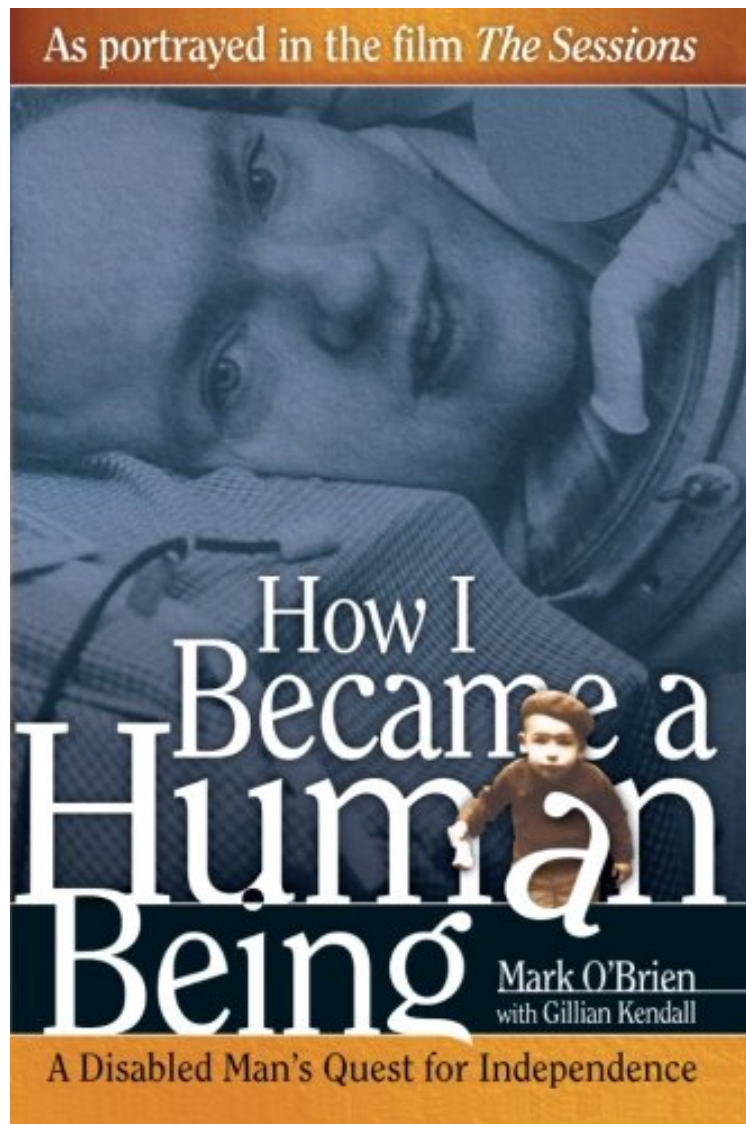


(Free and download) How I Became a Human Being: A Disabled Mans Quest for Independence (Wisconsin Studies in Autobiography)

How I Became a Human Being: A Disabled Mans Quest for Independence (Wisconsin Studies in Autobiography)

Mark O'Brien

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Mark O'Brien : How I Became a Human Being: A Disabled Mans Quest for Independence (Wisconsin Studies in Autobiography) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How I Became a Human Being: A Disabled Mans Quest for Independence (Wisconsin Studies in Autobiography):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Profound, sincere and thought-provokingBy Daria KutuzovaThis is a

very touching and profound book about the life of the poet and journalist Mark O'Brien, who lived more than 42 years in an "iron lung". With his signature frankness, self-acceptance (and sometimes ruthlessness) Mark uses his life story to highlight the existential and relational themes that are common not only to people who live with disabilities, but also to the able-bodied folks. What is independence? What is caring? What are boundaries? What is love? What is friendship? What is hope? and many others. I am very grateful to Gillian Kendall and all other people who made sure this book was finished and published after Mark's death. Reading it was like meeting a beautiful and quirky friend with a unique voice.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. **Compelling Story** By J.E. While a recent film (*The Sessions*) and documentary (*Breathing Lessons*) have been made, this autobiographical story, authored by Mark O'Brien, is the one that grabs you and doesn't let go. Despite his severe handicaps, Mr. O'Brien goes to college (UC Berkeley!) and becomes a journalist, writer and poet. The book goes into detail about his experiences growing up, his transition to a nursing home (a nightmare), college, and beyond. We all cope with challenges in our lives. But the challenges this man copes with and overcomes, leave you reeling and evaluating life.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. **HEARTBREAKINGLY BOLD AND INSPIRING** By Jack E. Levic I recently saw the movie *THE SESSIONS* and was eager to learn more about Mark O'Brien and his quest to experience life to its fullest. We've all had our trials and setbacks in life and we often hear the phrase, "It could be worse," but what if you are that person so severely disabled that it could not get much worse? Blessed with a brilliant mind but trapped in a broken body, O'Brien's dilemma is how to overcome the daunting obstacles placed in his path. It wasn't always this way. For a few short years, Mark O'Brien was healthy and "normal" in every way. He had an equally bright future as any 6-year-old could have...loving parents and siblings in a middle-class family. In a blink of time, O'Brien became one of the countless victims of a scourge that had been terrifying the nation for decades. Amazingly, the vast majority of people exposed to the polio virus do not become sick. For some, the virus enters the bloodstream with varying devastating effects. O'Brien was among the unluckiest of the unlucky with a severe form of polio that required him to spend most of his days in an iron lung. He is quick to point out in the book that his muscles were destroyed but he was not actually paralyzed in the usual sense. He did have feeling in his body but was unable to move his limbs. Hence, a simple itch could not be scratched and small things became a never-ending nightmare. O'Brien was working on *HOW I BECAME A HUMAN BEING* when he died in July, 1999 just a few days short of his 50th birthday. What an amazing 50 years it was. Gillian Kendall finished the book and tried to keep O'Brien's wit and tone in the final book. *HOW I BECAME A HUMAN BEING* is remarkable in that the reader feels he/she is actually talking to O'Brien as he freely shares his feelings and emotions. It is a heartbreaking look deep inside the heart and soul of a deeply disabled person. It's clear that O'Brien is angry for much of his early life. No one seems to fully understand his needs and limitations. His parents learn that most children in O'Brien's situation have a short life span in an institution so they give him a life at home. It's not clear that he fully appreciates their sacrifices and emotional pain since they can never cure him of his affliction. The huge iron lung is always a source of problem as in one case the family moves to a new home and O'Brien's room is too small for the iron lung, so he is set up in the living room. There is that lifelong lingering guilt that somehow he is responsible for his situation. Eventually, O'Brien does go to an institution for supposed better care and he is trapped with people of various mental and physical disabilities. His brilliant mind will soon wither with his broken body. It is interesting to read his views on the medical treatment, the staff and patients. Some staff members seem to terrorize him with their borderline cruelty and insensitivity while others show him genuine concern and tenderness. How many attendants might simply be overworked or poorly trained in the care of the disabled and how many should be sent away? There seems no hope for O'Brien as he is trapped in his body and in need of regular attention by attendants. He knows his days will end in hopelessness and despair. It's with an amazing determination that he fights for independence and a chance to live on his own and to attend college. Despite the obstacles, it is college that brings him that dreamed of independence and a chance to experience life. Although he must rely on hired attendants, he does attend classes and begins to thrive. His writing gains some attention and O'Brien's life is changing. He encounters other disabled students and professors but also points out the varying degrees of disabilities. Some people had it "easier" because they could maneuver in wheelchairs and had more mobility in their bodies. The lack of physical intimacy is a painful theme throughout the book. O'Brien is sure that he will never experience the basic human need of love--a love that is returned to him. He experiences many crushes on his female attendants and some respond with a degree of affection and affection, but O'Brien feels it will never go further and finally, he turns to a sexual surrogate who helps him achieve the ultimate in human intimacy. The chapter about the sex surrogate is rather short and mechanical. It was just an experience that didn't seem to affect him as strongly as expected. As his life moves forward, O'Brien becomes an inspiration to everyone--not just the disabled. He lived much longer than anyone would have expected and in a much fuller life than anyone would have dreamed possible. This amazing book inspires the reader but leaves a burning desire to know more. O'Brien barely mentions his parents throughout the book--almost to the point that his family does not seem to exist but then suddenly they are there as if they had always been there. In the last few years of his life, O'Brien did have a girlfriend. His relationship with Susan Fernbach is only mentioned briefly but he seems to genuinely care for her. He is so open about so much of his life that maybe his time with Fernbach is meant to be kept to himself. *HOW I BECAME A HUMAN BEING* is so brilliantly sad and inspiring that the reader is

left feeling they knew Mark O'Brien. O'Brien proves that anyone can live a full and satisfying life. The world is a better place because of Mark O'Brien's determination to live and find independence.

In September 1955 six-year-old Mark O'Brien moved his arms and legs for the last time. He came out of a coma to find himself enclosed from the neck down in an iron lung, the machine in which he would live for much of the rest of his life. For the first time in paperback, *How I Became a Human Being* is O'Brien's account of his struggles to lead an independent life despite a lifelong disability. In 1955 he contracted polio and became permanently paralyzed from the neck down. O'Brien describes growing up without the use of his limbs, his adolescence struggling with physical rehabilitation and suffering the bureaucracy of hospitals and institutions, and his adult life as an independent student and writer. Despite his physical limitations, O'Brien crafts a narrative that is as rich and vivid as the life he led.

O'Brien conveys his pain, his suffering, his depression, his anomie without resorting to tugging at our heartstrings. Felice Picano, author of *Like People in History*