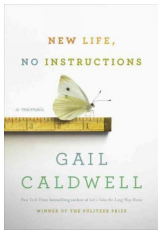


New Life, No Instructions



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Did you ever hobble around on crutches? Discover that your most basic possession, your body, does not work as it once did? This excellent memoir about rehabilitation, friendship, loss, and the love of a great dog is a tearjerker at times, but always incredibly well-written. Wow, does Caldwell know how to spin a yarn.

Gail Caldwell suffered from polio as a small child. In this account she describes how her mother sprawled on the floor with her when she was young and did the tough leg exercises needed to strengthen Gail's leg.

All her life, Gail adapted to living with a bum leg. In her late fifties she decided to adopt a strong Samoyed pup. And as Tula grew, Gail soon found herself falling more and more often, and that she could no longer hike the three mile reservoir loop with her strong-willed pet.

Doctor after doctor told Gail that her limp, the weakness in her leg and her frequent falls were caused by her polio, but Gail finally sought another opinion. The new doctor asked to see her CT scans and X-rays but there were no recent ones. Upon doing them, he discovered that Gail's hip was shattered with the ball absolutely flat. She needed hip replacement immediately.

As a single person, Gail relied on her friends and neighbors for support. And how they helped her. Not only was rehab very painful, but it left Gail weaker than she'd ever been as an adult. She had to depend upon others.

On one of her worst days, a friend brought her Samoyed home after Gail returned from the hospital. The dog smelled Gail's blood and anxiety and bolted toward the door. After Tula left, Gail wept. Not even her dog accepted her altered state.

Not only does the book describe Gail's medical woes, but it also details her experience raising a pup, and her experiences as a child with polio. Also covered are her close relationships with both her parents, particularly her mother.

This tough, strong woman learned here how it felt to no longer be independent. She learned to both listen to and push her body forward. A rower for many years, Gail, soon went back to lifting her boat into the water. A woman full of Texas grit and can-do, Gail writes beautifully about life, pain, and growing as a person. No matter what your problems are, this book will charm and inspire you. If you like this memoir, try Caldwell's earlier one, *Let's Take the Long Way Home*.

It's about her friendship with the writer Caroline Knapp, their dog adventures together and Knapp's early death.

Posted by Dory L. on May 25, 2014

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