



## By The Book: The Trials of a Lawyer

AUGUST 10, 2012 By David Rattiner

*Suzy's Case* (Scribner) by debut novelist Andy Siegel is a knockout — smart, sensitive, significant and in spots laugh-out-loud funny. The author, a personal injury and medical malpractice attorney in the city who sits on the board of The New York State Trial Lawyers Association, gets going with a prefatory note: “When a story begins ‘Little Suzy’ you know some messed-up stuff is about to happen to an innocent kid.” But he advises, “Hang in there.” The first chapter then presents “the unfortunate event” of six-year-old Suzy Williams. Rushed to a Brooklyn hospital by her devoted mother, June, in distress due to sickle cell anemia, Suzy goes into cardiac arrest, as a team of frantic doctors and nurses try to electric shock her into responsiveness. And then, as the author promises, “the ride begins.” And is it ever wild. And well done.

Siegel, who summers in Amagansett, and who grew up in Great Neck, has been “litigating complicated jury trials” for over two decades. Not bad for a kid who was kept in remedial reading through the 11th grade, he notes. He knows what it’s like to be an underdog. And now, he adds fiction adventures to those from his real life as he places his protagonist’s “legal expertise and fighting spirit” at the service of “the less advantaged people of the city.” Tug Wyler, a personal injury lawyer, gives the lie to what many still call ambulance chasing. As far as Siegel is concerned, he, Tug and those like him are “the Robin Hoods of the profession.” What gets Siegel going every day, which he loves, is trying “to make the system work for the injured victim when the big insurance companies vigorously resist such an outcome.” Beware the words “complication” or “iatrogenic” (referring to an injury sustained during the course of medical care), Tug says. They mean, we’re not guilty and we’re not going to pay for it! In *Suzy's Case*, resistance is hardly the whole of it, as Tug follows a malpractice trial that leads to a cover up. He perseveres, risking not just his standing in court but, at least three times, his life. But he’s doing it for Suzy, who’s irreparably injured physically and mentally and for her hot African American mom, and because it’s the right thing to do.

Tug is street-smart delicious, savvy-sharp, unconventional, determined, a wimp and wuss only with his imperious money-mad, narcissistic wife, Tyler Wyler. Right! It’s that kind of book! He hardly scorns money — in fact, he’s (in)famous for getting good judgments for his clients, including those on referral — which is the way Suzy comes into his life. He would happily sock it to the insurance company baddies who give injury victims a hard time. Will they be humbled? Frightened? Punished? Will justice in one case lead to Justice? Of course not. Besides, Tug’s going to have his own series.

The legal and medical lore in the book is impressive and absorbing. And it’s fun and so New York, full of smart-ass observations, sexual innuendo, urban slang and dialogue that doesn’t wait for response. Unimpressed with a judge Tug turns to his lawyer and says, “Let’s get out of here before I pop off at this pseudorighteous shit flake.” Did Counselor use profanity? “No, Your Honor, I asked my lawyer if he was going to the White House clambake. He’s very political.” Tug’s charm is that he acts honorably, even where women walk all over him but maybe that’s because he suffers from “SOMBS (Step On My Balls Syndrome).”

Siegel trots out a full canvas of eccentric folks. These include those who do the bidding of The Fidge, a mysterious, powerful black man who seems to know his way around the underworld with expertise and dispatch. There's also Lily, Tug's long-time, loyal Latina paralegal who bosses him around, when she's not dissing him, and HIC folks — that's Tug talk for Henry's Injured Criminals, referral cases of those who have been "tried, convicted, and jailed" for felonious conduct that he inherits from Henry Benson who's not against sending a killer or two Tug's way. Tug takes them, saying, "I repulse myself sometimes." Then, invoking a mantra he recites at various and dubious times, he adds, "At least I admit it."