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# My Degeneration: A Journey Through Parkinson's (Graphic Medicine)



## Synopsis

How does one deal with a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease at the age of forty-three? *My Degeneration*, by former Anchorage Daily News staff cartoonist Peter Dunlap-Shohl, answers the question with humor and passion, recounting the author's attempt to come to grips with the "malicious whimsy" of this chronic, progressive, and disabling disease. This graphic novel tracks Dunlap-Shohl's journey through depression, the worsening symptoms of the disease, the juggling of medications and their side effects, the impact on relations with family and community, and the raft of mental and physical changes wrought by the malady. *My Degeneration* examines the current state of Parkinson's care, including doctor/patient relations and the repercussions of a disease that, among other things, impairs movement, can rob patients of their ability to speak or write, degrades sufferers' ability to deal with complexity, and interferes with the sense of balance. Readers learn what it's like to undergo a dramatic, demanding, and audacious bit of high-tech brain surgery that can mysteriously restore much of a patient's control over symptoms. But *My Degeneration* is more than a Parkinson's memoir. Dunlap-Shohl gives the person newly diagnosed with Parkinson's disease the information necessary to cope with it on a day-to-day basis. He chronicles the changes that life with the disease can bring to the way one sees the world and the way one is seen by the wider community. Dunlap-Shohl imparts a realistic basis for hope—"hope not only to carry on, but to enjoy a decent quality of life."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“An emotionally resonant memoir.” Publishers Weekly “Peter Dunlap-Shohl’s *My Degeneration* is . . . a model of how to fill a particular niche. . . . In one of the funniest segments, Dunlap-Shohl presents a series of drawings of bad doctors: “the gimlet-eyed skeptic” who accuses her patient of making up his symptoms, the “cheery prophet” who forecasts inevitable physical decline, “the blithe know-it-all,” and several more. For patients, these irreverent archetypes validate their experiences. Clinicians, too, stand to gain a better appreciation of how they might appear to their patients.” Arthur W. Frank, *Science* “*My Degeneration* opens up a powerful new purpose for comics” as an effective tool to educate doctors, patients, and others about both the clinical and the personal sides of living with a disease. This book should be required reading for any specialist.” Foreword Reviews “Going beyond patient-education booklets, Dunlap-Shohl’s journey of setbacks and triumphs contextualizes key disease information within a narrative suffused with emotion and wry humor. [Parkinson’s disease] patients, families, and caregivers will find it valuable; those who enjoy memoirs will appreciate its compelling real-life drama.” starred review, *Library Journal* “[*My Degeneration*] is in many ways what I would describe as the very model of a graphic medicine book: perfectly balancing . . . the educational and the autobiographical, the clinical and the personal.” Jared Gardner, *Public Books* “We learn basic facts and so much more from Dunlap-Shohl’s honest and honestly engaging account, from his initial depression through all of his learning and experience with the disease to his final chapter. Most of us likely know at least one person with Parkinson’s, and to now have this incredibly informative text allows us to understand the disease in a fresh, bold, visual and visceral way. Those who may find themselves with the unfortunate diagnosis will have a helpful guide to understanding and coping.” Nancy Lord, *Alaska Dispatch News* “The reach of this book extends far beyond those who have, or know someone who has, Parkinson’s disease. I recommend it especially to physicians and other health care providers, who by reading it might avoid the “gratuitous cruelty” that is so easily inflicted, and which Dunlap-Shohl illustrates from his own experiences. . . . I recommend it also to all readers as a story told with humor, honesty and grace, and Dunlap-Shohl has made it into a work of art.” Carolyn Kroehler, *The Roanoke Times* “Peter Dunlap-Shohl once again brings his unique art to the table to help educate, illustrate, and demonstrate life, hope, and strength on his journey with Parkinson’s. Creative and insightful, this book reflects all of Pete’s greatest qualities, including his constant work to help and educate all those in the PD community, patients and care partners alike.” Bill Bell, co-founder of the Northwest Parkinson’s Foundation “Peter Dunlap-Shohl is a comic genius and a masterful artist. The fact

that he came down with early-onset Parkinson's gave him the unlucky opportunity to chronicle this dogged and humorless disease. His wit and artistry, his truth telling in the face of struggle, makes the struggle easier for his readers to bear. Peter is a Rock Star Artist and Humorist. Every disease like Parkinson's should have someone like Peter Dunlap-Shohl, until there are no more diseases like Parkinson's left. "John Straley, author of *Cold Storage, Alaska* could have recommended Peter Dunlap-Shohl's book because it brings attention to a great purpose. Or because it is brave and honest work. Or even simply to acknowledge an achievement of this magnitude created under physical, psychological, and emotional circumstances that most of us will never understand." But I'm not endorsing Peter's graphic novel for any of those reasons. I'm doing so because this is a damn fine work of art, by a damn fine artist. "Nick Galifianakis, Washington Post cartoonist "The world made fresh by a Parkinson's patient with a wonderfully sensitive and cocked eye. He tells the tale of his fast-changing reality with compassion and wicked humor, leaping from one crazily inventive work of art to the next. Never more acute than when examining his own mind-set, Peter Dunlap-Shohl leads us from diagnosis and despair to the high ground where he could compose this lucid, moving book. A miracle, in a way "and a triumph. "Tom Kizzia, author of *Pilgrim's Wilderness: A True Story of Faith and Madness on the Alaska Frontier* "Terrific, a read-in-one-sitting book that engages, teaches, and challenges readers from the first page until its conclusion. . . . Ultimately, this is a story about resilience, and how PD helped the author develop a new perspective on the fragility of life and his ability to adapt to adversity. It is a lesson that all health care professionals should heed. "Michael J. Green and MK Czerwiec, *JAMA*

Peter Dunlap-Shohl worked as a cartoonist for the Anchorage Daily News for twenty-five years. He has won various prizes, including the First Amendment Award from the Alaska Press Club. His blogs are *Frozen Grin* and *Off & On*, the Alaska PD Rag, about living with Parkinson's disease.

This book is honest, revealing and educational. My husband has PD and we feel we're well informed, but this is such an excellent and easy to read summary. Peter's provided a huge service sharing his feelings -- it is like a PD or caregiver's support group for those of us who don't have one within fifty miles -- or if you think one wouldn't help. When I started *My Degeneration* for my bedtime reading my husband, having already read it, said wait until daytime. I'm glad I did, because it is very frank, but Peter also made me laugh. I'm going to recommend this book to some friends who ask well meaning but INSENSITIVE questions about PD -- not to mention some physicians of our

acquaintance.

A beautifully drawn and written story. Peter, our family loves you. Everyone who might ever come into contact with a person with Parkinson's should get this book. Yes, that probably means everyone in the country. It helps explain and prepare and, weirdly, offer a sense of calm. My best wishes to Peter and his wonderful wife.

Well written. Great introduction to PD. Would have been more helpful in my early stage. The points of exercise extremely important as is the many phases of PD. I especially recommend for newly diagnosed. Life is not over with PD but the book examines the change of living life after.

I learned a lot. I have read articles over the years about Parkinson's, but nothing as powerful as this. There is nothing like being genuinely engaged and drawn into a difficult topic you are trying to learn about. This is very well done.

Very informative and funny. Helps you understand more about PD than any text book. Everyone who has a loved one or patient with this disease should read this.

This is a valuable reference for understanding what we think we know about Parkinson's and how one man has experienced it. The text and pictures illustrate very effectively what his experience has been as well as useful information about therapies.

a very honest look at one mans life with Parkinson's.

Informative, though I hadn't expected it to be; resonates even with me, a late onset 72 year old female. Peter's conflict about not living/living is especially poignant. So refreshing is this book considering the sappy self serving let- me- tell- you- how- courageous- you-should- be publications out there! And it's funny, funny; couldn't put it down!

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