



When Hope Is Your Only Option: One Man's Brave Journey through Life's Adversity: Triple Organ Transplant

Jim Stavis

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Jim Stavis's memoir *When Hope Is Your Only Option* is stirring and filled with hope.

In the 1970s, at age seventeen, Starvis received a then-grim diagnosis of type 1 diabetes. In his forties, he faced another chilling pronouncement: due to the havoc that diabetes had caused in his body, he'd need a new heart, kidney, and pancreas.

When his doctor told him a triple transplant had never been done, Starvis solemnly vowed, "I will be the first." His hope and determination carry his story forward. The book charts how he continued to draw people into his life and imparts his hard-won hope.

The narrative is laced with inspirational affirmations and advice about getting through suffering. Its style is friendly and open yet not overly conversational. Scenes are well crafted, with an apt balance of dialogue and exposition and a keen eye for sensory description.

The story is mostly organized chronologically, but opens with the pivotal scene in the doctor's office, as Starvis and his wife find out the extent of the surgeries he needs. The book balances emotion and information about life events, which arise at a steady, modulated pace, placed based on the importance of each event.

Starvis as a character is well rounded, presenting an appealing array of both positive and negative characteristics. Other people, including his wife, are represented with depth and compassion, their presentations infused with the narrator's gratitude. Writing is strong and serves as a great complement to the book's interesting premise.

The short length of the book and its chapters keep the story focused. The parts of the book that are focused on sharing wisdom feel superfluous, even hollow, compared to the compelling events Starvis faced. More enticing are moments in which he focuses his thoughts on adversity, such as when he describes how he progressed through endurance, hope, and prevailing.

Hope in the face of a triple transplant may seem impossibly Pollyannaish or naïve, but that's not the kind of optimism this book conveys. Its hope is bright-eyed, enduring, and confident, but also characterized by grit: Starvis shows himself to be a deeply determined man who counts the cost before he chooses hope.

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MELISSA WUSKE (June 11, 2018)

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