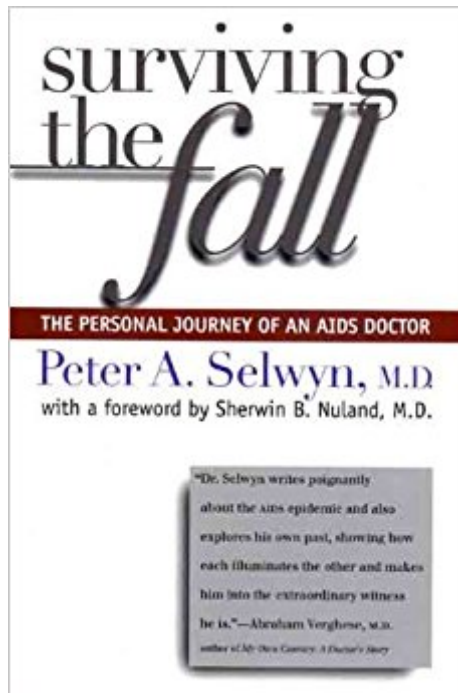




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# Surviving The Fall: The Personal Journey Of An AIDS Doctor



## Synopsis

This poignant and eloquent book is a memoir of the first decade of the AIDS epidemic in the Bronx, a physician's firsthand account of the emergence of an epidemic and the lives that it touched. It is also an exploration of how the physician was himself transformed by his experience with these patients. Dr. Peter Selwyn, now a well-known researcher and clinician in the area of HIV and drug abuse, came to Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx as a medical intern in June 1981. He remained there for ten years, caring for patients with AIDS. During that same span he got married and became a father. Absorbed in the pain and losses of his patients and their families, Dr. Selwyn finally acknowledged the grief he had carried for decades following the sudden death (and apparent suicide) of his father when the author was an infant. He realized that, like AIDS, suicide stigmatizes both those who die and those who survive. Surrounded by dying young parents, he understood what it meant to have a father and to be one. For him, it was a process of healing in the midst of the epidemic. His story can help us see AIDS (and any life-threatening illness) as an opportunity to go through our own fear, pain, and darkness and to come out on the other side. Recognizing the darkness and passing through it, observes Dr. Selwyn, is a prerequisite for anyone seeking to be an effective caregiver, whether professional or personal. It is a process that can teach us how to accompany patients or loved ones through illness and to witness and relieve their suffering as they approach death. This is an uplifting story of loss, discovery, and coming to terms with the past, a story with an important message for anyone dealing with the challenges of living, dying, and being human.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Selwyn entered his residency at an inner-city Bronx hospital in 1981, just in time for the arrival of AIDS. Medical school had prepared him to be a healer, but in the face of a devastating, incurable disease, he found his most important role was as a "witness and companion." There were certain characteristics of the disease that made it more personal, and in the devastating effects of AIDS on families, Selwyn began to sense parallels with the suicide of his father: "Like AIDS, suicide is something that stigmatizes both those who die and those who survive, something that is shrouded with shame, guilt, and secrecy." Selwyn successfully intertwines his own story with portraits of his most memorable patients, resisting the temptation to turn them into martyrs. He admires drug addicts' "yearning to live intensely in every moment" and eventually, as he becomes more and more obsessed with his work, recognizes that he shares some of their patterns of addictive behavior. As befits a memoir, this book's best moments are the intensely personal ones: Selwyn's secret fear that any weight loss meant the onset of AIDS; his attempt to trace his father's last steps in the building where he died. Selwyn credits his journey through the AIDS epidemic with making him a better doctor, but the healing went both ways as he found a new understanding that would allow him to treat the untended wounds left by his father's death. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is not so much a book about AIDS as it is the story of a physician's coming to self-understanding by means of his work with AIDS patients. Selwyn, associate director of the AIDS program at Yale, began working with the disease as a new resident. Increasingly consumed by his work and concerned about his patients, he began to recognize that he was becoming less emotionally available to his own family. Selwyn attributes this and other problems to the death of his father, who died suddenly, probably a suicide, when the author was an infant. While Selwyn's profiles of AIDS patients are lovingly and beautifully written, and he paints an involving and realistic picture of the devastating impact of AIDS, readers might wonder at his tendency to attribute virtually every emotion to his father's death. Not an essential purchase, this book will nevertheless appeal to readers interested in AIDS or stories of self-discovery. ?Linda Gleason, Univ. of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey Lib., Newark Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Dr. Peter A. Selwyn's book "Surviving the Fall: The Personal Journey of an AIDS Doctor" is one of profound importance. It is the synthesis of Peter's life, his life's work, including his work with the late Elisabeth Kubler Ross and her teachings, and thus a path to healing for humanity. I hope that none are misguided into avoiding it because they think it is about what many so unfortunately see as the "unspeakable" AIDS epidemic just as they often mistook Elisabeth Kubler Ross's work to be about death and dying rather than life and living. "Surviving the Fall: The Personal Journey of an AIDS Doctor" is another important entry in humanity's journal of life and living. I thank Peter for sharing a copy of this book with me prior to publication in preparation for furthering his support of those in need. This review was originally posted on a number of years ago. I was deeply moved by this book which helped create an opening into my own inner world and my own unfinished business. I am certain that for those who dare to look inside themselves and examine their own unfinished business, they too will find meaning in Peter's book. One meaning that became evident to me in reading "Surviving the Fall: The Personal Journey of an AIDS Doctor" is that it is a beacon. It is a beacon to all who wish to find their way to overcoming their personal inner obstacles and blockages, and thus to avoid becoming bitter, angry, and beaten down by life and to what they bear witness. It is a beacon to becoming the beautiful person each of us is meant to be. Peter's book exemplifies deep understanding of, and awakening to, the inner pain and struggles that can either lead us astray from our own paths toward beauty, or be the driving force behind our own personal and spiritual evolution. I hold that this book is a guide to becoming what each human is meant to be: a "flower". We are intended to strive throughout our lives to become that flower despite the strife which may surround and engulf us. The manure that is "thrown at us", life's trauma's, losses, and pains, is the fertilizer from which we grow. I hold that "The most beautiful flowers spring from the deepest manure". That manure, the pain and tribulations of life, can be the "detritus" from which we are driven to our own flowering or it can be just a stinking bunch of "muck" into which we sink and become, to ourselves and others, much like the muck. We can become the perpetrators of more "muck" upon others. Indeed we can become the muck in other's lives. We think we don't have a choice but I believe we do. I believe ultimately choice creates "Hitler's" and alternatively, choice creates "Mother Teresa's". It is our choice where the pain takes us: "Flowerhood" or "muckhood". Peter's book is an example to all of how one man had the strength to look inside and make a choice to reach for the beauty that is there for all to grasp. That beauty was the gift he received from, and gave back to, his patients and now to any who read his book. That beauty has led Peter to share his wonderful example of what can be derived from the manure that is thrown at us in life. "Surviving the Fall: The Personal Journey of an AIDS Doctor" also points out a crucial factor in all healing: We gain

much from those in pain for whom we remain present. Indeed, we gain much by remaining present for our own pain. It is hard to be cognizant that to \*just be present\* can make such a difference, yet this is a truth which Peter Selwyn exemplifies in his writings, his life, and his life's work. It is a natural outcome that when we remain so present for others who hurt, even if we do not have any answers to their suffering, if we are willing or able to look, we become aware of our own "demons". It is from just such a pivotal point of awareness that a choice, conscious or unconscious, of "flowering from the manure" or avoiding it and sinking back into the muck comes. It takes strength and courage to look at what causes us and others pain and to stay with it. Yet to heal we must do just that. Those who suffer with whom we share this definitively human compassion of simply being there are our greatest teachers. Indeed, we can see so much of ourselves reflected in their eyes if we dare to look. If we dare to "touch" their pain simply by our compassion and presence, we will see what is hidden in our own "shadows" that drives us to behave as we do, and thus, what can drive us all to beauty, peace and living life fully every second of every day. This is the human experience. Peace is obtainable here and now. It is elusive and perhaps transient, but we each can get there in this physical lifetime if we will just sit still long enough to discover where the struggles lead us. Dr. Peter A. Selwyn's book is a lighthouse to all who are willing to find their way through their storms to their own shore of self discovery.

This is great book, if you have lost someone to suicide. It is beautiful written from the heart of a medical doctor as he deals with his loss. Suicide is personal, and it hurts all. I recommend this book if you have lost a family member. The author writes that his father fell, but he "survived the the fall."

A depthful memoir recounting a dramatic time at the start of the AIDS crisis. Beautifully weaves together the personal and the larger medical drama unfolding at the time.

The author describes in gret detail his struggles and satisfactions working with AIDS patients in New York. As he continues his work he finds need to look into his own background and discovers the details of his father's death when he was a child. A heartwarming portrayal of how life experiences often unrecognized motivate us in our choice of profession and the way we carry out our responsibilities. A heart warming book. Morris Wessel, M.D.

Surviving the Fall is eminently readable, quite fascinating and very moving. It makes the reader care about the troubled people who become Dr. Selwyn's AIDS patients. Dr. Selwyn also shares very

personal insights into his own emotions and the journey he took in coming to terms with personal losses.

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