

Official OnlineBookClub.org review: *Personal Encounters with Cancer* by Margaret Phalor Barnhart. Review by C. Knight, Aug 4, 2017

“Cancer is a truly terrifying disease, and one of the worst things about it is how different it is for every person. Some cancers require a lifetime of chemo, others come back every few years and some are even ‘curable.’ Cancer changes the lives of not only those diagnosed with it but also everyone around them. Inspired by a friend who relayed her experiences with cancer through email, the author decided to chronicle the stories of six people with different cancer diagnoses with her book, *Personal Encounters with Cancer: Lung, Bladder, Metastases, Prostate, Tongue and Breast*.

Personal Encounters with Cancer covers six different people using a mix of first and third person accounts. The first four stories focus on Crystal (lung cancer), Jack (bladder cancer), Linda (breast cancer with recurrence of invasive ductal carcinoma and metastases) and Ken (prostate cancer.) Like those affected by cancer, these stories are about more than just their cancer, they also discuss their own personal lives and how they lived their lives with the terrifying disease. Crystal, for example, starts her story off with a friend getting arrested at the border for forgetting he had a rifle in the back of his pickup. Linda ended up losing her breasts to cancer and dealt with deciding between different prosthetics, reconstruction and merely letting it be and finding the confidence to do so.

The last two stories are over half of the book and tell the stories of Miriam (tongue cancer) and Margaret (breast cancer.) Miriam is the friend who inspired Margaret to compile this book in the first place, and her story is told via a collection of emails from herself and her two children. Miriam’s story is especially touching because not only was she shocked at the diagnosis of cancer (like everyone else,) her husband started going through the effects of Alzheimer’s shortly after. Her children balanced helping Miriam with her treatments and taking care of her with finding a place for his Alzheimer’s treatment at the same time. Miriam deals with her life changing drastically and a husband who often forgets she’s even sick at all. Margaret’s (breast cancer) story is the final one, and it’s no coincidence that she and the author share the same name. This is the story of Margaret Phalor Barnhart herself, and she introduces poetry and snippets from her other works alongside her diagnosis and treatment.

What makes this book stand out is how well it lives up to its name. Sure it’s all about encounters with cancer, but it’s also very personal. Linda goes into detail with the differences between different boob prosthetics and the notion that she’s tricking people by wearing any at all, but then she feels less confident without them. Ken mentions the use of Viagra after his diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer. These and many more of the day-to-day life narratives are things people with cancer genuinely deal with but I’ve never read about them anywhere else. I felt honored to read such personal things, and it was brave and awesome of them to open up so other folks who have cancer can see they’re not alone. A few of the stories also dealt with faith—how it’s easy to lose sight of it during such tough times and how

a steady confidence in God helps get through even the toughest decisions. One of the hardest things to explain about religion is why bad things happen to good people, and it was great to see how people dealt with their own faith during this period.

In the Amazon description of the book, Margaret writes that the book is for cancer patients and their friends and family, along with health care workers, pastors and social workers. With all of the personal details in the book, I wholeheartedly agree that anyone who has cancer, who knows someone with cancer or who interacts with people who have cancer should read the book. I would add, however, that anyone who enjoys a good, short autobiography/biography will enjoy the book as well. (This book is just under 150 pages. My official rating is 4 out of 4 stars.”

Comments:

“This sounds great. Cancer is rampant in our world right now, and this would be a perfect book for those going through it. I’m sure it has something for everyone, though.”

“The review is very good. I would like to appreciate the author for writing such an amazing book.”

“Great review! Cancer is truly awful. It is beautiful to see people open up about it and tell their stories. It shows such strength!”

“Wow! Truly very brave of them. Sounds like a book I would love to read for sure because I have a couple of loved ones who are cancer survivors: prostate and breast.”

“Thanks for the great review. I would love to read the whole book. This really can capture the hearts of many people. I also love reading real life experiences and it teaches us more to understand people and their battles with cancer. These brave souls touched my heart and I really appreciated all the details that were provided and I learned a lot from it.”

“Cancer is truly a tragedy and this book brings out a new side to it.”

“Sounds like a touching book that will help many understand the difficulties of such an illness.”

“Cancer is a deadly force. Talking about it is a good way to help people understand and relate. Thanks for the great review. This is a must read.”

Review for Breast Cancer, an Emotional Journey

A long-time friend who belongs to a Writing Club near Phoenix AZ says, "We were very fortunate to hear Margaret speak. We wanted to find an author who would share her story with us. When the Book Club and Bible Study groups heard she was coming, they wanted to be included. The audience had different interests, but she kept all engrossed. She writes and speaks words that inspire, inform and give hope." Nel