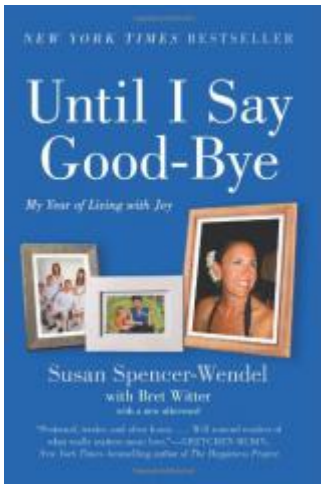
Until I Say Good-Bye: My Year of Living with Joy

by Susan Spencer-Wendel with Bret Witter



About the Book

Susan Spencer-Wendel's UNTIL I SAY GOOD-BYE: My Year of Living with Joy is a moving and inspirational memoir by a woman who makes the most of her final days after discovering she has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

After Spencer-Wendel, a celebrated journalist at the *Palm Beach Post,* learns of her diagnosis of ALS, more commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, she embarks on several adventures, traveling toseveral countries and sharing special experiences with loved ones. One trip takes Spencer-Wendel and her 14-year-old daughter, Marina, to New York City's Kleinfeld's Bridal to shop for Marina's future wedding dress --- an occasion that Susan knows she will never see.

Co-written with Bret Witter, UNTIL I SAY GOOD-BYE is Spencer-Wendel's account of living a full life with humor, courage and love, but also accepting death with grace and dignity. It's a celebration of life, a look into the face of death, and the effort we must make to show the people that we love and care about how very much they mean to us.

Discussion Guide

1. The memoir begins with *Happy the Man,* a poem by John Dryden. How does this poem relate to Susan Spencer-Wendel's story? What do you think made her choose it? Do you have a poem or a particular passage from a favorite book that could introduce your own story?

2. How does Susan react when she learns that she has ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease? How does the diagnosis impact her family and the choices she makes? What does being diagnosed with ALS take away from Susan --- and what does it give her?

3. Wondering about Lou Gehrig's proclamation that he was the luckiest man on earth, Susan comes to realize that if Gehrig could feel this way, so could she. Why? If you found out you had an irreversible condition, how would you assess your life?

4. Susan made a list of the things she wanted to do and the places she wanted to go in the time she had left --- trips to the Yukon with her best friend, Budapest with her husband, New York with her daughter. Are there must-see places or experiences you'd like to try? Share with your group.

5. How did Susan and her husband, John handle her illness with the children? Do you think they truly understand what is happening to their mother? Talk about John. What words would you use to describe him?

If you could offer him advice or encouragement or comfort what would it be?

6. Susan includes a list of the little things she loves, including smoking-hot 4-inch heels, the smell and color of freesia, a steaming bath in a clawfoot tub. What are some of the little things that you love?

7. What makes Susan's story uniquely her own? What makes it universal? She wrote Until I Say Goodbye as a gift of love and happiness, of knowing, for her children. Do you think she succeeds? What has life taught you that you'd like to share?

8. What made you choose to read UNTIL I SAY GOOD-BYE? What did you discover in reading Susan's story? How would you describe her and her amazing journey?

Author Bio

Susan Spencer-Wendel was an award-winning journalist at the *Palm Beach Post* for almost 20 years. A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she holds a master's degree in journalism from the University of Florida. She has been honored for her work by the Society of Professional Journalists and the Florida Society of News Editors, and she received a lifetime achievement award for her court reporting from the Florida Bar. She lives in West Palm Beach, Florida, with her family.

Critical Praise

A poignant, wise love story.

Until I Say Good-Bye: My Year of Living with Joy
by Susan Spencer-Wendel with Bret Witter

Publication Date: March 4, 2014
Genres: Memoir, Nonfiction
Paperback: 400 pages
Publisher: Harper Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0062241478
ISBN-13: 9780062241474