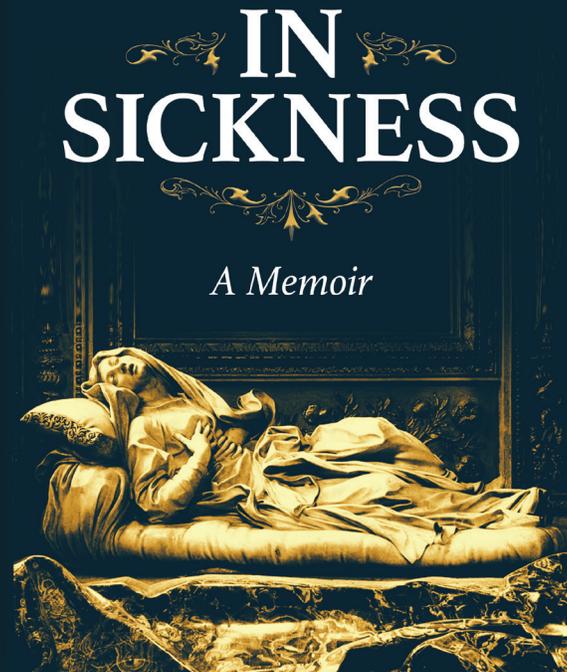


# IN SICKNESS

## BOOK CLUB GUIDE

BARRETT ROLLINS



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Message from Dr. Rollins  
Discussion Questions  
Playlist  
Support & Resources

Would you like Dr. Rollins to join your book club discussion? Reach out to [suzanne@bmmworldwide.com](mailto:suzanne@bmmworldwide.com) for booking opportunities. Discounted bulk book orders are also available.

# DEAR READER,

Imagine you're living a rational life, one guided by logic and objectivity. You adhere so firmly to these principles that they become second nature, disinclining you to self-examination—what would be the point? Then, one day, reality punctures your complacency: you're shocked to find that a part of you has been behaving quite irrationally and your meticulously fabricated world crumbles. That's what happened to me.

This memoir tells the tragic story of what can happen when love draws us in and blinds us to reality. When we hear about echo chambers, they usually involve the news and politics. But they can also exist in relationships. They can come from love, and dissolve our senses.

I hope this guide can help you reflect on my story, whether you're reading alone or with a group. Along with a collection of questions, I've also included some additional materials to enhance your reading experience. Thanks for joining me on this journey, and please feel free to connect with me on my website or social accounts. I would love to hear from you.

Best,  
Dr. Barrett Rollins

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Love can make you do crazy things. That's how the old saying goes. What's the craziest thing you've ever done in the name of love?
2. Dr. Rollins believes relationships can insulate us from the outside world. Do you agree? Have you been in a relationship that caused you to miss out on something?
3. Why do you think Dr. Weeks chose to hide her disease? Why do you think Dr. Rollins decided to go along with the lie?
4. Have you ever lied or kept a secret on behalf of a partner or family member? What influenced your decision to do so?
5. Do you think their profession and their closeness to the disease influenced the doctors' decision to ignore Jane's diagnosis?
6. Has loyalty and devotion ever led to disaster in your own life?
7. What echo chambers have you experienced? What circumstances created them? And how were they fueled? Did you participate, or were you viewing it from the outside?
8. What questions do you still have for Dr. Rollins?
9. What questions do you wish you could ask Dr. Weeks?
10. Do you believe Dr. Rollins is responsible for his wife's death? Is he partially responsible? Why or why not?

# PLAYLIST

Stream it  
on Spotify



1. Brahms, Clarinet Quintet Op. 115, 1st movement, Allegro

Brahms is always achingly beautiful but this late work's elegiac feel reminds me of the sadness of my last years with Jane. It was played at her memorial service.

2. Bach, "Ich Habe Genug," aria from Cantata BWV 82; Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, soprano, The Orchestra of Emmanuel Music

An aria from one of Bach's sacred cantatas, "Ich Habe Genug" (I have enough) is a setting of the words of Simeon who, having seen the infant Jesus, is contented to die. Although originally scored for bass soloist, Bach wrote an alternate version for soprano, here sung by Lorraine Hunt Lieberson who died of breast cancer at age 52.

3. "I Wanna Be Sedated," The Ramones

A punk era classic, this is one of Jane's favorite songs describing one of Jane's favorite states: being sedated.

4. "Da Doo Ron Ron," The Crystals

A Phil Spector song produced with his signature "wall of sound," an aural experience that used to rocket Jane and me back to our adolescence. I'd like to think that "Da Doo Ron Ron" was playing in her subconscious when we first met.

5. "Drive My Car," The Beatles

The girl in the song doesn't drive a car but she's definitely in the driver's seat. Who does that remind you of?

6. "Half Full Glass of Wine," Tame Impala

A girl fails to keep her promise to be home before midnight, just like Jane did early in our relationship. Her boyfriend sings, "Thank God I've been blessed with a patient mind" as he tries to plot his revenge.

7. "Bell Bottom Blues," Derek and the Dominoes

More of Eric Clapton's mooning over Patty Boyd. The theme's not particularly pertinent but the longing music and lyrics are: "Do you want to see me crawl across the floor to you?"

8. "Misery," The Beatles

Jane and I loved the Beatles, particularly the early stuff. This is a pretty straightforward song but it has that John Lennon edge to the singing and the lyrics that make you think he really is miserable.

# PLAYLIST

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## 9. “No Reply,” The Beatles

Another stupendous early Beatles number. The verses are John’s pure anger at his duplicitous girlfriend; the bridge is Paul’s heartfelt pledge that “if I were you, I’d realize that I love you more than any other guy.” A perfect reflection of my complicated relationship with Jane.

## 10. “Sweet Jane,” The Velvet Underground (or Cowboy Junkies)

Well, I mean it’s “Jane,” right? And sung by the coolest group of the sixties and early seventies. I always think of Jane when I hear it.

## 11. “Whipping Post,” The Allman Brothers

The driving 12/8 rhythm and slashing guitar solos make you feel like you’re tied to the whipping post, a feeling I describe during my last decade with Jane.

## 12. “(The Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes,” Elvis Costello

Jane thought that Elvis Costello spoke directly to her in his songs. I don’t think this was one of her favorites but it’s one of mine. The deal that the rusty-winged angels make with the singer reminds me of the impossible deal Jane tried to make with me.

## 13. “Every Breath You Take,” The Police

This song was part of the sonic wallpaper when Jane and I started dating. Beyond that, though, the deluded stalker lyrics remind me of our own shared delusion.

## 14. “Destination Moon,” They Might Be Giants

Jane and I thought that these guys were absolutely brilliant. I chose this song because it’s about someone refusing to admit how ill they are. A serious problem embedded in a bouncy, utterly singable tune.

## 15. “Jemima Surrender,” The Band

A song of sexual frustration by one of the greatest bands of all time. I used to hum it during my own prolonged dry spell.

## 16. “Once in a Lifetime,” The Talking Heads

“Same as it ever was, same as it ever was.” Jane wanted nothing to change. Every line of every verse in this irresistible song describes Jane’s state of mind.

## 17. “She is Still a Mystery,” The Lovin’ Spoonful

I’m sure John Sebastian meant this as a rueful reflection on the mystery of the objects of our romantic attention. But I use it as a statement about my late wife’s unknowability.

# SUPPORT & RESOURCES

## SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

**WWW.988LIFELINE.ORG**  
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## DANA-FARBER CANCER INSTITUTE

**WWW.DANA-FARBER.ORG**  
**617-632-3000**

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