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# Fragile Lives: A Heart Surgeon's Stories Of Life And Death On The Operating Table

'So fascinating, and so moving'  
*Sunday Times*

## fragile lives



A heart surgeon's stories  
of life and death on the  
operating table

PROFESSOR  
STEPHEN WESTABY



## Synopsis

THE SUNDAY TIMES NO.2 BESTSELLERAn incredible memoir from one of the world's most eminent heart surgeons and some of the most remarkable and poignant cases he's worked on. Grim Reaper sits on the heart surgeon's shoulder. A slip of the hand and life ebbs away. The balance between life and death is so delicate, and the heart surgeon walks that rope between the two. In the operating room there is no time for doubt. It is flesh, blood, rib-retractors and pumping the vital organ with your bare hand to squeeze the life back into it. An off-day can have dire consequences – "this job has a steep learning curve, and the cost is measured in human life. Cardiac surgery is not for the faint of heart. Professor Stephen Westaby took chances and pushed the boundaries of heart surgery. He saved hundreds of lives over the course of a thirty-five year career and now, in his astounding memoir, Westaby details some of his most remarkable and poignant cases – such as the baby who had suffered multiple heart attacks by six months old, a woman who lived the nightmare of locked-in syndrome, and a man whose life was powered by a battery for eight years. A powerful, important and incredibly moving book, *Fragile Lives* offers an exceptional insight into the exhilarating and sometimes tragic world of heart surgery, and how it feels to hold someone's life in your hands.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A modern day hero. Well written, and very interesting

I don't read much non-fic but I'm challenging myself to read 6 nf books this year. I had Fragile Lives on my shelf from a giveaway which HarperCollins ran while I worked there, and I was very intrigued by the premise, so it seemed like a good place to start the challenge. I loved this book. Broadly, it follows Stephen Westaby's career, from university through to the present day, and takes you on a journey through some of the big developments in heart surgery during that time, looking specifically at valve alternatives and external mechanisms. While it's generally chronological, the book also looks at some of the most interesting cases Westaby has worked on, some of which are mentioned in the blurb above. While he uses plenty of technical terms, the author explained things well enough that I, with no knowledge really of how a heart works or the problems it can have, was able to follow quite easily what was going on in each situation and what the significance of certain details was. Fragile Lives is a fascinating look into an area of surgery where the stakes are very high and everything must be done very precisely. It was a really really interesting read, and I highly recommend it.

An easily read book of vignettes by an accomplished British cardiac surgeon, each story having a point to make. As a US physician I found myself agreeing with much of what the author has to say.

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