

Book Review

Narrative Medicine

The Use of History and Story
in the Healing Process

Written by Lewis Mehl-Madrona M.D., Ph.D.

Reviewed By Lucinda Hodges

I live in western Montana on the edge of the Flathead Reservation. This is [Salish - Kootenai](#) Country. It's harsh geography, melded to diverse cultures, with both a rich and a blighted tribal history. Essentially, it is a complex, multi-faceted and very interesting environment to live in -- just like the book, Narrative Medicine.

As I read Lewis Mehl - Madrona's book, my thoughts are filled with images of my Salish friends. For this book is as much about bridging the social, racial and cultural divides as it is about transforming the world of western medicine.

...our expensive biomedical approaches to health and disease work, but can be equivalent to using a Gauguin painting to kindle a campfire.

Ultimately, I think most readers will find their own inner landscapes are reconstructed by this book. I am quite sure, you will never see your relationship to your doctor through the same old tired eyes after reading this book. So reader beware! Your next trip to your local medicine man may leave you even more dissatisfied than usual if you fall in love with this book as I have.

Lewis Mehl-Madrona

Despite its claims of superiority, conventional medicine itself is the third leading cause of accidental death in America.

Lewis Mehl-Madrona

One aspect I really enjoy about this book is the interconnectedness the writer brings to his topic. Narrative Medicine is as much about our own journeys in relation to our tribe or family as it is about connecting to --and even talking to-- our own diseases. But, he also gives us, the reader, many grim facts and statistics about exactly where decades of pharmaceutical based medicine has lead us in this modern millennium. These conflicting forces add depth and contrast to

the book. I relished the factoids for their ease of understanding. I savored the personal stories and metaphysical experiences for the provocative thoughts and ideas they will bring to mind long after the book is read and back on the shelf.

Throughout the book the author intertwines patient histories and traditional tribal storytelling with critical academic analysis. He weaves these three threads with great care. But, I also found the combining of the three styles to be consuming -- even daunting. And the tone of the book, while easy to read, also carries an academic voice and vocabulary that may not suit every reader. This is a thinking person's book. It is not the book you want to reach for on a "brain fog" day. It is the kind of book I will pick up often, to browse and muse over, especially when I feel the need to redirect my own sails to the changing winds.

There are no objective diagnoses, causes, explanations, or cures independent from the stories in which they function as plot and action.

Lewis Mehl-Madronna

I suspect many of you will only read the tribal narratives, others will enjoy the detailed patient histories, and others the writer's astute insight and commentary. But, in the end, it is skill of the writer in bringing us to consider the interdependence of the three entities in practical application to our own health and well being that makes the book a worthwhile read.

Lucinda Hodges lives in Montana where she home schools her children, tends her garden, wild crafts herbal remedies, writes and maintains websites.