

Book Review

Title: *A Reason for Living*

Author: Laurent Grenier

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Cost: \$12.95 USD

Reviewer: Arlie Taganuya

Disability study is an evolving discipline. The postmodern turn in the United States academe in the 1960s onward has shifted a great degree of sensibility and sensitivity to issues confronting people with disabilities. A central preoccupation of many contemporary scholars is to capture the everyday and the institutional experiences of people with disabilities. However, most production of disability discourses and ideas are monopolized in universities, research institutions, and other social agencies; failing to incorporate stories of people with disability as a legitimate voice in providing knowledge. Laurent Grenier's (2004) *A Reason for Living* is an addition to the sparse body of literature responding to the institutional centrism of disability scholarship and putting forward voices previously silenced in academe.

This self-published book is an autobiographical sketch of the author's saga living with spinal injury after a diving accident when he was 17 years old in his native Canada. As the title suggest, this book is about finding a new purpose when disability strikes later in life. In what may appear to be another inspirational story, the book provides a rich ethnography and critical narratives of the ever present psychological battle and the societal reaction of a person living with spinal injury, how he deals the varying challenges of his new disability, and how he creates symbolic meaning that may ameliorate his daily struggle.

Laurent Grenier does an outstanding job describing the emotional stages he experienced after his accident. The first three chapters describe Grenier's early struggle over his disability, his sense of denial and the frustration of being in a medical institution while recuperating and being housed in a long term assistive living. The feelings of bitterness, death-wishes, and the ignorance of people about his condition became his self-inflicted worries and mental preoccupation for years.

The remaining two chapters are the central tenet of his book. Grenier's introduction to poetry, art, and philosophy gave him a breakthrough to rediscover his creative expression, new-found athleticism, and social engagement in bringing up issues that affects people with disabilities. Through his poetry, Grenier was able to articulate his social difference and rebound from his feeling of hopelessness to mental victory.

Grenier's book does moral work in a number of ways. First, it provides readers deeper insights of the personal struggles of a spinal injury survivor and engages them through Grenier's lucid depiction of a contextual experience inside an institution. Second, it opens up a critical dialogue on how our systems of care and policies fail to provide the optimum space to empower people with disabilities to become active participants in our society. Although Grenier's story

magnifies the importance of personal psychological change, it is in the change of people's reaction and other societal structures that make Grenier's living more meaningful.

The epic-like structure of the book allows the reader to follow clearly his personal journey. However, the book is organized broadly. Often chapters swing from his personal experience to his philosophical insights. This style of writing attempts to connect reality and the metaphysical and may not be for everyone. But Grenier's command of the language provides a more profound pictures and insights for his readers.

The detailed table of contents needs to be reflected as subheading in the main text. This allows the readers to have a clear idea of the logical flow without referring to the table. Yet, this minute flaw does not diminish the book's importance, especially for those who are studying the emerging discourses in disability studies or simply readers wanting to be inspired. The book is not short of realism and essence. It anchors hope and transformation to ordinary lives with or without disability. It is a must-read.

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