

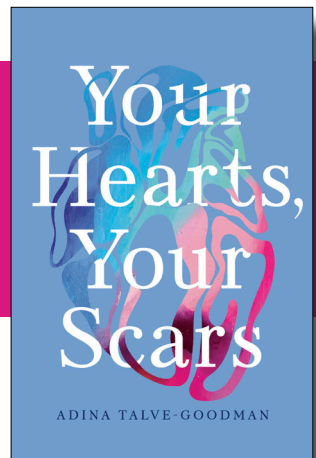


Your Hearts, Your Scars

Essays by Adina Talve-Goodman

Edited by Sarika Talve-Goodman and Hannah Tinti, with a foreword by Jo Firestone

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“Adina Talve-Goodman walked a tightrope, for much of her thirty-one years, between life and death. Perhaps for this reason, Adina embodied life more than any person I’ve ever met. She lit up rooms with pure joy and kindness and, although this phrase is often overused, to know Adina was to love her. I’m grateful this beautiful book exists, so everyone else can know her, too. Adina was a brilliant writer, and these pages are imbued with her exuberance, her sharp humor, and both versions of her spectacular heart.”

—**Ann Napolitano**, author of *A Good Hard Look* and *Dear Edward*

“This book is so full of life that it’s hard to believe the amazing young woman who wrote it is no longer walking among us. Adina has left an indelible mark on this world. Her extraordinary gifts, her irrepressible spirit, live on.”

—**Dani Shapiro**, author of *Inheritance* and *Signal Fires*

INTRODUCTION

Adina Talve-Goodman was born with a congenital heart condition and survived multiple operations over the course of her childhood, including a heart transplant at age nineteen. In seven essays, she tells the story of her chronic illness and her youthful search for love and meaning, never forgetting that her adult life is tied to the loss of another person—the donor of her transplanted heart. Whether writing about the experience of taking her old heart home from the hospital (and passing it around the Thanksgiving table), a summer camp for young transplant patients, or a memorable night on the town, Talve-Goodman’s writing is filled with curiosity, humor, and compassion. Published posthumously, *Your Hearts, Your Scars* is the work of a writer wise beyond her years, a moving reflection on chance and gratitude, and a testament to hope and kindness.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. In the opening pages, Adina’s friend, comedian Jo Firestone, writes, “Around her I laughed the hardest and cried the hardest. She fiercely reminded us how much we were loved.” Were you able to get a sense of Adina as a person in these essays, beyond what her loved ones shared? And do you think there is a difference between how we see ourselves versus how other people see us?
2. In “The Condition of My Transplanted Heart is One of Remembering,” Adina considers the family of her donor’s heart, reminding herself, “My family’s gratitude, our joy, comes in large part from another family’s grief.” Do you think it’s possible to experience grief as both mourning and celebration?
3. In “The Condition of My Transplanted Heart is One of Remembering,” Adina describes being on the transplant list as “an exercise in how close you can get to death—close enough to earn a heart, not so close that the heart can’t bring you back.” How much did you know about the transplant process and how the transplant list works before reading this book? Do the factors considered seem just to you? What did Adina think about the justice of the process?



4. “In my childhood bedroom, in a box on my nightstand, preserved in some scentless chemical, sits my old heart.” Why did Adina keep her original heart after her transplant? What does it mean to her?
5. Within these essays, Adina describes several encounters with strangers in need: the man beside his toppled wheelchair, the man outside the café asking for money, the man who loved a dying woman. What does anyone owe to strangers? What does Adina choose to give them? Does empathy cost too much, or is it ultimately worth it?
6. “Men Who Love Dying Women and Fishing” is written in second person, centering “you,” the reader, as the subject. How did this perspective shift away from the collection’s first-person voice change how you read the piece? If “you” were in Adina’s situation, would you have made different choices?
7. Adina explores what it means for her to live with illness, and also the ways others react to her body and her story. How do Adina’s friends, lovers, strangers, and family see her body before and after her transplant? How do their reactions shape her understanding of herself? If you were a transplant patient, would you choose to share this with others, or would you try to keep it a secret?
8. Adina also interrogates how her readers will see her: “I live in this way, a different body, a body of hybridity, to mean something to you, to your experiences, to practice your empathy, to fetishize, even to ‘inspire.’” Have you ever been guilty of reducing someone to their illness in this way? How can we resist this impulse?
9. In her introduction, Adina’s sister, Sarika Talve-Goodman, writes: “Adina comes from a family of rabbis, writers, storytellers, and Sephardic Jewish witches.” This ancestry comes into focus in “Thank God for the Nights That Go Right,” when Adina tells her father, a rabbi, about the man she met who had survived fourteen years with his transplant. She explains, “Sometimes the universe just shouts *I Got You*, y’know?” He responds, “That’s like God.” What does he mean? How does Adina’s background and spirituality guide her through both illness and health?
10. When Adina finally receives her transplant, she worries about the responsibility and whether she deserves the heart. “What will I do with all that time?” she asks herself. “How will I ever be worthy of it?” Most of us have more time but rarely ask the same questions. What do we owe to others? What do we owe ourselves? And what choices can we make to live up to our own hearts?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adina Talve-Goodman (1986–2018) was born in St. Louis with a congenital heart condition and underwent a heart transplant at age nineteen. She went on to graduate from Washington University, and perform internationally at the Academia dell’Arte in Italy and Globe Theater in London. She later became a mentor for Girls Write Now and the managing editor of celebrated literary magazine *One Story*, and was recognized with the Hadassah Advocacy Award and *Bellevue Literary Review* Felice Buckvar Prize for Nonfiction. She was diagnosed with a rare form of lymphoma, caused by post-transplant immunosuppressants, as she was attending the University of Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program and working on what would become her debut collection of essays *Your Hearts, Your Scars*. Learn more about her at www.adinatalvegoodman.com.

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