



Book Review

# **A Review: Into the Magic Shop by James R. Doty**

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**One thing every human has in common is the first sound we hear. It's the heartbeat of our mother." James R. Doty**

Although as a child I was often told how unique we are all as humans, with our own DNA and individual fingerprints being clear examples, the older I become the more I see myself as being connected and similar to everybody else. We are not alone; indeed, we weren't designed to be alone. Humans are a co-operative species, and we were designed to rely on others. In fact we need others. We need our parents, for at least the first decade of life (for me, I needed about two and half decades). Then we need the care and support from others, whether that is from friends, siblings, classmates, teachers, mentors, or in our romantic relationships. We simply need others. And what is the water that helps nourish the connectedness between people? Compassion. That for me is one of the many take home messages from Dr James Doty's upcoming book, *Into the Magic Shop*.

To write one's own life story can be a Pandora's box. If I sit back and consider undertaking such a task myself, the following questions come to mind: where to start, what to put in, how much detail, the list goes on. The other thought that crosses my mind, "don't make it too honest because if people really know who I am they won't like me." Yet Doty's reflections are beautifully, heart-wrenchingly, and refreshingly honest. And I think that is the brilliance behind the book, and maybe to an extent, the man as well. Learning to develop an attitude of acceptance and non-judgment towards himself was a struggle for Doty. And often the overarching themes of "am I good enough, am I worthy enough" shine through in the book.

In this ever increasing competitive world, the sense I get is we can't share too much of ourselves with others, otherwise they will know our weaknesses, they could be exploited, and we could lose. Yet failure is part of being human; and how we handle failure is something all of us can really struggle with. As Doty puts it, "Events themselves have no power. It is your response to the events that determines their power." Although our brains are magical things, and Doty conveys some of the hard science and complexities behind how the brain operates with great simplicity, unfortunately our brains can also get caught up in loops of worry, rumination, and fear.

Doty's new book, *Into the Magic Shop*, takes us on a journey through many periods of Jim's life where he has come face-to-face with failure. The sense I had at the beginning of the book was, here is a guy who is afraid. He is afraid people will find out he was poor, he had a father who was an alcoholic, and he had a mother who was depressed. His family relied on government assistance. If people found out about these things what will they do? Well if the fear part of Doty was running the show it would jump straight to judgment, and the judgment would be people will think he is a failure, and not worth investing time and energy into, his fate has already been determined, and that fate was one of unimportance. There are many times in the book where this judgment is being conveyed, and it brought tears to my eyes.

Doty takes us on a remarkable journey. Starting in his hometown in California as a 12-year-old, through his years as a struggling student, and to eventually becoming a Professor of Neurosurgery at Stanford University. He weaves his own personal story, with science and teaching examples, to create a book that leaves a lasting impression.

On completion of the book all I was left with the impression that Doty is somebody who has plenty of courage. Not because he doesn't care what others think or if he fails, but because he does care, and that is being human. We all care. This book is a very personal account of the failings, struggles, and times of deep suffering in Doty's life. As you read the book you can't help but feel Doty's 'presence'. It is as if he were beside you, reading it to you himself. Magic.