

Change of heart

'Sick Girl' author gets real about her transplant and recovery

ANGELIQUE CAMPBELL
angi.campbell@metro.us



PROFILE. If you are looking for a sickeningly sweet “Hallmark movie of the week” type of story, look elsewhere. “Sick Girl” (Grove Press, \$24) is an uplifting autobiographical tale of a different, more candid variety. Written by Amy Silverstein, who after a brief but intense illness had a heart transplant at age 25, the book casts a

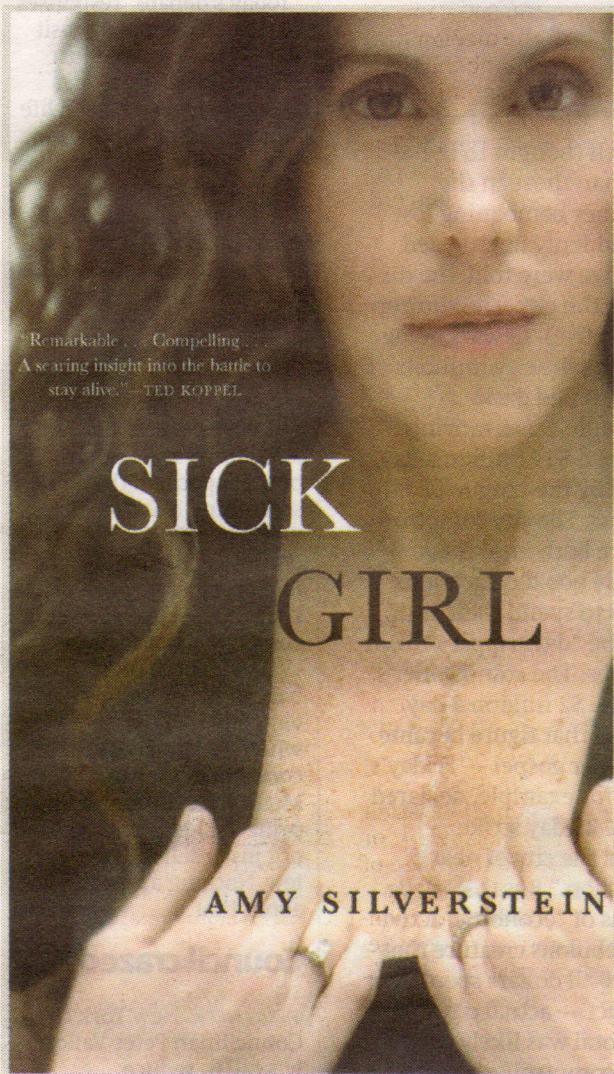
“I have woken up every day for the past 19 years because of a donor organ.”

Silverstein

glaring light on how complicated life can be for a medical miracle.

“I’m just a very honest person,” Silverstein says. “I think it’s something to do with living on the edge — if we can’t be honest and present then, when can we?”

THE CONSTANT exhaustion, crippling nausea and susceptibility to illness caused by the immunosuppressives she has taken twice a day for the past two decades to keep her body from rejecting the donor heart have given her unique insight into how modern medicine works — and sometimes doesn’t.



“You can’t just hand yourself over to the doctor. I had intuition; I wrote in my journal when I was 24, ‘I know there’s something wrong with me,’” Silverstein says. “We just feel like doctors are gods; we want them to be gods.”

Initially, Silverstein and her doctors both were hesitant to believe that anything was seriously wrong with her, thinking she was just another stressed-out law student. But as her symptoms worsened, she and her doctors became acutely aware of

4 The number of hours a heart can be disconnected from a donor’s circulation and still work properly before transplant.

how ill she truly was.

“It’s 50-50. The doctor is only going to be as good as you are,” says Silverstein. “It’s vitally important that you are both equally involved.”

INVOLVEMENT AND awareness is also vitally important to Silverstein in another arena: organ donation. She now works on the board of directors of the United Network of Organ Sharing, a federally contracted transplant network.

“I have woken up every day for the past 19 years because of a donor organ,” Silverstein says. “Donating an organ is not the kind of thing people think about in their day, but I hope this book makes them think about it for even five seconds.

“If people would think about it in advance and not make the decision in that tragic moment when they can’t bear the thought of letting go of even the smallest part of the person they love, they might make a different decision.”

On the Net

www.amysilverstein.com
www.organdonor.gov