



Half-Life: Reflections from Jerusalem on a Broken Neck

Joshua Prager

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"Am I paralyzed? Am I going to die?" Those were the questions Joshua Prager asked a paramedic on May 16, 1990, after the minibus he'd been traveling in during a visit to Israel was blindsided by a runaway truck. He had been an exuberant, athletic nineteen-year-old, an aspiring doctor and an all-star baseball player who loved the Yankees. The accident, in which Prager suffered a broken neck, instantly turned his life from "before" to "after."

In "Half-Life: Reflections from Jerusalem on a Broken Neck," Prager delivers an often agonizing, frequently comic, and always soulful account of a young man's attempt to survive a near fatal injury and recover his formerly carefree existence, only to discover that it is gone forever. Prager's determination to make a new life for himself fully bears comparison with Jean-Dominique Bauby's "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly," in which a man trapped in his own motionless body overcomes his limitations with a mind and heart free to travel anywhere.

But Prager is no meek paragon of sickroom virtue. He spares no one in his account—not insensitive doctors, not irritable nurses, and not himself. On a trip from back to his childhood home, he struggles to crawl up the steps, despite doctors' orders to stay away from stairs. He threatens to sue Columbia University to make it more accessible to the disabled. Eager to date, he must find a way to fend off the pity of potential girlfriends. And yet he is not too proud to make use of the disabled section in order to attend a sold-out Bruce Springsteen concert. To celebrate his "half-life," he wants nothing more than to play a game of catch with his father.

The columnist George Will has lauded Prager for his "exemplary journalistic sleuthing," skills that the now forty-one-year-old writer has applied to recording the highs and lows of his life so far. Rich in literary allusion and bursting with heart, "Half-Life" is, in the end, less about the loss of physical powers and more about the growth of a mind and an indomitable will.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joshua Prager is a journalist and author. He has written for publications including "Vanity Fair," the "New York Times," and the "Wall Street Journal," where he was a senior writer for eight years. George Will has described his writing as "exemplary journalistic sleuthing." You can see his work at www.joshuaprager.com. His first book, "The Echoing Green," was a Washington Post Best Book of the Year. He has lectured at venues including TED and Google, and has received fellowships from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard and the Fulbright Program. He lives in New York City.

PRAISE FOR "HALF-LIFE"

"This is an extraordinary memoir, told with nuance and brimming with wisdom. It speaks to the mind and heart, enriching both."

—Jerome Groopman, M.D., Recanati Professor of Medicine, Harvard University, and staff writer for "The New Yorker"

"Joshua Prager's 'Half Life' is the ruthless confrontation of personal myths through writing, memory, and

reporting. In poetry worthy of a Goethe, prose worthy of a Robert Pirsig, and reporting worthy of a Mark Bowden, we return to the scene of a crime and learn how the body is our original connection with reality and the only one that can set us free. This is a worthy addition to the literature of disability and so much more."
—John Hockenberry, host of the public radio morning show "The Takeaway" and author of "Moving Violations: War Zones, Wheelchairs and Declarations of Independence"



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