

*Life After Encephalitis* by Ava Easton.

Comments from Professor Jon Evans, University of Glasgow.

This is a wonderful book. Ava Easton says in the preface to *Life After Encephalitis* that she hopes that it gives a voice to survivors of encephalitis. It does. It is a book of stories from which we learn what encephalitis is and how it affects the brain, but more importantly how it changes the lives of those who survive it.

Ava Easton makes a compelling case for the use of narratives in helping survivors, their families and health care practitioners to understand what it means to cope with the consequences of encephalitis. But the case is really made for her by the survivors of encephalitis and the families who tell their stories with such clarity, insight and dignity.

The unique accounts of survivors Roy, Sophie and Ross are annotated by the expertise of Prof Solomon and Dr Irani, which is a wonderful way to understand and learn about the consequences of encephalitic illnesses. That encephalitis changes the lives of those who suffer it, is clear, but it also changes the lives of family members, friends and colleagues. Jean Evans provides a deeply moving account of how the lives of her husband, Phillip, *and* herself changed when Phillip developed encephalitis. Then Janet Hodgson gives us a very helpful neuropsychological account of Phillip's experiences that illustrates how encephalitis leads to a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes that has a profound effect on a person's sense of identity. This style of combining a survivor's story with a health care professional's perspective is engaging and very effective.

Losing a child is the worst thing that can happen to a parent. In Chapter 7, Tiggy Sutton describes the trauma of losing her son, Johnny, who died after just a four-day encephalitic illness. When Johnny didn't make it, Tiggy Sutton's family had to find a way to cope. They coped '*minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day*'. For those who suffer the same experience, this chapter will, I hope, give comfort – Tiggy Sutton articulates the terrible experience that she, her husband and their other children had to endure, but she also explains how they managed to find a way to cope. I was reminded of the book written by Barbara Wilson, President of the Encephalitis Society and her husband Mick - *First Year, Worst Year* - which describes how she and her husband Mick coped with the loss of their grown up daughter Sarah in a white water rafting accident in Peru. Tiggy Sutton and also Barbara and Mick Wilson take the reader through the experience of loss, never avoiding describing the emotional pain they experienced, but they also explain how they were able, in time, to cope with a loss, which at times felt impossible. As Tiggy Sutton says, '*Our grief has eased, but it has never disappeared*'.

Resilience is a theme that characterizes the survivors and their family members in this inspiring book. Roy puts it so well when he says, '*Do I wish I had never had the illness – of course. But I am a better person for having it*'. Jean Evans comments, '*Encephalitis has changed both of our lives, but it hasn't stopped them. We have lived through the tough times and changed for the better*'. These and the other stories in

this book help us understand how encephalitis robs people of many things, but also shows that many people grow stronger as a result of their experience with encephalitis.

Jon Evans

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