

Book Review: *Doctor Of The Heart: My Life in Medicine*

Author: Isadore Rosenfeld, MD

Review by: Arthur Rosenfeld

It's not every day that a novelist gets to review his own father's memoir. Despite the fact that he's a formidable and compulsive raconteur, there are stories in *Doctor of the Heart* book that my dad, Dr. Isadore Rosenfeld, has not shared before. As an intimate self-portrait of one of America's most famous doctors offered right in the midst of dissecting scrutiny of our national healthcare system, the publication of this book is perfectly timed. More, the book shares secrets that dress a tree of family lore in a luminous fashion perfect for the season.

You may recognize my father's name from his string of #1 New York Times bestselling books, titles that include *Second Opinion*, *The Complete Medical Exam*, *Live Now—Age Later*, *Power to the Patient*, *Dr. Rosenfeld's Guide to Alternative Medicine*, and *Doctor, What Should I Eat?* You may also recognize his name from *Parade magazine*, where he was health editor for many years, and when you have the book in your hand—his picture is on the cover—you may recognize his face from Fox News Channel's weekly health show *Sunday Housecall*, from which podium he continues to explain complex medical issues in plain talk for millions of viewers around the country.

What you probably don't know about my dad is that he was raised by a man who earned a few dollars a week candling eggs in the basement of a grocery store, that his mother's identical twin sister (and the rest of her family) died in the Holocaust, that he was once in line to be Canada's Minister of Health, that he was, and is, physician to some of the world's wealthiest and most powerful people—including kings and queens and presidents and princes, as well as Hollywood celebrities and captains of industry. It's even more unlikely that you know that my dad made an Acapulco house call in a limousine in the company of Lady Bird Johnson and a coterie of Secret Service agents.

It is also unlikely that you've heard that the great stage actor Zero Mostel ran around in my father's office with a flashlight in his underwear screaming "It burns!" just to scare the other patients. Probably you didn't know that my dad accompanied New York Governor Averell Harriman on a delegation to the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War, where he somehow managed to get members of the Brezhnev-era politburo, known anti-Semites, to raise a toast to Israeli Premier Golda Meier at precisely the time their country was supporting Arabs nations in a war on the Jewish state.

On the surface it might seem that *Doctor of the Heart* chronicles the life of some kind of social chameleon, who, like the lead character in Woody Allen's film *Zelig* is able to blend in with the notables around him, or like *Forrest Gump*, simply manages to sail through life in the company of movers and shakers. To see my father's story that way would be to miss the elephant in the room—a piercing, relentless medical acumen, combined with palpable compassion. No fictional character ever stayed up all night to figure out what was wrong with a patient whom others have written off, until he came up with an obscure and unlikely diagnosis and saved a life.

Those qualities continue to drive people to seek Dr. Isadore Rosenfeld's counsel, and in his memoir they provide a bridge between story and science. The book so successfully wraps medical information in the sugar of entertainment, (my father has a healthy sense of himself and

is not shy about his accomplishments) that readers will be too busy laughing or incredulously shaking their heads to realize how much they are learning. The focus is on cardiology, so the bulk of the facts are about heart attack and stroke, but gems about endocrine disease and mental illness can also be found.

Not every chapter engages celebrity. My father's busy practice was filled with everyday people, many of whom he treated for free. A selfless, down-to-earth community physician in his native Montreal set the example for what he thought a physician should be, and some of the most touching and memorable parts of *Doctor of the Heart* recount the hardships of his early life at a time when Jews worldwide lived, and died, under the shadow of the Nazis. If this were a novel, I would say the book shows an arc of character that makes the heights to which my father's career soared even more remarkable and meaningful.

My father is in favor of socialized medicine, and says so in the book. He believes government subsidy can work within a capitalist system despite the economic difficulties and drives a moral nail through political objections to such a healthcare plan, focusing, as always, on what is best for patients. That repeated and unwavering devotion to the sick comes through loud and clear in the book.

Ah, but are there a few gratuitous inclusions? I suppose some readers may think so. While he writes wonderfully well and the book is a lightning-fast read, there are one or two few places where his memory goes soft. For example he describes a dinner at a Chinese restaurant at which someone called the paparazzi, who set bulbs flashing as Jacqueline Onassis and my mother walked out. In fact it was I who had the former first lady's arm, and the caption in the next day's paper read Jackie O in Chinese Orgy with Bearded Hippie!

But that, dear friends, is a story for another memoir.

Doctor of the Heart: My Life In Medicine (Mary Ann Liebert, Inc/ Oct 2009) is available at online booksellers and from the publisher at 800-800 685-4802 and www.liebertpub.com/heart

Arthur Rosenfeld is an authority on the spiritual dimensions of Eastern thinking for a Western world. A novelist, martial arts master and philosopher, Rosenfeld is a contributor to national magazines, including *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Parade*, has been seen on national TV and radio networks. The author of eleven acclaimed books and the creator of the fiction genre "Kung Fu Noir," he combines stories with Eastern wisdom drawn from nearly 30 years of martial arts study. His latest title is *Quiet Teacher*.

A Yale graduate, Rosenfeld combines scientific background and communication skills gained through post-graduate studies at the University of California with real-world savvy gleaned from high-level corporate positions. Drawing on his background in medicine and science he has been cited in national media, including *Newsweek*, *Ebony*, and *Parade*. He has also written *The Truth About Chronic Pain*.