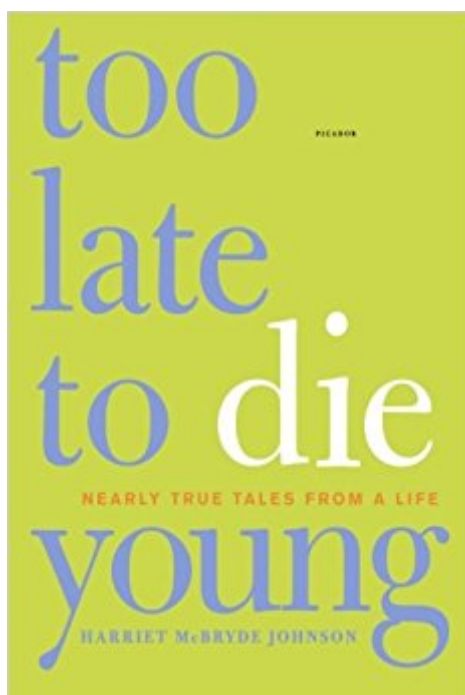


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# Too Late To Die Young: Nearly True Tales From A Life



## Synopsis

A Washington Post Book World Rave Harriet McBryde Johnson's witty and highly unconventional memoir opens with a lyrical meditation on death and ends with a bold and unsentimental sermon on pleasure. Born with a congenital neuromuscular disease, Johnson has never been able to walk, dress, or bathe without assistance. With assistance, she passionately celebrates her life's richness and pleasures and pursues a formidable career as an attorney and activist. Whether rolling on the streets of Havana, on the floor of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, or in an auditorium at Princeton debating philosopher Peter Singer, Harriet McBryde Johnson defies every preconception about people with disabilities, and shows how a life, be it long or short, is a treasure of infinite value.

## Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Picador; Reprint edition (February 21, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0312425716

ISBN-13: 978-0312425715

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 25 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #139,069 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #62 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Diseases & Physical Ailments > Musculoskeletal Diseases #82 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Disabled #121 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Special Needs

## Customer Reviews

It's hard to believe that one Charleston, S.C., woman, from the seat of her wheelchair, has faced off President Reagan's Secret Service detail, disrupted a National Democratic convention, joined disability advocates in Cuba and "for 13 years straight" protested the Jerry Lewis muscular dystrophy telethon. Indeed, folks with a sentimental attachment to "Jerry's kids" should start at chapter one, where Johnson explains how it felt as a youngster to watch a televised "childhood death sentence" every year. Johnson, who was born with a congenital neuromuscular disease, wants kids with disabilities to grow up "prepared to survive," not merely waiting to die. Equally problematic for the spirited lawyer are media heroes like the late Christopher Reeve, who revived

"telethon melodrama" by displaying himself as "a disability object, presumably tragic but brave, someone to gawk at." Johnson, whose law practice specializes in disability advocacy, has a personal assistant, a motorized wheelchair and a supportive circle of family and friends that make her active, satisfying life possible. Readers inclined to feel sorry for people with disabilities, to offer them prayers or a pat on the head "Johnson has endured both" should spare them the very real burden of providing "disability awareness training to everyone who happens by," and read Johnson's feisty book instead. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

There is a small but discrete literature by writers who have experienced personal or family tragedy: William Styron on his depression, Reynolds Price on his paraplegia, Kenzaburo Oe on his brain-damaged son. . . . To read these stories can deepen everyone's humanity. *Too Late to Die Young* can proudly take its place among these other important books.

- The Washington Post "A remarkable portrait of a woman who is proof that the disabled can live lives filled with purpose and pleasure."
- Kirkus Reviews (starred review) "Masterfully paced and structured. . . . *Too Late to Die Young* serves as both a memoir and a kind of revolutionary act itself."
- Mary Johnson, *Ragged Edge Online* "Readers inclined to feel sorry for people with disabilities . . . [should] read Johnson's feisty book instead."
- Publishers Weekly "Johnson's rich, descriptive writing, humor, and Southern cadence make the book entertaining, thought-provoking, and meaningful."
- The Post and Courier (Charleston, South Carolina) "She insists on being her own complicated person, a Southern lady, for instance, as well as a socialist, an atheist, a lawyer, and a born storyteller with a wicked sense of humor. . . . But her writing is so vibrant, so interesting, and so funny that you can't help but feel as if you're in her world, sitting beside her and hearing her story for yourself."
- The Tampa Tribune "This lady pulls no punches. An entertaining look at an activist who insists on living life her way, disability or no; strongly recommended."
- Library Journal "A wonderful mix: a keen mind, exuberance, activist politics, along with a special brand of Southern women's wit."
- Adrienne Rich

I read and loved this book years ago and recently bought it for my 19 year old granddaughter, who is a college freshman & has cerebral palsy. Harriett was a tremendously inspiring woman who lived a happy, fulfilling life, in spite of her disability. For many years, she didn't think she had long to live after accidentally watching (by herself, when she was a child) the Jerry Lewis' telethon, which portrayed muscular dystrophy as an affliction to be pitied. Much to her surprise, she kept on living

and went on to become a disability rights attorney and, as witnessed here, a wonderful writer who takes you into her world with honesty & humor.

Wow!! I picked up this book on recommendation thinking it would be "important" to read. The title sounded a little too serious for me and yet seemed "important", yet I remembered reading one of these essays before and really enjoying McBryde Johnson's voice. Right now I am trying to talk about the book but I no longer have it with me--when I read "Too Late to Die Young" what I discovered was Harriet McBryde Johnson's rich rich humour-filled wonderfully strong and human voice...and by human I mean, she lets you in to things that many people keep hidden--her feelings, her doubts, her sometimes brashness and outspokenness, her offense, her bodily and social realities...yet this book seems rooted in McBryde Johnson's humor, delight, and pointed truth-telling. She talks to the reader as if talking to a friend, a good friend...and one feels glad to be intimately connected (in a way: ) ) to Harriet McBryde Johnson...Enjoy!

She's an important voice that's not heard often enough.

This collection of autobiographical stories and essays is compelling, startlingly honest, and a real page-turner. I did not want it to end, and I want to know what happens next. Harriet is unconventional, funny, charming, sharp-witted, and has a true Southerner's ability to spin a yarn. Her account of meetings and conversations with Peter Singer, Princeton professor and proponent of the idea that parents should have the right to extinguish the lives of profoundly disabled children, is fascinating, chilling, thought-provoking and haunting. Admittedly living with the kind of disability that Professor Singer believes warrants extermination at birth, Harriet punctures the underlying assumptions that inform such beliefs--that disabled people are "worse off," that their quality of life is diminished. Harriet herself explodes the stereotype, and it should be noted that she is, most emphatically, NOT one of Jerry's kids. But this is not a book merely about disability, or disability rights. It is a good yarn, told by an enchanting writer, about interesting people, and I for one hope there are more stories on the way.

I came across this book of autobiographical essays when I was trying to learn more about the experience of living with cerebral palsy. Although that may not have been the late Johnson's exact diagnosis, this book stood out as the very best. Great, frank, outspoken writing of a life richly lived. Disabilities or no, it should be added to our core list of outstanding American memoirs. Johnson

"young adult" novel *Accidents of Nature*, about a camp for disabled kids around 1970, is also autobiographical and well worth reading for any age.

For many years, I always found a way to work Ms. Johnson's NYTimes article into my college classroom. And then there was the year I didn't - and ended up in a power chair myself. How ironic! And these tales are so important, her voice so clear. I miss her, and am sorry she is gone, but so happy to have her book as a living legacy for all of us, with bodies disabled or not. Thank you Ms. Mc Bryde Johnson

This has been a good year for disability rights in terms of publications. First, Mary Johnson published *Make Them Go Away* and now we have Harriet McBryde Johnson's much anticipated *Too Late to Die Young*. Read together these texts provide a powerful one two punch for the disability rights movement in an era which has seen the courts gut the Americans with Disability Act. Both authors have been champions and leaders of the disability rights movement and each are gifted writers. Harriet McBryde Johnson is a gifted story teller--although I wanted to savor the text and make it last I was too spoiled to do so. I read the book cover to cover the day I received it. Now, I am going back to re-read each and every chapter. Each story told resonates at some level regardless of the subject matter. What truly struck me the most was that my life is not so different, that I am not so unusual, and that the bigotry and discrimination I encounter on a daily basis is no different from what other disabled people face. I am not the only one that is subjected to unwanted attention and grossly inappropriate comments. I am not the only one that found Christopher Reeve comments about disability offensive. I am not the only one who is treated poorly when I travel on an airline. In short, discrimination against the disabled is rampant and it is heartening to know others are experiencing and fighting against this. To know that I have two gifted authors on the side of equal rights lets me not only feel better about myself a feel less alone but know the future, in spite of the courts, will be better than the past.

This book taught me a lot of useful information that I did not know about those who have disabilities. I must say, I have a newfound respect for individuals with disabilities. This book may open up your eyes as well!

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