

## **Book Review**

A Heartfelt Look at an Inviting Life

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Until I say goodbye: My year of living with joy, by Susan Spencer Wendel with Bret Witter. New York: Harper. 2014 (paperback)

Being personally inviting is to be a beneficial presence for oneself and others (Purkey & Novak, 2015). But how does this occur during a tragedy? *Until I say Goodbye: My year of Living with Joy* is the first-person account of the life struggle of 44 year old Susan, a journalist, wife, and mother of three who was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a degenerative disease that destroys the nerves that power the muscles. Instead of fighting the disease with medical treatments, Susan decided to live one last year enjoying the company of her family and friends with a series of outings and trips. As her muscles deteriorated, Susan wrote her memoir – eventually reduced to writing with just her thumb on her iPhone.

### **Personally Inviting with Oneself**

Three hours after she was diagnosed with ALS, Susan and her husband arrived at the ALS clinic for a series of affectless appointments and tests, a process she likened to “speed dating.” Susan suddenly decided to leave. Her doctor, after reminding her there were more appointments to be had, proclaimed she had a patient who had ALS for thirty years and still golfs. “...you could end up like that” she noted. Susan’s thoughts were, “Maybe I have years. Maybe. But not because I attended this clinic. This was a cattle call, not treatment...They were measuring my slide to death.” On this day, Susan decided she did not want to be poked, prodded and tested in such a seemingly heartless environment, stating “I had been an official ALS patient for less than a day, and I already knew how I did not want to approach my disease.” On this day, she chose to be personally inviting to herself, even if it accelerated her illness. Invitational theory states that “people are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly” (Purkey & Novak, 2015). Susan decided this illness would not define her. Her dignity and spirit were more important. She made the decision to live one last wonderful year. On this day, she chose to write her book; not a “book about illness and despair,” but a personal account of her final joyful year. The book would be a gift to her children to help them understand who she was “and learn the way to live after tragedy: with joy. And without fear.” If being inviting is indeed a means to address humanity, Susan chose to be human, both with herself and with those around her.

## **Personally Inviting with Others**

Susan's ultimate intention was to share her remaining time with her loved ones traveling, reliving memorable moments, and granting wishes. Being inviting to others takes into account their feelings, wishes, and aspirations. In doing this, Susan embarked on bucket list adventures with the seven most important people in her life. These trips presented a variety of different experiences: the Yukon, Hungary, the Bahamas, Cyprus, swimming with dolphins, and seeing her teenage daughter in a wedding dress at Kleinfeld's Bridal shop in New York. The book also touches upon her award-winning career as a journalist and details many examples of professional invitation by both her and her colleagues.

As Susan lived her last year, her muscles began to fail. Some of the trips she took caused irreparable damage. A trip to a Vancouver beach involved climbing down, then up, four hundred steps. Susan was unable to walk correctly after that. She understood that with ALS, damaged muscle fiber does not repair itself, stating, "I left a lot of muscle on those stairs." When asked if she regretted it, her simple answer was "no." What was more important was the experience shared with her best friend.

## **The Inviting Stance**

Throughout the book are examples of care, trust, respect and eternal optimism; all surrounded by Susan's intention to be positive, loving, and inviting. Her deteriorating body was not to be lamented. Instead, she proclaimed gratitude for a life well lived, for the love in which she was surrounded, and for the inner ability to stay strong, positive and in control. She was determined to write about strength instead of illness. Although afflicted, Susan maintained an inviting stance with herself and others throughout. She dutifully served her roles as mother, wife, daughter, and friend, while also introducing herself to the world. Her memoir allows the reader to live in her shoes, to understand life through her eyes, and grasp what it truly means to be inviting – even when one is dying.

## **References**

Purkey, W. & Novak, J. (2015, September). *Introduction to invitational theory*. Retrieved from <http://www.invitationaleducation.net>.

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## **JITP Guidelines for Authors**

The Journal for Invitational Theory and Practice (JITP) (ISSN-1060-6041) publishes once a year and promotes the tenets of invitational theory and practice, self-concept theory, and perceptual psychology. First published in 1992, it is currently indexed in the ERIC and EBSCO databases.

The JITP seeks to publish articles under two priorities: research and practice. First, manuscripts are encouraged that report research that examines and expands the theory and practice of invitational learning and development, investigates the efficacy of invitational practices, relates invitational theory to other theories of human development and behavior, or focuses on theories that are compatible with invitational theory and practice. Second, manuscripts will be considered that are more focused on the practice of invitational theory. These articles are less data-oriented and could describe authors' attempts to apply invitational theory to a variety of settings or activities related to invitational theory. We will also consider book reviews of professional books related to invitational or related theories.

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