

DEFYING DESPAIR

*Feed the Mind
Train the Body
Nourish the Soul*

Anthony Scelta Jr.

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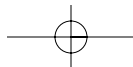
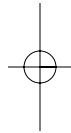
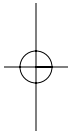
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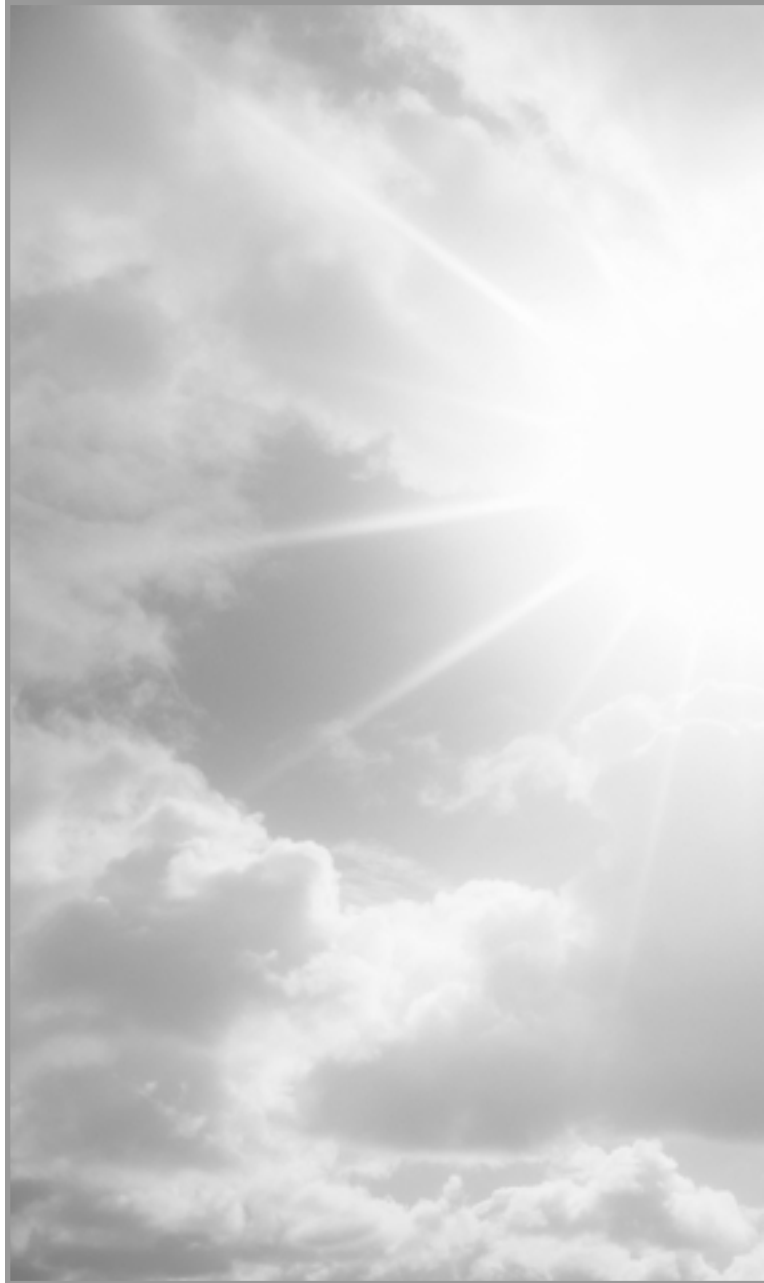
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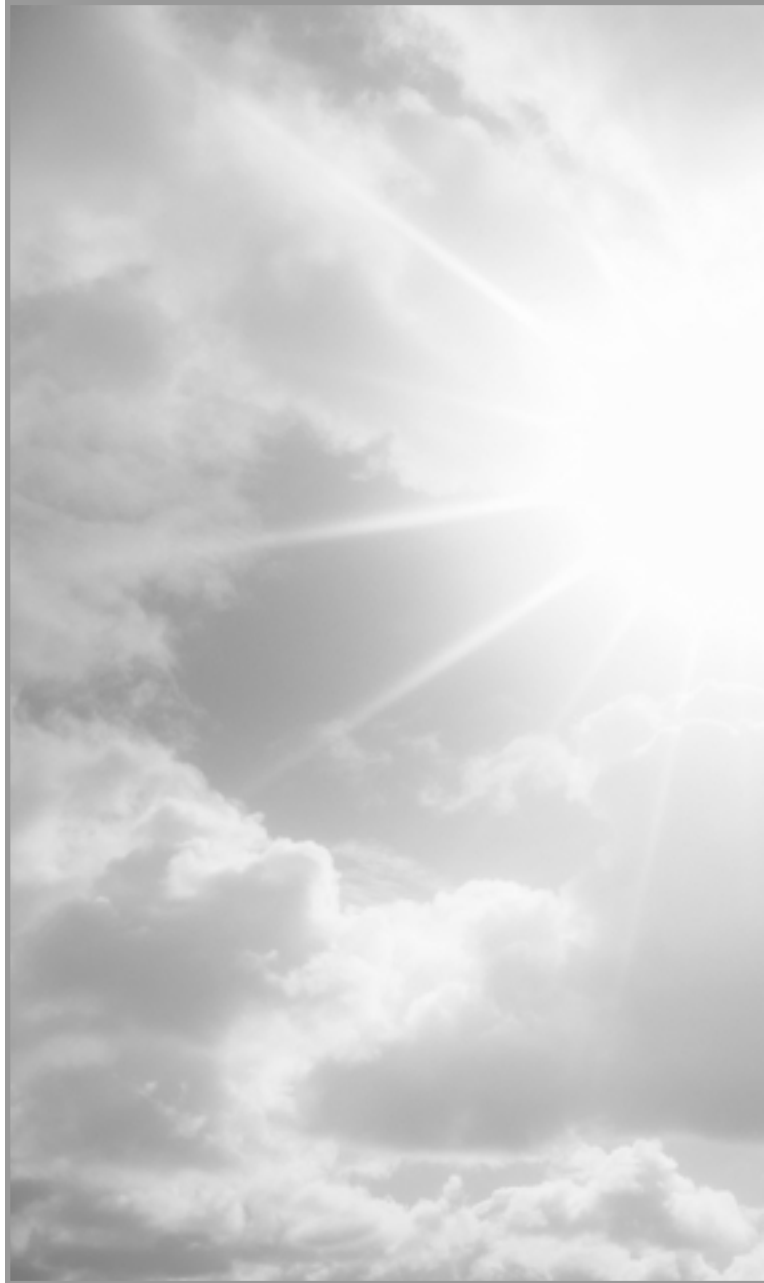




FOREWORD

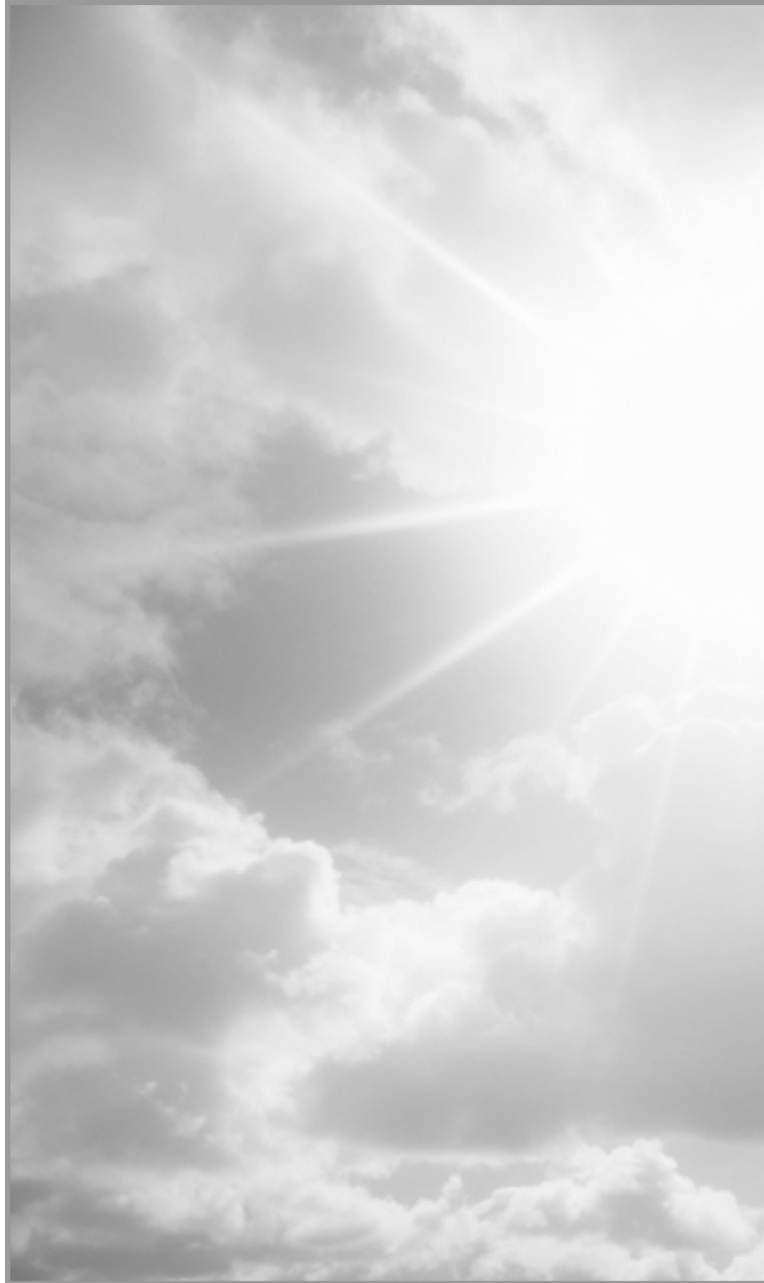
There has been an explosion of books on Parkinson Disease, including two of my own: *Shaking Up Parkinson Disease and 100 Questions and Answers about Parkinson Disease*. About half of the books are by doctors giving patients and care-givers information on treating Parkinson Disease, and about half of the books are by patients giving information on coping with Parkinson Disease. Why is this book different? It's different because Anthony Scelta was diagnosed with Parkinson Disease before he was 25 years old! He has lived a life, for all intents and purposes, knowing only Parkinson Disease, with a brief memory of what it was like to live without this malady. Most people in his shoes would have drowned in despair. Anthony has not! Somehow through will, through physical conditioning, through sheer "guts" he gives all of us a message of hope in adversity. This is definitely a book worth reading!

*Abraham Lieberman, MD
Internationally recognized expert on Parkinson Disease,
author of five books on the topic,
and National Medical Director of the National
Parkinson Foundation.*



PART I:

The Harbinger Of Despair



CHAPTER ONE

The Bomb Drops

Plan To Be Surprised

“**W**hen we make plans, God laughs.” I heard this Jamaican proverb many years ago, but at the time, I paid it no mind. You see, in my early twenties, I had it all planned out. As far as I knew, nothing could stop me from personal training clients, having fun, and basically flying by the seat of my pants. Vibrant, and in peak physical condition, I wanted to enjoy life to its fullest. I was young, brash and seemingly invincible—I didn’t think there was anything beyond my reach. That’s when God let out a guffaw that sent a shockwave through my life. My life’s vision had been snuffed out, and replaced with a nightmare that was unimaginable. Despite all my planning, developing Parkinson’s Disease at the age of twenty-five was definitely not something I had anticipated.

My first symptom was tightness in my left shoulder and arm. I was even having difficulty putting on a jacket because of it. At the time, I figured it was nothing more than a minor, sports-related, shoulder injury. Shortly after I experienced my

Defying Despair, by Anthony Scelta

first symptom, something happened at the gym. In between sets of a shoulder exercise, my whole body started to tremble. My legs were so wobbly that I could hardly drive home. I figured I must have been glycogen depleted—when the body is deprived of sugar—due to overexertion. Within days of that incident, my left hand started to tremble quite visibly, for no apparent reason. I didn't know what the heck was going on. All I could think of was that I had developed some sort of sensitivity to caffeine. So I eliminated it from my diet. Finally, on one occasion, during a heated repartee between me and a crooked car salesman, my left arm shook very violently and uncontrollably. It was then that I decided to see a doctor.

The first doctor I saw dismissed my symptoms as “probably stress related,” but tested for a possible thyroid condition just in case. When hyperthyroidism was ruled out, and my tremor persisted, I was referred to a neurologist. Like a Ping-Pong ball, I was bounced from one specialist to the next. Comments like, “You're okay, you're probably just depressed,” coupled with questions such as, “Are you gay?” made the process terribly frustrating. What on God's green earth did my sexual orientation have to do with anything?

Then came the real fun and games—the testing. First, I went for an MRI, then for a CAT scan, and then for another MRI. These exams were my own little tubular tunnels of torture: Forty-five glorious minutes of being entombed in a temporary casket, with loud thumping noises walloping my eardrums. If I would've known then that the torture tunnels would be the most pleasant of all my tests, I might have tried to enjoy them more.

A nerve conduction test, called an EMG, was by far the most harrowing of the lot. Before the test even started, I

The Bomb Drops

knew I was in trouble. You know how it works. When the doctor tells you, “This won’t hurt a bit,” you know it’s going to hurt. If he says, “This may hurt a little,” it’s going to hurt a lot. Well, the doctor performing the EMG said to me, “This is going to hurt quite a bit.” So you do the math.

During this procedure, I was given the opportunity to do my best impression of a voodoo doll. First, the doctor would stick a large needle into a particular muscle in my arm—the muscle between the index finger and the thumb, for example. Then I had to tense up that muscle, and hold it for about thirty to sixty seconds. So, while the needle was jabbed between my index finger and my thumb, I was told to make a fist. The pain was excruciating. After being probed approximately thirty more times, in various parts of my arm, it was almost over.

By then I was exhausted, and severely nauseated. But the fun continued for another half hour, with unbearable electric impulses being applied to the same traumatized parts of my arm. At least if I ever get electrocuted, I’ll be prepared. When I was done being tortured, I was hoping they could at least tell me something; anything. But they couldn’t.

A year of more probing and testing finally led to the initial diagnosis. Frankly, I thought the doctor was nuts. Besides, he didn’t even sound convinced of the diagnosis himself. Believing that the diagnosis had to be wrong, I got three more opinions, the last of which was given by a renowned doctor at the National Parkinson’s Foundation in Miami. At that point, I finally believed it.

The unequivocal words, “You have Parkinson’s Disease,” left me numb. As I left the office, I replayed the