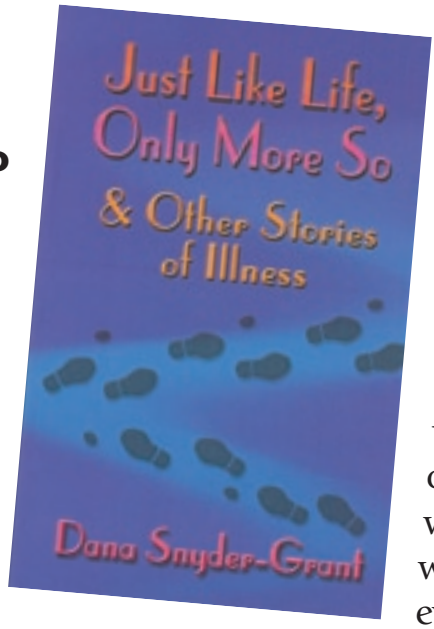
Just Like Life, Only More So & Other Stories of Illness

DANA SNYDER-GRANT



For many of us, it feels like MS tells us "no." No, you'll be too tired. No, don't climb those stairs. No, I'm not letting you bring that fork to your mouth without spilling rice all over the floor.

We don't generally have the nerve to talk about those moments, nor to put them into the larger context of our lives. But clinical psychotherapist Dana Snyder-Grant tackles them in her new book of personal essays, **Just Like Life**.

For more than 20 years with MS, Snyder-Grant has lived a passionate life. She's an enthusiastic member of a co-housing community in Acton, Massachusetts. She cares about her clients, most of whom are struggling with chronic illness and disability just as she is. Her passion comes through in her essays, many of which were originally published in a local Acton weekly.

The opening sections, "The Medical Journey" and "Loss and Change," aren't always easy to read, especially for those of us who've been there. Her language can be blunt: "I felt horribly ill," she writes of an early flare-up in 1981, "and I couldn't see."

Some of Snyder-Grant's best writing comes when she focuses her attention beyond her own body. "The world in the woods was subtle and quiet, evolving and alive," she writes of a walk along a nearby brook. "There was the running brook despite the ice, the animal tracks that went one way and then another, the flash of attention in the distance. All you needed to do was pay attention to appreciate this."

That quality of attention is the strongest gift of this book, whether she's describing a wooded retreat, her high school reunion, or the Thanksgiving dinner she cooked for her entire community—more than 20 families who pull for her as she works not to allow her illness to define her.

Booklocker.com (2006), 164 pp., $13.95 (paperback), $6.00 (e-book). P.O. Box 2399, Bangor, ME 04402-2399; fax: 207-262-5544; www.booklocker.com/books/2544.html. ■

Reviewed by Chris Lombardi, a frequent contributor to **InsideMS**.