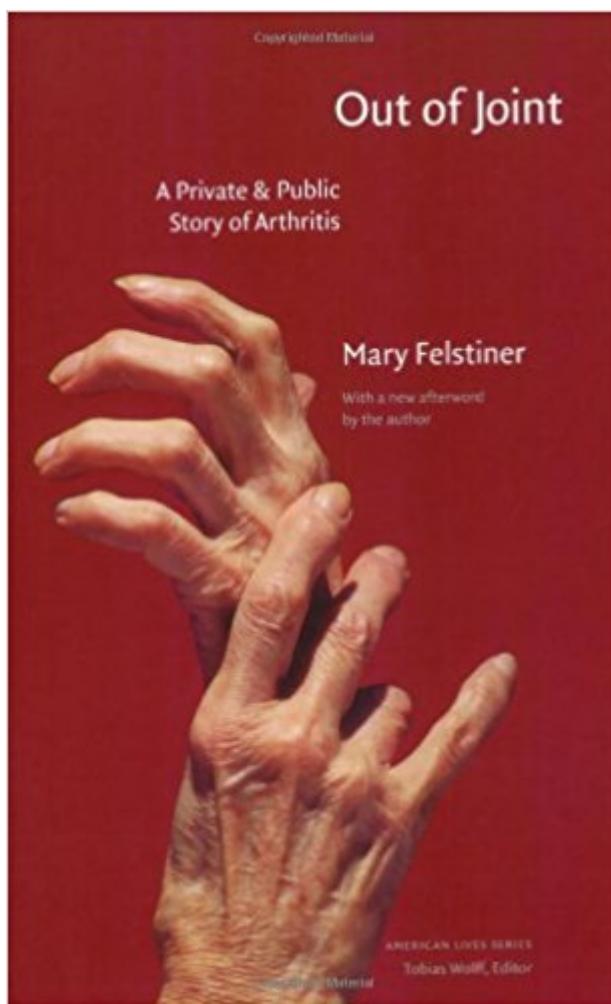


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# Out Of Joint: A Private And Public Story Of Arthritis (American Lives)



## Synopsis

She begins, in the morning, by casing her joints: Can her ankles take the stairs? Will her fingers open a jar? Peel an orange? But it was not always this way for Mary Felstiner, who went to bed one night an active professional and healthy young mother, and woke the next morning literally out of joint. With wrists and elbows no longer working right, she'd discovered one of the first signs of rheumatoid arthritis, the most virulent form of a common disease. *Out of Joint* is her account of living through arthritis, a distinction she shares with seventy million Americans. While arthritis pain affects one out of three Americans, this book is the first to tell the personal story of the nation's most common yet neglected disease. Part memoir, part medical and social history, *Out of Joint* folds the author's private experience into far-reaching investigations of a socially hidden ailment and of any chronic condition: "how to handle love, work, sexuality, fatigue, betrayal, pain, time, mortality, rights, myths, and memory. Moving from the 1940s to the present, this story of one life with arthritis exposes little-known medical research and provocative social issues: alarming controversies over arthritis miracle drugs, intense demands concerning disability, and the surprising and disproportionate number of women affected by chronic illness. From this prize-winning historian comes a call for healing through history, a moving meditation on the way chronic conditions can be treated by enlisting the past.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Felstiner brings a feminist's eye and a historian's tool kit to this narrative of her decades-long struggle with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), a crippling autoimmune disease that afflicts more than two million Americans. Felstiner (To Paint Her Life: Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era), a professor of history at San Francisco State University, traces the growing scientific understanding of RA, from the earliest accounts in medical antiquity to the latest theories of how pregnancy might trigger the disorder. She touches on treatments, from antimalarial drugs through cortisone and the now-blackballed painkiller Vioxx. Part of the American Lives Series, edited by Tobias Wolff, Felstiner's memoir suffers at times from self-indulgent prose and tiresome metaphors. Yet the book's total effect is powerful, and her major chords strike true: RA is a devastatingly disabling condition with steep private and public costs; its disproportionate effects on women have not been adequately addressed; its social, political and interpersonal implications are significant. In the end, Felstiner's story is as much about the complexities of belonging; as a woman, a feminist, a Jew, an intellectual; as it is about her illness. So it has something to discover for any reader, pained joints or otherwise. 10 b&w photos. 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.

"Felstiner brings a feminist's eye and a historian's tool kit to this narrative of her decades-long struggle with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), a crippling autoimmune disease that afflicts more than two million Americans. . . . The book's total effect is powerful, and her major chords strike true: RA is a devastatingly disabling condition with steep private and public costs; its disproportionate effects on women have not been adequately addressed; its social, political, and interpersonal implications are significant. In the end, Felstiner's story is as much about the complexities of belongingâ "as a woman, a feminist, a Jew, an intellectualâ "as it is about her illness. So it has something to discover for any reader, pained joints or otherwise."â "Publishers Weekly (Publishers Weekly)"Felstiner proves not only an able historian but a powerful memoirist, deftly combining the private and the public. . . . Particularly compelling are her vivid accounts of how it actually feels to be her: not only the pain that can stop her from doing simple tasks or her problems with side effects of medications, but the tensions chronic illness can create in a marriage and the anxious fears that can flood the mind. . . . If chronicles of triumph over illness may be too upbeat a model for afflictions that worsen over time, Felstiner proves there is something to be gained from any experience, and something more to be gained from examining and writing about it."â "Merle Rubin, Los Angeles Times (Merle Rubin Los Angeles Times)"Our species likes to make sense of things, to find a story to explain even sickness, even storms. In Out of Joint: A Private & Public Story of Arthritis, history professor Mary

Felstiner looks for her story within the larger story of her disease. Like many people visited by illness, Felstiner, diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) at age 28, wants to know why. In this artful and intelligent book, she examines this question from many angles—“personal, medical historical. . . . Her candor and her research, as well as her sharp and graceful writing style, make *Out of Joint* an evocative and provocative read.” Frances Lefkowitz, *Body + Soul* (Frances Lefkowitz *Body + Soul*) “Out of Joint is superbly written and a must for anyone wishing to better understand rheumatoid arthritis.” ForeWord (ForeWord) “Out of Joint reminds us that the words we use as health professionals can have a profound negative effect on the recipient’s appraisal of the situation. . . . This book is inspiring and easy to read.” Sarah Ryan, *Nursing Standard* (Sarah Ryan *Nursing Standard*)

I like the book; however, I have to admit that I expected it to be different. I can't even really say "how" different. It is truly a very personal memoir, and I find it to be written in a way that shows how torn the author was; torn between pride and (understandable) self-pity, optimism and deepest pessimism, hopes and not daring to make plans. Myself, fighting RA every day; actually some days every hour and every minute, can understand what the author was going through. But the book is, although brilliant, very sad, taunting, painful, and emotional. One reviewer called it "gorgeous" which is not a word that would have come to mind for me describing it. But that is fine; everybody takes something different from this book. The long road on the journey to acceptance has plenty of potholes, detours, roadblocks, and feelings of being completely lost. This book is inspiring and absolutely worth the read. It reminds you that you are not alone, and that you can always stop and ask for directions...

I really identify with the writer's problems. Many things I would describe differently - because rheumatoid arthritis is different for each person who has it. But she does the description well. Some days I wish I could wear signs on my hands, feet, knees, hips, back, neck, elbows, shoulders - and any other joints not mentioned, that say; "PAINFUL - DO NOT TOUCH! PLEASE ASSIST AS NEEDED!" And I wish the people who look at me when I get out of our van in the handicapped space would smile at me. We have a Handicap Tag hanging from the rear-view window. But I don't LOOK handicapped - despite using a cane and a mobility scooter. Several times people have remarked that I "don't look handicapped, so why do you park in a handicap space that other people need." Mary Felstiner is helping to increase awareness about Rheumatoid Arthritis, but only as much as the number of people who read it. And I don't count. I've had RA since 1973 - not as long as the

author, but more than long enough!

Mary Lowenthal Felstiner has written an important book on many levels. *Out of Joint* should become the classic for anyone struggling with a chronic problem, be it physical or mental. Mary has an amazing ability to express what so many of us feel ...but in an original, refreshing, and totally unique way. I loved her refusal to quit or to accept that nothing more could be done. Like that energetic bunny, she just kept on going, searching for probable causes, exploring possible cures, and keeping a constant, sometimes hilarious, dialogue with herself. This book is also a lesson in how to go about family life and love the RIGHT way...an inspiration to us all.

This book is moving as a memoir and enlightening as a history of our country's all too slow coming to grips with rheumatoid arthritis.

Excellent reading.

I did appreciate a lot of the things that the author was trying to convey - I feel that this is a very personal take on how her journey has been with RA. There were a lot of ethnic references that she related to, that others who are not of her ethnicity would not understand as a truth in this medical condition, but overall, she made her point clear. RA is very invasive and it changes your life to the very core. I am enjoying readint the book very much

Although I had intended to read *Out of Joint* slowly, chapter by chapter, once I began the momentum built until I stayed up extremely late one night to finish it. It is a gorgeous, haunting, painful, exhilarating, breathtaking book, and one that is as much poetry as powerful analysis. This is a deeply courageous book, one willing to stay inside the pain and the joints---I felt almost as if I were right in there, almost inside this body. The book conveys that bodily presence so beautifully, it is quite amazing. It also conveys both movement and stasis, a sense of the endlessness of pain, but through it all the movements of the author's mind, as she explored different facets of it, and in many different sites--library, clinic, home, mountainside, street, office, and classroom. I felt as if I were traveling along with her, on a sort of Pilgrim's Progress, on a quest, even if there is no ultimate resolution, though there are moments of release and exultation. This will become a classic text, not just about arthritis but about writing, and about memoir, and about the body. I hope it will be read widely everywhere. Many thanks for writing such a wise and generous and sensuous book, one

that, even in the darkness, is full of light!

As someone with inflammatory arthritis and an advocate for making arthritis more visible to society, I was so glad to hear Mary speak and read this book. We have been lacking any sort of exploration of arthritis and its effects. Arthritis is epidemic in this country, but it is still invisible. This is one more step for bringing it to light. This book explores so many different angles- the emotional, the artistic, the physical, the social, the private, the public. Sometimes her writing meanders over into poetry and somehow explains medical terms with poetic expression.

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