

## FOREWORD

A. J. Cronin, Walker Percy, Richard Selzer, Oliver Sacks, Melvin Konner, Perri Klass: these are all physicians who became renowned as writers. And now Philip Zazove, M.D., has joined their ranks.

His absorbing memoir *When the Phone Rings, My Bed Shakes* makes me pleased and honored to call Phil a colleague as well as a friend. To be sure, I am not a doctor, but a fellow writer—a fellow *deaf* writer.

Deaf? There might be some argument about that, but it won't come from me. Technically, Phil has a “profound” hearing loss, one great enough so that he depends on speechreading for nearly all his communication. At the same time, he has some hearing, enough so that in certain circumstances he can carry on a telephone conversation. But I am not going to quibble over the fine points of an audiogram.

Phil's experiences as a person whose hearing is impaired mirror those of all of us who consider ourselves deaf. He speaks with an odd “accent.” As a child he suffered jeers from hearing youngsters. Even today he has a hard time making sense of group conversations. Most of all, he has had to overcome the greatest handicap we face: the low expectations of people with “normal” hearing. Doing so is always a struggle, and only a sentimental ignoramus who has never had to endure such a battle would claim it is character-building.

As a youngster who was born with a severe hearing loss in 1951, Phil was fortunate. His extremely supportive parents are both physicians, and they relied on hearing aids and speech therapy to pre-

pare their bright, personable, and capable child for an education in the public schools with his hearing peers. This was mainstreaming before the term was invented, and Phil took to it easily. So much so that he entered Northwestern University with a robust self-image.

Despite his sterling academic credentials at Northwestern, however, Phil had a difficult time persuading a medical school to accept him. School after school turned him down until Rutgers, and later Washington University, decided to take a chance. And they were not disappointed; deafness, like the famous prospect of being hanged, wonderfully concentrates the faculties. Phil did himself proud.

Philip Zazove is an experienced physician—a member of one of the noblest and most exclusive of all the professions—yet he must deal, every day, with a world that lacks sound. He does it with a singular lack of bitterness and self-pity, with a great deal of patience and resourcefulness, with wry humor, and with an astonishing compassion for his fellow human beings.

He does this in the company of an extraordinary wife—Barbara, herself a physician. She is hearing, and like many hearing spouses of deaf people, she is possessed of a flexibility and depth of understanding rare in any human being. So much, in fact, that Phil gave up his successful Utah practice in order to accommodate the needs of her career.

But I am getting ahead of a story Phil tells better than anyone else could.

In this book he tells us about many things: how a deaf doctor listens to a patient's heart; how a deaf doctor keeps in touch with his answering service; how a deaf doctor wakes up to a phone call from a pregnant patient about to deliver in the middle of the night (thus the title of his book); and, most interestingly, why a deaf doctor would choose family practice, a specialty that requires subtleties of human communication beyond the capabilities of most people who can hear.

Readers will also revel in stories that have nothing to do with deafness and everything to do with compassion and delight in the illimitable variety of human beings. Phil Zazove, you must remem-

ber, is a doctor who writes. His tales of his early days practicing in a small town in Utah are rich in both humor and tragedy. His patients include a ninety-year-old man who fancies himself tough as nails, so stubborn that it takes all Dr. Zazove's wives to get him to hold still long enough to be treated; an adorable little girl who likes to stuff things up her nose, with smelly consequences; a pregnant lesbian fearful that her father, who has links to the underworld, might harm her—and, Phil fears, possibly him too; and an elderly woman addicted to both meprobamate and monologues, who seems to turn up every time Phil faces a professional crisis.

There are also deeply touching stories of cancer and death and personal involvement in the sufferings of others. Philip Zazove is an empathetic and caring human being, and that, more than anything else, is why he became a family practitioner.

Though he grew up in the hearing culture, he learned sign language as a medical student in order to minister to signing deaf patients. They flock to him, not merely because he speaks their language and can preserve the confidential doctor–patient relationship without need for an interpreter, but also because he shares their problems and, just as important, knows their potentialities.

And this, in the end, defines Philip Zazove, physician. “Some day in the future,” he writes, “I hope my descendants will look back at my life . . . and say, ‘He helped destroy the stereotype that once prevailed about people who are deaf. He showed them they can do anything hearing people can.’”

Who could hope for a better legacy?

HENRY KISOR