

STRENGTH OF SPIRIT HELPS AUTHOR LIVE FULLY WITH ALS

Not in Kansas Anymore, A Memoir, Looks Forward as Well as Back

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, delivers knock-out punches. And over the past twelve years, Robert Paulson, author of *Not In Kansas Anymore: A Memoir of the Farm, New York City and Life with ALS* has endured them all. A formerly active patent attorney, Paulson today can only blink and nod his head slightly. Unable to speak, dependent for life on a mechanical ventilator, tracheostomy and feeding tube, he has fought back with both dogged determination and good humor.

Not in Kansas Anymore, which Paulson wrote entirely on an eye-responsive keyboard that appears on his computer screen, is a heart-warming and uplifting story. It begins with a description of the pleasures and perils of a hardscrabble life on a small wheat and pig farm in the Midwest in the '40s and '50s with his widowed mother and six older siblings, all under age 18. It continues with an account of Paulson's evolution from a young frat boy at Kansas State to a more worldly Georgetown law graduate and finally, to an experienced New York patent lawyer and father of three sons.

The 255-page book includes pictures and reminiscences of farm life near Lindsborg Kansas, a predominantly Swedish community rich in cultural traditions. A fine storyteller, Paulson paints a vivid picture of life on the farm and in the frat house and elicits humor and nostalgia describing a young mid Westerner's wide-eyed wonder as he becomes part of New York City life in the early 1960s. He also opens a window into the arcane world of patent law and reveals the astonishing explanation of why he was afflicted by this inherited disease.

Above all, however, *Not in Kansas Anymore* stands as a testament to the power of the human spirit, as Paulson describes turning from a vibrant, athletic individual enjoying a demanding career, fatherhood, and his lifelong hobby of singing into a totally disabled person confined to a wheelchair and voiceless. He doesn't shirk from telling us of the indignities, embarrassments and bouts of despair he has felt, and he admits that his present life is difficult. Still, Paulson insists he is "a lucky man," and attributes much of his courage and determination to fight for life to the lessons learned from his family's struggles to hold onto the farm when his father died.

His takeaway message is that a diagnosis of ALS need not be a death sentence. At its essence, he reminds us, life is the ability to understand and communicate. Thanks to modern technology, Paulson says, ALS cannot take these away.

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Review copies: Contact mepaulson@rcn.com, or, in Canada, gempub@shaw.ca. Please leave a name and email address or telephone number for confirming shipping arrangements.

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