

A REVIEW OF

## *Coma Life: Touch Me, Talk to Me, I'm Here*

By Richard S. Darling, D.D.S.

REVIEWED BY JIM GLEASON

Besides being a powerful description of what it was like living in a coma, *Coma Life* also is an inspiring story of a man who has struggled with diabetes, liver cancer, hepatitis C, heart attack — and *three* liver transplants.

Let me first assure readers who may be on the transplant wait list: multiple transplants are *not* the norm, but if something goes wrong, it is strengthening to know second — and third — chances are possible.



Jim Gleason recently retired from Unisys Corp. in Blue Bell, Penn. A 1991 heart recipient, he is the author of *A Gift from the Heart*.

*Coma Life* author Richard Darling, D.D.S., born and raised in Barre, Vt., graduated from the University of the Pacific Dental School in San Francisco. He had a successful dental practice in California, but serious health problems, including liver cancer and hepatitis C, forced him to take leave of his practice.

Eventually, he needed a liver transplant. After a successful transplant, though, serious complications took him into his "coma life" for two weeks.

What is life like while in a coma? The many pages of recalled fantasy dreaming inside the coma, often

related to real activity around him, were fascinating for what is revealed about the unresponsive patient in that state. Strange characters often populated those fantasies, and later he found that something the doctors or nurses did find itself into his fantastical dreams.

He cautions relatives of comatose patients never to shut off life-support equipment — *as long as irreversible brain damage is absent*. He writes:

"A wonderful life lives on inside that silent body you visit each day; never give up hope and stop their world. It must be remembered that relatives cannot take the position: 'He would never have wanted to live like this,' because many of us in a coma are living a carefree, action-filled life. We have no knowledge of being comatose and, for the most part, have a peaceful existence that is without pain."

His recollections become especially meaningful as he later shares his coma experience with a terrified woman whose husband was in a coma. "I have to tell you a few things....," he says as he begins. How wonderful to be able to turn one's own challenge into support for another as he shares hope that her loved one is truly hearing her, and just isn't able to reply.

I was moved each time he evocatively describes families he reaches out to support after his own experiences, which Darling does repeatedly.

*Coma Life* is a good book for families supporting a loved one in a coma state and for medical professionals who find themselves in contact with unresponsive patients. Darling's story provides a rare opportunity for us to understand what may be going on inside the mind of an unresponsive patient. There may well be a desperate life inside begging for your reassuring contact. As Darling pleads, "Touch me, talk to me, I'm here!"

Despite the disappointment of losing his first two transplanted livers, the author lets us know of the joys that go with the extensions of life that donors and their families offer by saying yes to donation. Patients may recognize themselves as the author describes the roller-coaster of being on the wait list. Another message of hope is the author's story of getting a transplant despite liver cancer.

Darling's story brings hope and encouragement to us all. His lesson that it can be healing to help others at one's own time of need is an important one. We all have gifts to offer others.

As you internalize the inspiration this book offers, I encourage you to ask yourself about your own gifts and how you are sharing those gifts to help others. Not too many things are more important. **U**

*Coma Life* is available from Richard Darling, D.D.S., 78629 Bougainvillea Drive, Palm Desert, CA 92211, [comalife@dc.rr.com](mailto:comalife@dc.rr.com). The cost of \$17 includes postage and handling, and all profits are used to promote organ donation and hepatitis C research.

Visit [comalife.org](http://comalife.org) and [fairfoundation.org](http://fairfoundation.org) for more about the FAIR Foundation, which Darling founded to advocate for equitable government distribution of funds for disease research.

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