

ALWAYS LOOKING UP

The Adventures of an Incurable Optimist

By Michael J. Fox • Publisher Hyperion (March 2009) Book review by Aisa Valenzuela

When Michael J. Fox came out with a memoir in 2002 called *Lucky Man*, the title took many by surprise. Fox stunned the world in 1998 with the revelation that he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in 1991 at the age of 30 and at the height of his career. His choice of title for his autobiography couldn't have been more ironic.

Upon reading that book, however, one realizes that Fox really does consider himself a lucky man, enjoying one of Hollywood's most charmed careers and a happy, private life with his wife and kids. The fact that he had Parkinson's actually helped him turn his life around from alcoholism and depression, and only made him more thankful for what he did have.

Readers will rejoice that Fox's inspiring attitude is still on display in his latest memoir, *Always Looking Up: The Adventures of an Incurable Optimist*. While many thought that his career would end with his retirement from *Spin City*, his then hit TV show, he reveals in this new book that his life and calling are actually just beginning.

The book is divided into four sections: Work, Politics, Faith, and Family—the pillars that he believes holds up his life today. Picking up from where *Lucky Man* left off, the Work section talks about his feelings on leaving *Spin City* and how he was soon inspired to start a Parkinson's Disease foundation by idols such as Lance Armstrong and Muhammad Ali. (The Michael J. Fox Foundation is now the largest non-profit funder for Parkinson's disease research.)

The next section, Politics, is the longest and, admittedly, a little dragging in parts. Depending on where you stand on the issue of stem cell research (which Fox is an advocate of), it is potentially also a divisive topic. Still, politics have understandably played an important role in Fox's life in recent years, as we have seen him tour the United States doing political advocacy and campaigning for candidates during the elections. It is fascinating to witness this new persona of the author, who many of us know only as an actor.

The last two sections talk more about his philosophy on faith and family. It rounds out our glimpse into Fox's character and shows how he is truly a well-grounded and balanced

individual—a feat in itself given the temptations and superficiality of Hollywood.

Although *Lucky Man* is still the better book for fans who want to read up on Fox's acting career and personal life, *Always Looking Up* works as an addendum to it, focusing on the last ten years of his life. It's inspiring how Fox is still going strong even as his disease grows worse.

Although the actor's optimism is deeply moving, it is his admissions of vulnerability that make for the most memorable parts of the book. In the most poignant passage, he says, "Sometimes, when channel surfing, I am ambushed by the image of a younger, healthier me. Usually, I just carry on clicking, giving it no more thought than I would an infomercial. There are times though, I confess, when I will pause and set the remote on the coffee table for a minute or two—sometimes longer." These sentences mirror the sense of loss most of us feel regarding Michael J. Fox—the sadness of seeing a young, talented person struck by a terminal illness in his prime.

The book begins with him getting up from bed in the morning and ends with him laying down to rest at night, with all the obstacles and rituals his disease forces him to endure. He seems to be pointing out that this is just another day in his life and in his battle with the disease. After you finish reading his novel, you can't help but hope that the day will soon dawn when Michael J. Fox will wake up and find his cure for Parkinson's.

