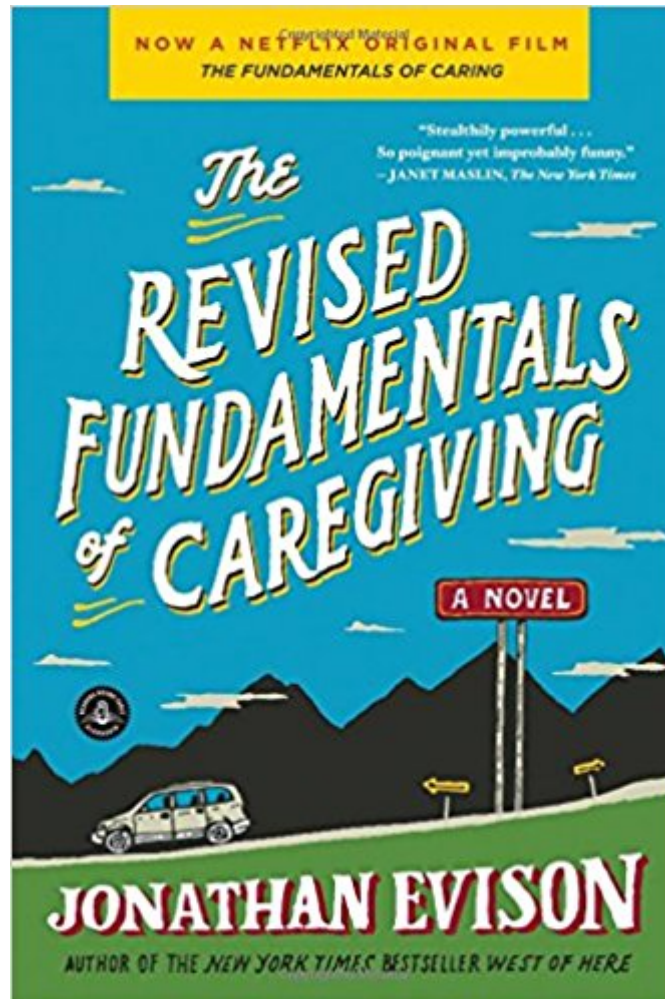


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The Revised Fundamentals Of Caregiving: A Novel



Synopsis

In *The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving* (releasing June 24, 2016 as a Netflix Original Film titled *The Fundamentals of Caring*, starring Paul Rudd and Selena Gomez), Jonathan Evison, author of the new novel *This Is Your Life*, *Harriet Chance!* and the New York Times bestseller *West of Here*, has crafted a novel of the heart, a story of unlikely heroes in a grand American landscape. For Ben Benjamin, all has been lost--his wife, his family, his home, his livelihood. Hoping to find a new direction, he enrolls in a night class called *The Fundamentals of Caregiving*, where he will learn to take care of people with disabilities. He is instructed about professionalism, about how to keep an emotional distance between client and provider, and about the art of inserting catheters while avoiding liability. But when Ben is assigned his first client--a tyrannical nineteen-year-old boy named Trevor, who is in the advanced stages of Duchenne muscular dystrophy--he soon discovers that the endless service checklists have done nothing to prepare him for the reality of caring for a fiercely stubborn, sexually frustrated teenager who has an ax to grind with the whole world. Over time, the relationship between Ben and Trev, which had begun with mutual misgivings, evolves into a close friendship, and the traditional boundaries between patient and caregiver begin to blur. The bond between them strengthens as they embark on a road trip to visit Trev's ailing father--a journey rerouted by a series of bizarre roadside attractions that propel them into an impulsive adventure disrupted by one birth, two arrests, a freakish dust storm, and a six-hundred-mile cat-and-mouse pursuit by a mysterious brown Buick Skylark. By the end of that journey, Trev has had his first taste of love, and Ben has found a new reason to love life. Bursting with energy and filled with moments of absolute beauty, this big-hearted and inspired novel ponders life's terrible surprises as well as what it takes to truly care for another human being.

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Customer Reviews

Life is near-constant revision, because even the best-laid plans go awry. Take, for instance, the writing of this review of Jonathan Evison's new novel, *The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving*. I planned to tell you how the novel is part roadtrip buddy comedy, part meditation on parenting, and part blueprint for pulling yourself up by the bootstraps when you hit rock bottom. I hoped to convey how funny and cool and downright irreverent (German Knuckle Cake, anyone?) Evison's writing is. And I was sure I'd leave you with some notion of how important it is to roll with life's punches. But, instead, this: You should read this book because it'll make you happy. I promise. (Okay, just kidding. We won't stop there. That'd be silly. And cliché. And probably a little frustrating for you.) So yes, this novel will make you happy, even though, for the most part, it's a profoundly sad book -- main character Benjamin Benjamin (never trust a guy with two first names, especially when those two first names are the same first name) is down to his last few bucks. His wife Janet is divorcing him after a mysterious "disaster" involving their two children, the story of which Evison weaves in periodically with the "real time" story. And Benjamin, having completed a course in caregiving, is making \$9 an hour caring for a 19-year-old, wheelchair-bound dude named Trev who has Duchenne muscular dystrophy. A lot of the fun of the novel is the back-and-forth banter between Trev and Ben. They discuss girls ("Look at the turd-cutter on her", e.g.), and watch the Weather Channel, and eat waffles. And every Thursday, they go to the movies.

While reading *The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving*, I kept struggling with the reasons why this book didn't seem totally gripping for me, especially since it had received so much acclaim, so many awards ('s Best of 2012, Washington Post notable book). So I had high expectations. But while I found the book to be a pleasant enough read it never rose above "just average" for me. The basic situation in this book: Benjamin has been on a downward spiral, with his wife pushing him to sign divorce papers and his children lost to him. There has been a major tragedy in his life (those details are best left for readers to discover). In an act of desperation, he takes a class which teaches him the art of caregiving. Then he lands a job looking after Trevor, a young man with muscular dystrophy. The job is as difficult as one might expect. Ben's pay is minimal. He has to deal with Trevor's mother, a formidable and fiercely protective woman. And Trevor's father? He has been out

of the picture for quite some time. The most painful part of reviewing for me is the obligation to provide my honest reaction to a book while realizing writers work very hard to reach readers. So I don't want to discourage possible readers from giving this book a chance - and it is also worth noting that many other reviewers liked the book. But here's why I didn't (and I'll also note the strong points of this novel): Neither Trevor nor Ben seemed fully fleshed out to me. I wanted to know more about them. I wanted to be intrigued by their interactions and drawn into their lives. I wanted the story to have a lingering impact. The novel does have some strong points.

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