



# **Island Practice: Cobblestone Rash, Underground Tom, and Other Adventures of a Nantucket Doctor**

*Pam Belluck*

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ISLAND PRACTICE was optioned for a television series by Imagine Television ("Friday Night Lights," "24") and Fox Television. Screenwriter is Amy Holden Jones, acclaimed feature film writer whose movies include "Mystic Pizza" and "Indecent Proposal."

ISLAND PRACTICE audiobook is now available! Read by talented actor Joe Barrett, who has also recorded William Faulkner, Tom Wolfe, John Irving, among others.

## **With a Foreword by Nathaniel Philbrick, author of the bestseller *In the Heart of the Sea***

If you need an appendectomy, he can do it with a stone scalpel he carved himself. If you have a condition nobody can diagnose—"creeping eruption" perhaps—he can identify what it is, and treat it. A baby with toe-tourniquet syndrome, a human leg that's washed ashore, a horse with Lyme disease, a narcoleptic falling face-first in the street, a hermit living underground—hardly anything is off-limits for Dr. Timothy J. Lepore.

This is the spirited, true story of a colorful, contrarian doctor on the world-famous island of Nantucket. Thirty miles out to sea, in a strikingly offbeat place known for wealthy summer people but also home to independent-minded, idiosyncratic year-rounders, Lepore holds the life of the island, often quite literally, in his hands. He's surgeon, medical examiner, football team doctor, tick expert, unofficial psychologist, accidental homicide detective, occasional veterinarian. When crisis strikes, he's deeply involved.

He's treated Jimmy Buffett, Chris Matthews, and various Kennedy relatives, but he makes house calls for anyone and lets people pay him nothing—or anything: oatmeal raisin cookies, a weather-beaten .44 Magnum, a picture of a Nepalese shaman.

Lepore can be controversial and contradictory, espousing conservative views while performing abortions and giving patients marijuana cookies. He has unusual hobbies: he's a gun fanatic, roadkill collector, and concocter of pastimes like knitting dog-hair sweaters.

Ultimately, *Island Practice* is about a doctor utterly essential to a community at a time when medicine is increasingly money-driven and impersonal. Can he remain a maverick even as a healthcare chain subsumes his hospital? Every community has—or, some would say, needs—a Doctor Lepore, and his island's drive to retain individuality in a cookie-cutter world is echoed across the country.

## **Island Practice: Cobblestone Rash, Underground Tom, and Other Adventures of a Nantucket Doctor Details**

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Author : Pam Belluck

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# **From Reader Review *Island Practice: Cobblestone Rash, Underground Tom, and Other Adventures of a Nantucket Doctor* for online ebook**

## **Erin says**

A fascinating glimpse of what it's like to live and work full-time on Nantucket. Not exactly a storybook picture. An island-wide epidemic of Lyme Disease, extremely high rates of substance abuse and suicide, and population of people who seem to be just outside the definition of "normal". All of them rely on one doctor who is not exactly normal himself. But the island couldn't make it without him. Well-written and interesting, now I'm not so disappointed that we didn't get to visit Nantucket on our vacation! I feel like I've been there just from reading this book.

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## **Liralen says**

I've read my fair share of medical memoir, but this is not medical memoir: it's a biography, or at least an extended profile, of a doctor written by a journalist.

Tim Lepore has been the resident surgeon on the island of Nantucket for decades. It's a somewhat isolating job, but it gives him the chance to play cowboy—to flout convention and go his own way. (The book argues that he's *not* a cowboy because he's very careful about safety and so on, but I'd argue that you can be a 'cowboy' while still being mindful of safety.) He's obsessed with guns and ticks and arcane history. He's generally beloved on Nantucket.

He sounds like a character...but it doesn't make for that interesting a book. It seems that this project started with an article, and though I think I would have enjoyed a long article, I ended up finding the book something of a slog. It's perfectly good writing (which decided me between two and three stars), but...I don't know. In some ways the book is presented as an investigation into an unusual community—isolated not only by distance but by ocean—but I think I would have preferred to read something where the focus was spread around more characters. Two hundred and seventy pages of peppery Lepore was at least a hundred pages beyond my interest.

*Review written November 2015; revised September 2016 to correct a typo.*

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## **Jennifer Hummer says**

*Island Practice* by Pam Belluck is a nicely drawn biography of the infamous Dr. Lepore, the landmark doctor on Nantucket. Belluck writes with an overall sense of admiration for the doctor, even while describing some of his most controversial tactics. She makes it clear that the islanders feel this same admiration. The reader, however, might not. Dr. Lepore may make house calls and deliver emergency C-Sections, but he also allows islanders to live in underground caves and have sex with animals. Whether you like him or not, however, Dr. Lepore is an engaging and eccentric character, and one well worthy of a biography.

Belluck has certainly done her homework. Her interviews with key figures are short and to the point, and perfectly placed. She does a great job recounting each one of the sometimes strange, sometimes heroic situations the doctor finds himself in. Her readers are sure to come away with an entirely different image of Nantucket. In fact, it's almost impossible to recognize the Nantucket of the uber-wealthy summer goers inside these pages.

Island Practice is part survival guide, part snap shot of one of the most beautiful and unique places in America. I chose to review this book because my father was raised on Nantucket and my grandmother lived on the island until her dying day. An uncle and cousin still reside year-round and I imagine remain ever grateful for Dr. Lepore.

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## **Kurtbg says**

This book chronicles the journey of a New England doctor who becomes unsatisfied with the industrial revolution ideals of mass production applied to one of the few noble endeavors of mankind - the caring and treating of humans. Boxed in by the profit-focused and quick-lube approach to medical brought on by the introduction of HMO between care-giver and care-needer an opportunity opens up for Tim Lepore on the island of Nantucket. There, medical facilities and staff are minimal allowing him to practice across all medical disciplines and peculiar needs of the island's residents and the visiting vacationers and elites. What is the role of a physician? How are they best supported to provide care? How much personal interest should be invested versus a detachment to treating a nameless body is the best method to provide care? These aspects are all brought to light as Dr. Tim, a self-professed (and eccentric) libertarian provides thought through actions and commentary.

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## **Anne says**

Island Practice, Cobblestone Rash, Underground Tom, and Other Adventures of a Nantucket Doctor by Pam Belluck (2012)

Dr. Tim Lepore (rhymes with peppery) left his mainland emergency medicine practice in Providence, Rhode Island to raise his family and tend to the people of Nantucket, MA. When he served a shift in the cottage hospital on the island one summer, he thought that trading the mean streets and mayhem of Providence in the 1980's for the quiet beauty of an American vacation paradise would be a gamble worth taking. Thirty years later, Dr. Lepore is such a fixture on the island, so legendary, and so deeply eccentric, that New York Times reporter Pam Belluck has written a book about him, his doctoring, his relationships with his patients, his service to Nantucket, his medical triumphs and tragedies. The good doctor is made in a mold that may have existed more commonly before managed care pushed patients and doctors into a few minutes of allotted time. He is the kind of doctor baby boomers remember having when they were young or heard about and wished they had. Dr Lepore has time to pay attention to his patients; he knows about their personal lives; he listens and he isn't afraid to tell the unvarnished truth to them. Dr. Lepore is no warm and fuzzy TV doctor like Marcus Welby, MD, though. Lepore is blunt, his bedside manner is more Dr. House than Dr. Welby. His waiting room is filled with heads of game he has shot and other evidence of his strange hobbies: "skulls, arrowheads, snake skin, turtle shells, fish jaws, and antlers." (17)

Chapter 1: Dr. Lepore is crashing through the underbrush on the island trying to find the "twigaloo" of Underground Tom, a homeless man who squats wherever he can remain undetected and builds tree-houses, underground bunkers or twig houses to live in until the authorities toss him off public land. The doctor makes house calls to Tom, if he can only find the well-hidden hovel. "Lepore allowed Johnson to pay his medical "fee" by providing informal advice about fashioning arrowheads." (17)

Chapter 3: Dr. Lepore makes scalpels out of obsidian by using a flint-napping method used in the Upper Paleolithic era and he uses them to perform surgery. (47) This method is discontinued when the health department objects to the method of sterilization used on the volcanic glass scalpels.(48)

Chapter 4: Moby-Tick. Dr. Lepore is an interesting mix of politically conservative ideas (pro-hunting) and libertarian ideas - he refers patients with severe pain to an island hippie who makes marijuana cookies. In Chapter 4, Lepore's practicality goes against the beliefs of the liberal segment of the island's population. Nantucket has a very high rate of tick-borne illness: Lyme disease, babesiosis and anaplasmosis (65). Lepore has educated himself to become a leading authority on tick-borne diseases and he thinks that the most effective way to combat the disease is to kill more deer which are the hosts for the infected ticks. Naturally that opinion does not go over well in Nantucket even though almost every resident or visitor has been infected or known someone who has been. The part-time population of celebrities and others who own summer cottages don't seem to like to hunt or to let anyone else extend the hunting season on Bambi. Lepore prints out bumper stickers ironically proclaiming "Save Our Ticks!" "Honk If You Love Ticks" (68). It's a town hall confrontation we have seen here in New Jersey often enough.

Island Practice is a fascinating portrait of an eccentric, but highly capable doctor devoted to his community and his patients.

Readers who enjoy medical memoirs, biographies and popular non-fiction might also like:

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot

Every Patient Tells a Story by Lisa Sanders

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## Phyllis says

Combination of an interesting character's story, as the island MD, and the great differences in medical practice on an island.

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## Julie Flygare says

*Island Practice* is the mesmerizing story of Dr. Tim Lepore, the only surgeon on Nantucket Island. Thirty miles off the coast of Massachusetts, Nantucket is best known for its beaches, red pants, and sky-high real-estate prices, but author **Pam Belluck** reveals a different side of the island, a diverse year-round population with quirky medical problems and a doctor as quirky as his clientele. Dr. Lepore does not shy away from

mysterious strange cases - including two cases of narcolepsy with cataplexy.

This is a highly recommended read for anyone who enjoys non-fiction. You will laugh at times and feel heartbreak at other times. Thank you, **Pam Belluck** for uncovering this fascinating story.

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### **Christina says**

I loved the concept of this book - year-round rural doctoring on an island known as a summer playground for the rich. But the organization was b-a-d. I felt like I was reading unedited notes. Very repetitive and lots of "This guy is so eccentric! He has weird hobbies! Here is what a celebrity has to say about him. Also, here is a bad pun!!" Yech.

Would have made an outstanding New Yorker profile, fell flat as a book. On the plus side, I learned a lot about tick-born illnesses. Did you know that you can get three tick-born illnesses from a single tick on Nantucket? Neither did I!

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### **Fredsky says**

This was interesting at first, but became repetitive and boring. How could a book about such a diverse, eccentric, larger than life genius doctor practicing on Nantucket be boring? Ms. Belluck praised him too much. She didn't tell enough stories about him to support her awe. If she had written a book of anecdotes and left the readers to feel the awe and curiosity and annoyance on their own, it would have been a terrific book.

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### **Shawna says**

It was interesting to hear about Nantucket, especially since I have been to nearby Martha's Vineyard. It is also fun to learn about such an amazing doctor. I am always amazed there are not more people like him. He reminded my husband of my grandfather, Pop that was very knowledgeable, could fix nearly anything, and would make a tool to get the job done if he couldn't find one.

A coworker of my husband's knows the author of this book. This my husband learned after telling his co-worker, that frequently visits Nantucket, about the book. It is a small world.

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### **Carol says**

If you have any affiliation with the island (meaning Nantucket, not MV)...you will enjoy this peek into the real life of a few islanders. Being made into a series!!!!

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### **A. says**

Very nicely written non-fiction book about a small town doctor doing big things on the island of Nantucket. After reading this book and learning about the huge problem they have with tick-borne diseases there I will no longer be envious of Martha Stewart or John Kerry's vacations in Nantucket. Nope. You can mark that off my list of places to go. Great book with lots of human interest stories of the town doctor. Interesting read!

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### **John says**

A disclaimer that my parents have been patients of Dr. Lepore's since he arrived on the island a generation ago. I've never met him myself.

I wasn't as interested in the doctor's personal details - there are a chapter each on his growing up, and his wife and kids - as about the island in general. Definitely recommended for the discussion of the challenges of practicing on an island, where fog can be a serious problem in terms of getting emergency patients to the mainland, as well the discussion of mental health issues in a community where everyone (pretty much) knows everyone else.

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### **Grant Sanders says**

I am a former (and perhaps future) patient of the doctor in this book, Tim Lepore, and the stories spun here are all true and very entertaining. I found myself laughing out loud at parts. Tim is a larger-than-life figure on the island. Eccentric. Brilliant. Hard working. A vital part of the community. I found the book to be a little scattered and would have appreciated a slightly more linear approach to telling Tim's story, but overall, it was quite enjoyable. The only downside of this experience was the narrator in the audio version, who did his best to make everyone who lives on Nantucket sound like a back-water r-smearing hick. Not everyone here speaks with a folksy fishing-village New England accent. (Although, admittedly, some do.)

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### **Georgen Charnes says**

I couldn't put this book down. Granted, I'm a Nantucketer, so it was especially riveting to read about people I know or might know in the future, and to find out more about Dr. Lepore. But even with that added attractions, this was a truly interesting and well written book. It never seemed to bog down in too much detail, or be too sketchy.

I could see this book as the basis for a television series, a cross between House, Northern Exposure, and Doc Martin. Dr. Lepore is a challenging character... argumentative, honest, competent, and compassionate in turns. As someone who's been under his knife (not obsidian), I found his ability to have an interesting conversation and tell a joke to be a stress-reducer.

It very accurately captures the atmosphere of Nantucket, positive and negative. Nantucket is a small community with plenty of characters, both beholding to and resenting the extremely wealthy who surround us. One thing I like about the book is that it focuses on the lives of the year-round, working class people rather than the rich people. Too often anything about Nantucket seems to reflect the idea that it disappears



when the tourists aren't here, a perspective as immature as a child surprised to see a teacher at the grocery store. I especially liked the discussion about the hospital being bought by the mega-corporation... it's a crucial issue in a small town in a world that's getting smaller and more regulated all the time.

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