a great deal of contempt, too, for self-help counseling groups sponsored by the ALS society, etc. She says they are all hypocritical and/or in denial. In other words, the author really doesn't seem to have processed what she'd gone through or gained any perspective. Not a book I would recommend putting anywhere near someone who has just received a terminal diagnosis or who is thinking about euthanasia. This is, perhaps, a good book for medical professionals who want to get a very personal idea of how things look from a caretaker's point of view. I did not work much with dying patients during my time in the hospital. However, this book - specifically, the author's relationship with her son - did remind me of one situation I saw - a totally different one, in one way: a pregnant woman hospitalized for severe morning sickness. (She had it all day.) She would be pretty calm and peaceful during the day, but when her husband came to visit, she would become very upset, start to cry, toss around, saying she couldn't stand it anymore. The husband was very anxious, continually asking the wife if she felt any better and frequently asking us what could be done. I was in the room when, in re his wife's suffering, the husband broached the possibility of abortion to the doctor. The doctor very tersely told the man that this was not a good

option. It seems that there are times when relatives and patients exponentially increase each other's anxieties. Clearly, the case of this poor boy with Lou Gehrig's was tragic. But I wonder whether his mother's anxiety and inability to cope increased his own, just as his increased hers. In other words, in this book, euthanasia is presented as the only sane path. But I don't know that this particular case provides the most typical case or the most balanced argument. I read this book after reading "Deadly Compassion" by Rita Marker, thinking this book would give me a sympathetic view of euthanasia - wanting to know both sides. But I think I have to keep looking.

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