Introduction to Rescuing Jeffrey: A Memoir

On the 4th of July in 1998, teenager Jeffrey Galli dove into a friend's swimming pool and hit his head. His father Richard pulled him out and resuscitated him only to find that Jeffrey would be paralyzed from the neck down, be unable to breathe on his own, and be dependent on others for the rest of his life. With disarming honesty, Richard Galli confesses his determination to "rescue" Jeffrey again - this time by removing him from life support. In journal form, Galli emotionally records the progression of events entwined with the family's heartbreaking choice and the uplifting and life-affirming outcome of their decision.

Praise for Rescuing Jeffrey: A Memoir

"Galli knows that with a story this inherently powerful, less is emphatically more...Through a voice as plain as that of a single-reed instrument, he achieves an emotional resonance that swells with symphonic intensity...a huge story unflinchingly told." -The New York Times Book Review

"A book that goes beyond even Tuesdays with Morrie to the emotional core of our very existence, making us confront our fears, our loves, and our dreams in a way we may never have before...This is one of those rare great books that captures the strength of the human spirit and trumpets the quiet dignity of true heroism." -The Providence Journal

"Never has this kind of loss been made more poignant than in [this] book." -San Antonio Express-News

"This gut-wrenchingly candid book...is likely to arouse controversy and sharply divided reactions...Yet this eloquent story of heartbreak and hope is ultimately life-affirming." -Publishers Weekly

"This eloquent memoir is small in size but huge in emotion." -Kirkus Reviews

For a complete listing of reading group guides visit: www.stmartins.com
"This is as frank and honest a depiction of the kind of dilemmas we all might face, in one way or another, as I've ever read--and this book might help prepare you, if or when that time comes. Short, to-the-point, 'real' almost to a fault, Rescuing Jeffrey will move you. It might make you mad, it might make you cry, it might even life your soul--but it will move you." -Creative Loafing

"Galli's no-nonsense style renders the family's agony palpable in a way purple prose never could...No parent, no man or woman who's ever been through a life-or-death medical crisis with a loved one will come away from Rescuing Jeffrey dry-eyed." -St. Petersburg Times

"Rescuing Jeffrey brings to light some of the most compelling questions of our time concerning medical ethics, religion, and the right to die. Even better, this book portrays a bittersweet triumph of the resilient human spirit." -Boulder Weekly

"Galli writes with fierce honesty...As he wrestles with his feelings, he offers an intense contemplation of what makes a life meaningful, and gives readers a written testimony of the depth of a parent's love for his child...In the end, Jeffrey himself finds the will to live, making this absorbing memoir both heartbreaking and life affirming. It is a clear example of how writing the stories of our lives can help us heal." -WritersDigest.com

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. An increasing number of memoirs -- many on disturbing and personal topics -- have appeared in recent years. Literary memoirs can serve as a powerful means of discussing universal themes through personal experience and Richard Galli's book has certainly been regarded as a "teaching tool" in terms of how to cope and deal with tragedy. Do you believe there are subjects too personal to put in a book - for example, how did you feel when Richard Galli was contemplating removing his son's life support? What is the value of using literary writing to explore such personal experiences?

2. Richard Galli's book has been heralded as an extremely honest and affecting book. How does he achieve such an emotional intensity? Is it through the language that he uses? His tone? The format of the book?

3. Throughout the book, Galli's tone is often humorous and ironic, even as he sits at the hospital waiting room; overall he seems quite rational and composed. Sentences like "I had brought my son back to life, and then I had to find a way to kill him," produce a certain shock value. How did this no-nonsense style affect your view of the situation? Did it make the whole situation more or less intense? Did you still feel emotionally attached to Galli during these scenes?

4. How did the chapter introductory paragraphs, which are composed of notes sent to the Galli family after the tragedy, affect your reading of this book? Did it make their story more personal or universal?

5. Did you find that you followed Richard Galli's progression in the book as the story went on? In other words, did your opinion about "Option Two" (removing Jeffrey's life-support) shift along with Galli's own transformation?

6. As much as this book is about family tragedy, it is also a book about parenting. As Galli writes, he offers an intense contemplation on what makes life meaningful, and gives readers a written testimony of the depth of a parent's love for his child. Even though Jeffrey is unconscious for most of the book, Galli's relationship with his son is constantly shifting, not only in terms of Galli's
decision about his son's life-support but also how he views Jeffrey. Did you notice this change in the way that Galli viewed his son? Discuss this progress.

7. Galli makes it very clear that the doctors' only focus was to keep Jeffrey alive. It seems natural that people faced with tragedy would prefer to take this more passive role and let the doctors make all the decisions. But Galli makes an interesting point when introducing "Option Two:" "This place, these people, they all have one thing on their minds: keep him alive….Just because people can do things for him, doesn't mean they have to do those things." What point is he making about the doctors' approach to Jeffrey's situation? Did you find Galli's choice to take a more "active role" in the decision-making process shocking?

8. This book is often described as ultimately life-affirming and uplifting. How does Galli manage to produce this effect even though, ultimately, his son still has an extremely difficult road ahead of him?

About the Author

A litigation lawyer and former journalist, Richard Galli closed his law office and moved his practice home so he could better care for his son. Galli lives with his wife and two children in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. Jeffrey Galli is a student at University of Rhode Island.

To learn more about Jeffrey, about spinal cord injuries, and about some of the technology available to deal with them, you can visit his web site at www.rescuingjeffrey.com.
Rescuing Jeffrey is a compelling look at the next ten days. In this disarmingly honest account, Galli wrestles with a horrible predicament: Should he let his son live as a quadriplegic, unable to move or breathe on his own? Or should Galli "rescue" his son again-this time by removing Jeffrey's life support? Galli weighs this question with intelligence and stark emotional intensity. For ten days he struggles to comprehend a future he never imagined for his son. During those ten days two parents are forced to make the most difficult decision of their lives. "I had brought my RESCUING JEFFREY is the story of a tragic diving accident where 17-year-old Jeffrey Galli makes one last dive into a pool that alters the course of his life and that of his family. The book is written by his father Richard, who along with his wife, pulls his son from the bottom of the pool and then spends the next 10 days wondering if he should have saved him --- and if he should "rescue" him again, this time by unplugging his life support.Â RESCUING JEFFREY takes the story of what it means to have the future robbed to a different level. Unlike Reeve, who wrote from his own point of view, Galli writes from the viewpoint of a father who knows well what his son has been denied by this accident --- and his own grief. "Rescuing Jeffrey" is a poignant real-life story about the human condition and the fighting spirit to live. It is a father-son story set against the backdrop of tragedy: on July 4, 1998, a 17 year-old boy dives into the shallow end of a pool, severely injures himself, is saved by his father, and then is taken to a hospital. That is when and where this extraordinary memoir by Richard Galli begins. Depressing? Yes, at times. But "Rescuing Jeffrey" is not prelude to Prozac. It is, rather, a sober and realistic account of how a family - father, mother, son, and daughter - deals