



No Laughing Matter

Joseph Heller , Speed Vogel

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An uproarious and frank memoir of illness and recovery, *No Laughing Matter* is a story of friendship and recuperation from the author of the classic *Catch-22*.

It all began one typical day in the life of Joe Heller. He was jogging four miles at a clip these days, working on his novel *God Knows*, coping with the complications of an unpleasant divorce, and pigging out once or twice a week on Chinese food with cronies like Mel Brooks, Mario Puzo, and his buddy of more than twenty years, Speed Vogel. He was feeling perfectly fine that day—but within twenty-four hours he would be in intensive care at Manhattan's Mount Sinai Hospital. He would remain hospitalized for nearly six months and leave in a wheelchair.

Joseph Heller had Guillain-Barré syndrome, a debilitating, sometimes fatal condition that can leave its victims paralyzed from head to toe. The clan gathered immediately. Speed—sometime artist, sometime businessman, sometime herring taster, and now a coauthor—moved into Joe's apartment as messenger, servant, and shaman. Mel Brooks, arch-hypochondriac of the Western world, knew as much about Heller's condition as the doctors. Mario Puzo, author of the preeminent gangster novel of our time, proved to be the most reluctant man ever to be dragged along on a hospital visit. These and lots of others rallied around the sickbed in a show of loyalty and friendship that not only built a wild and spirited camaraderie but helped bring Joe Heller, writer and buddy extraordinaire, through his greatest crisis.

This book is an inspiring, hilarious memoir of a calamitous illness and the rocky road to recuperation—as only the author of *Catch-22* and the friend who helped him back to health could tell it. *No Laughing Matter* is as wacky, terrifying, and greathearted as any fiction Joseph Heller ever wrote.

No Laughing Matter Details

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From Reader Review No Laughing Matter for online ebook

Alana says

This book captures the monotony of months in the hospital. While I would never demean the psychological impact of such of an experience, or the friendship at the heart of this book, it also doesn't make for exciting reading.

Derek Baldwin says

one of the worst books I've ever read. boring, flatulent, self-indulgent and insulting to the intelligence. far too Jewish too.

Charlotte says

Joesph Heller, the author of Catch-22, was hospitalized for months with a rare autoimmune condition called Guillian-Barre Syndrome, in which the victim becomes paralyzed for days, weeks, or longer, and this is the story of his illness and recovery. It's actually co-written with a buddy of his, Speed Vogel, so each chapter alternates points of view. I was drawn to this book because I had Guillain-Barre five years ago and I find myself feeling, somehow, that I still have unfinished business but no one I know has experienced anything similar. Well, guess what? Other people's illness is boring. And disgusting. Or maybe it's just Heller, who kvetches about his sputum on every god damned page. He also congratulates himself on his fabulous physique (he's a geezer), denigrates women at every opportunity, and name drops to an embarrassing extent. Mel (Brooks) and Marlon (Brando) and Dustin (Hoffman), to name a few. The only interesting part of it was a sense of being taken on a tour of old Hollywood by a grumpy mensch. Feh! And the friend who co-writes reminds me of Kato Kaelin (remember him? O.J.'s deeply tanned houseguest with the tousled blond hair who got his five minutes of fame at the trial?). Speed gives us every boring detail of his life and neuroses and self-aggrandizing observations, but basically he's a poor kid who sponges off rich movie stars and basks in their reflected glow. Anyway, Heller does absolutely zero in terms of introspection or reflection, but we get a blow-by-blow account of his gallant efforts to spew forth phlegm and his admirable ability to entertain movie stars under duress. He finishes recuperating in the south of France. Let me confess that I skipped about 150 insufferable pages and skipped from page 166 to the end. How could such a drip write Catch-22?

Susan says

I too had Guillain-Barré Syndrome back when I was much younger. Reading this book definitely made me feel a little less alone when I had it! Interesting to read someone else's take on how it affected them, because having it SUCKED BISCUITS.

Katherine says

This book is dated at best. The second-by-second account is tedious and exhausting to fumble through. I myself have encountered GBS, and couldn't even begin to fathom writing very account associated with the illness in this length! Not interesting beyond the first 3 pages at all.....

Mike says

His journey with Guillain-Barre syndrome. A fascinating, disciplined, heartbreaking personal observation. After it totally paralyzed him, he ended up marrying his nurse!

Peterboh says

Despite the title, the book is fairly entertaining. I found it very interesting to learn something about the personal life of my favorite author Heller. He is also a good friend of my other favorite author, Mario Puzo, about whom there are some interesting stories as well. Must read for a Heller fan.

Brendan says

An entertaining read, though not quite as engaging as Heller's fiction. It loses a bit of focus towards the end; the chapters dealing with his legal struggles with his wife are a bit incongruous to the rest of the story. All in all, though, this is a darkly humorous and harrowing account of Heller's illness and eventual recovery.

Roni says

I love Joseph Heller, but the co-author of No Laughing Matter, Speed Vogel, is not a good writer. It seems this book was his idea and Heller just went along with it. The book felt like a list of stuff that happened after Heller was diagnosed with Guillain-Barre syndrome. The reader gets a peek into Heller's private life, so it's fun to see famous characters pop in and out of the book. And, yes, Heller is heroic in his battle against his disease. But that alone didn't make it a good book.

Thomas Strömquist says

In nursing school about a million years ago, I wrote a thesis on Guillain-Barré-Strohl syndrome, and my knowledge of the existence of this book was a key factor in my choice. The book itself did not disappoint. Vogel's and Heller's telling of the latter's sickness and recovery from the neurological condition is brutally honest and never shy away from unpleasantness, whether physical or emotional. At the same time a lot of humor and happiness is shared.

Nathan says

Joseph Heller suffered from a rare disorder toward the end of his life, a disorder so rare I've never heard of it and can't remember how to spell it, hence I'm not typing it here. I don't think he'd care, because this book isn't about his illness or the day it nearly took his life. It's about his recovery, after six months in the hospital, having been sent home on wheels. The book is about his friends, particularly his friend of two decades Speed Vogel, and how those friends lifted him up and helped him during this time. The cast includes Billy Crystal, Mel Brooks and surprisingly Mario Puzo, author of *The Godfather*. It's a rare view into Heller, and it's written with his rare and missed wit. Not sappy and not overly emotional; Heller would have hated that. Insane and touching. That's his magic.

NC

Emily says

My family is currently dealing with GBS, so I was hoping to find some insight in this book as to what it's like for the patient and what recovery can be like. It just came off as a lot of name dropping by Heller and mediocre writing + an incredibly self-serving attitude by Vogel. The descriptions of Heller's famous friends are the only reason this gets two stars rather than one.

Barbara says

As a GBS survivor, I was very interested in his story of survival. I just found it difficult to relate to having Dustin Hoffman brushing his teeth, and other name dropping.

But when he reached down into his belly and told me how scared he was (I think once), it felt real.

I gave him 2 stars because survived to tell about it.

Roberto Scarlato says

As a fan of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, I can already tell you that this book has his trademark wit. But, at its core, it is a very serious examination of a debilitating and often sudden disorder. Similar to Lou Gehrig or Parkinson's, Guillain-Barré syndrome is a neurological disorder which paralyzes the body.

Heller, at the time, was jogging when suddenly he had to be admitted to the hospital. Helpless, he waits for constant care and reports on his physical condition over the course of the book, he gains moments where he can move slightly. It is a long and tedious process and Heller often comments on the difficulties as well as the many procedures he endured.

On top of that, he was in the middle of writing his 4th novel, "*God Knows*" and was in the process of a

messy divorce.

Many famous faces come to offer help and high morale. Among those are Mel Brooks, Mario Puzo, Dustin Hoffman. The book alternates chapters between Joseph and his writing friend, Speed Vogel.

It is a good, educational look at recovery, sometimes funny but other times hard to get through because of the condition's depressing confinement. But, it also offers hope.

Jeffrey says

This isn't a story about Guillain Barre Syndrome, a still-mysterious disease that abruptly struck Heller and for a while turned him into a totally dependent and frightened person. It's a story - told by Heller and his longtime friend Speed Vogel - about friendship, human frailty, and the occasional triumph of laughter. If you're a Heller fan, you'll find this fascinating on a number of levels. If you've never read any Heller - well, hey, what are you waiting for? Start with Catch-22.
