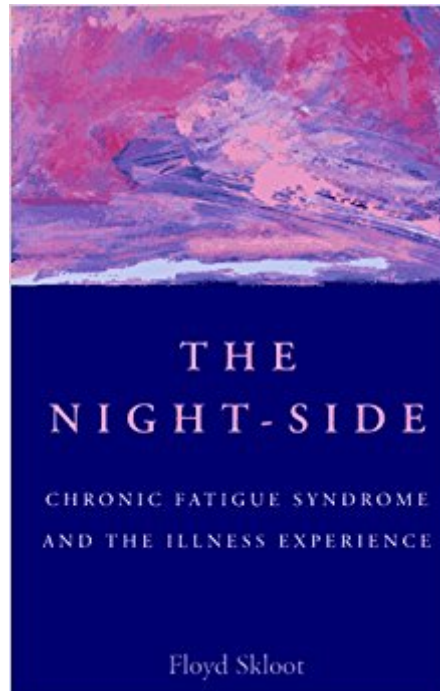




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The Night-Side: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome & The Illness Experience



Synopsis

Book by Skloot, Floyd

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anyone who writes about illness must quote *Illness as Metaphor*, and Skloot (*Summer Blue*) uses Susan Sontag's book for both the title and the epigraph: "Illness is the night-side of life," says Sontag. "Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick." Before he got Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) in 1988, Skloot was, as he often reiterates, firmly a citizen of the former: a runner "with a corkboard of ribbons" and without "an ounce of fat," he became habitually weak, forgetful, flu-ish. He quit his job as a "Senior Public Policy Analyst for a diversified energy corporation" but continued to work on his writing, turning out these essays, many of which have appeared in magazines such as *The Antioch Review*, *Threepenny Review* and even *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*. One, which appeared in *The Best American Essays* of 1993, is an affecting description of life with a brain that is no longer agile. Two other early pieces are also worthwhile: his musings on being a research subject ("Here I am with an illness that too many people already suspect as being psychosomatic; what happens if I get better during the clinical trial and it turns out I've been getting the placebo?") and on his memories of his mother's carefully packaged apartment, in which everything was embalmed in Saran Wrap. The pieces that work best approach the illness indirectly. Without a larger philosophy or dry humor (his sections on alternative medicine compare badly with Spalding Gray's), Skloot's

writing on his illness, especially one received with so little sympathy by the general public, seems self-indulgent. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Devastated by chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), award-winning poet, essayist, and novelist Skloot (Summer Blue, LJ 11/15/94) learned how serious illness can strike overnight and quickly rearrange every aspect of life. Over the next seven years, he went to astonishing lengths to find a cure for his incurable disease, undergoing some bizarre remedies: a double-blind experimental drug (ampligen) study, a visit to an Indian avatar in Germany, and Ayurvedic therapy in Vancouver. Skloot looks at his illness straight-on to explore Susan Sontag's "wild conundrum...about the healthiest way of being ill" (Illness as Metaphor, LJ 6/1/78). In the 12 essays reprinted here, which work well as a whole, he includes humor, baseball, poetry, music, and insights from Norman Cousins, Oliver Sacks, and others. An intelligent lay reader's guide, this is interesting but not essential reading. For comprehensive health collections. James Swanton, Harlem Hosp. Lib., New York Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

As of this date there are close to 150 titles listed on relating to Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome. Only a very small number of these deal with the full personal experience of living with the illness. Unlike the other few memoir type writings I've read, Skloot's is not a "how I beat the illness" story, because he hasn't beat it, he's simply drastically altered his life by necessity. For someone like me, whose same illness was denied by everyone around me for years, to the point where I internalized their beliefs and tried to live as if I weren't ill until I, too, became majorly debilitated, Skloot's perspective is a welcome relief. He had a sudden onset, which changed his life dramatically within a matter of weeks. It's encouraging to read the musings of someone who has his head straight on about this illness. He doesn't whine, or moan and groan. He is so completely sure of his ground, that there's no room for defensiveness in his tone. It's uplifting to read about someone who, like myself, was open to every alternative treatment or scientific explanation, though the miracle cure that would relieve his symptoms hasn't come along yet. It's also reassuring to know that there's someone out there who had the combination of luck and smarts not to be completely downtrodden by this disease. As a fellow sufferer, his lack of anger, his philosophical approach, his open mindedness are qualities I'd like to emulate. If you are a sufferer, or know anyone who is, or has a CFIDS sufferer in their life, this is a good book to start the healing process. The last thing anyone who's sick needs to be told is that all their problems will go away if they just give up wheat or mushrooms. Right now, CFIDS is a mystery, and coping strategies that go beyond the facile

recommendations of most self-help for CFIDS books out there, like "don't get upset if you miss a deadline at work" -- are rare. If you become ill to the extent that Skloot is, you need the spiritual and philosophical nutrition of excellent literature. I only wish there were more such fine personal accounts written on this devastating illness.

I am wary of books by men-who-have-been-athletes, because I find my experience of similar life events often to be different, to the point of having nothing in common. Floyd Skloot has written a book that is at once both very personal and wide-ranging. Speaking of the stunning changes that come with a life altering illness, he proceeds to delve into areas as diverse as baseball (player become spectator), alternative healing techniques (he's tried a bunch), spirituality, and the changed perception of time that comes with chronic disease. Having moved, like Floyd, from the fast lane to the slow lane, to the exit ramp and off, I find his perspective to be honest, profound, and free of a sense of victimization. I highly recommend the book to women and men with CFS and other chronic maladies. Far from being the last word, it opens up the discussion of a lifestyle and worldview that is almost taboo in faster-is-better American culture.

Excellent writing about illness unusually good book

Being a CFS sufferer, I myself had become very tired of the autobiographical books which bemoaned how hard the illness is. Mr Skloot never minimizes the illness or his discomfort yet shows how the introspection forced upon one by long term illness as well as the search for relief can offer insight, humor and revelation. I don't know of any disabled person, caregiver or human being who couldn't experience some moments of connection and understanding in Mr. Skloot's book. His style is refreshing and honest. A truly fresh look at the human condition and it's ups & downs. A must read!

One of things that impressed me about this book was what it was NOT. It wasn't an attempt to gain sympathy; it wasn't about finding a last minute miracle cure; it wasn't about easy cliches about health and illness. The essays contained humor, insight, and concentration on the fact of living. The best essay I thought was Home Remedies. Usually, when I read something really good, I get an image that sums it up for me. For me, I imagine the author stooping down and grabbing a clump of rich and warm earth, and telling me "this is good"--and I understand what he means.--Vidas Gvozdzis

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