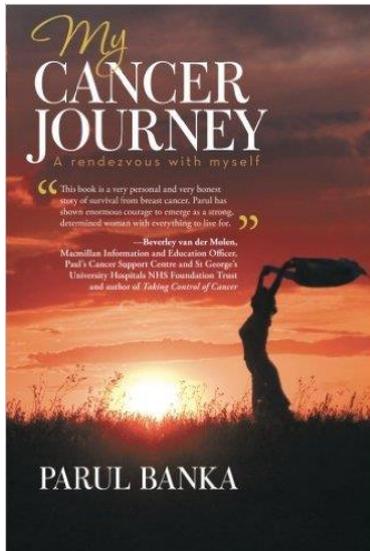


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



My cancer journey. A rendezvous with myself (2015)

Banka P.

Bloomington (USA): Balboa Press, 2015.
xxiv, 278pp.

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Average star rating 4.0 (out of 5)

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This book would be good for anyone – patients, carers, friends, family, health professions, and the public for risk awareness – because it is a personal story but also because the author writes in such an accessible and informative way.

Parul manages to convey things that are deeply individual and personal – how a person will cope with cancer, how people care for them or don't – in such non-judgmental ways that even if a reader's experience is different they will close the book with a sense of being alright. She manages to convey that the entire process is abnormal but without the terror that the word can bring; rather an acknowledgement of the abnormal that makes it, if not acceptable or normal, at least recognisable and manageable. Therefore, it could be read at any stage from diagnosis to remission and probably bears reading or dipping into as required.

It is very easy to understand, with a non-judgmental spirituality and great science sections, a section on counselling and one on complementary medicine that is the best and most balanced I have ever read. The story is Parul's so it flows according to her journey. The flow makes sense and the breaks for the "science bits" come perfectly in the text.

There is just one thing that troubles me slightly; it is hard to mention it as this book is Parul's personal journey, but I am concerned that with the rest of her scientific accuracy she uses the word cure or cured in several places. Doctors will never pronounce that one is cured of cancer if there has been invasion of lymph nodes or blood vessels because they cannot prove absence of disease (which is the definition of cure). They will only pronounce remission or no evidence of disease.

Overall, it is a great resource. I think the recommendations on the cover would make me pick it up more than the title or the cover itself, which is a slight shame because it is a fabulous resource. The title is rightly autobiographical but somehow does not convey the outward focus and gracious, giving spirit of the author. Perhaps a subtitle to convey the hope in the pages for others on a cancer journey would make the book even more accessible.

Breast cancer patient (46-55) (February 2016)

This book has many different parts to it, some of which will be useful to anyone going through or supporting someone with cancer. It is most useful for an understanding of the emotional and psychological effects and the strength of character required.

Parul covers her experience from diagnosis, through treatment, to post cancer. She includes the things that helped her through treatment, such as books and support, and explains what other people can do to help. It's easy to pick up the book, find a topic and get the information you need, rather than have to read the whole book.

I love the title and the cover; it looks very serene, calm and engaging and would draw me towards it on a bookshelf. The typeface is acceptable, and the chapters are not too long – I could dip in if I was tired and still feel I'd achieved reading a chapter. The honest tone resonated with me as I'd gone through almost identical treatment.

I like Parul's honesty but at the same time it is one of the book's only potential drawbacks. Parul regrettably had a very rough time during chemo and radiotherapy and this may scare people who read it before treatment. I had the same chemo, although eight rather than six sessions, but didn't have even half the side effects. This is just the luck of the draw; anyone reading this book should not think that they are going to have the same experience, it is an individual journey.

I recommend it but with a health warning about the level of side effects. It is the first book that I've reviewed where I'd like to meet the author! I really connected with Parul and found myself agreeing with so many of her comments and observations.

Breast cancer survivor (36-45) (December 2015)

This is an extremely detailed and helpful personal account that would be useful for anyone affected by cancer. It is especially useful for the emotional and physical side of cancer with extremely helpful chapters on topics like complementary therapies, side effects and how to deal with the emotional effects of cancer.

I like the title as the book is very much about how Parul discovers a lot about herself and the changes she makes because of her experience. It is easy to understand. Any medical information is clearly and succinctly explained. She references her sources, which is excellent. The text is nicely spaced out, which makes it readable. The chapter on complementary therapies is laid out well with a bold font and underlining to separate topics. The author writes from the heart. She is very good at describing what she goes through and it is an easy, although long, read.

This is an exceptionally well written and useful book. I couldn't put it down. It explores the cancer journey and how a diagnosis can make someone more aware of how they are living their life and how their personality and priorities can change. I could relate to a lot of this as this was how I felt after diagnosis. I particularly like the chapters on complementary therapies and self-awareness. The book seems different to many others in that it goes into a lot of detail about these and includes valuable information and insight into things that people may not have considered trying.

Had vulval cancer in 2013 (46-55) (December 2015)

This book would be useful for patients, partners or carers, relatives and friends and health professionals. It would also be a helpful library reference book for health and social care students. It is most useful for understanding the sequence of events after a diagnosis of breast cancer, the potential impact of treatment on health and wellbeing, and how emotionally helpful it is to have the help and support of friends and relatives during all stages, no matter how small.

It navigates through one woman's experience of living with breast cancer, enabling the reader to travel along as an observer. It is straightforward, easy to understand, and the technical information is explained as the story unfolds and handled simply yet clearly. The cover is colourful, and the image of a woman silhouetted against the night sky is thought provoking. The change in pace and style from page 195 onwards enables you to find key headings that you may wish to revisit. However, this change did surprise me, and I feel I was asked to put the emotions into tidy parcels.

The clear flow of events and Parul's open discussion of the impact of treatment and consultations with doctors enabled me to gain insight into her journey. I could hear her voice and identified with some of her fears and feelings. Parul struck me as an assertive woman; her no-nonsense open approach with health professionals may enthuse others to ask the right questions. Her insistence on knowing what was going on enabled her to maintain her self-esteem, alleviating fears from lack of knowing.

I will probably recommend it, especially for young professional women. It gives an insight into how one working woman came to terms with drastic changes in her life and how she coped. Her outspoken emotional fears and physical discomfort during treatment provides realistic expectations. Although not all outcomes are as positive, Parul's enthusiasm to fight her cancer is infectious. In addition, the cultural nuances specific to Parul add sociological depth and meaning and may help others in similar circumstances. This is a book you will remember.

Carer and health professional (66-75) (December 2015)

This book will help those going through treatment as it explains the process very clearly; it will also help carers to understand how you feel. I found it very accurate.

I found it hard to get into but that may just be me! It is easy to understand; the author explains it all very well and I could really empathise with her story. The cover does not appeal to me; it is too dark and makes the book look like a textbook. However, it is set out nicely inside and the chapters are short and sweet, which is good for me as since recovering from cancer I have a very short attention span.

This book provides emotional support and it is a good read for after the event. It is written very well and honestly – I can agree with all Parul's feelings and comments. It is good to read someone else's feelings and thoughts during this awful journey!

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (November 2015)

This is helpful for all cancer patients, but especially younger ones and those trying to juggle work and a career (and moving house!); it recognises the importance of trying to hold down a job during treatment, for financial reasons and self-worth. Fertility issues are looked at honestly and pragmatically; this is not often covered in such books but is extremely important for women of child-bearing age. It is also helpful in dealing with the discomfort people feel about talking about cancer – even now – and how people shy away from facing even a loved one with a diagnosis.

There is also a great deal in it to recommend it to carers. There's a wonderful section on how carers, family, friends and work colleagues can offer practical help and sensitive support and about how it is OK not to connect with people who don't. It is also optimistic about the role of the NHS and its cancer services. Parul also looks at the religious and cultural implications of getting cancer, spiritual topics such as karma, feelings of guilt and shame, being hurt by people who themselves are unable to support you due to their own pain, and she deals honestly with moving on, picking up a different, post-cancer life. It may therefore also be helpful for people who have additional cultural and ethnic considerations about how they and their illness should be treated and how it may affect extended, and often geographically distant, families.

It is easy to understand. If Parul mentions a drug or piece of equipment, she explains it in the text or footnote without interrupting the flow and includes details of books, resources and support agencies that provide more comprehensive information. I didn't notice any errors; treatment protocols and chemo drugs change all the time, but Parul points this out in several places. The print is large, the index is clear, and the short chapters are amusingly titled with lots of double spacing, diagrams, flow charts, even a cartoon! I love this size paperback; the pages are large, but the book is not too heavy to read in bed or if your arms/hands are weak. It has an uplifting cover image and warm colours. A real comfort book!

The narrative is often difficult but honest. Some information is not usually in other books, eg: self-help strategies; complementary therapies; cancer support centres; psychological approaches to the aftermath of cancer and how it changes you. Parul tries to come to terms with her cancer in several ways and is honest about their success or not. I would like to more on dealing with recovery over a longer period, how it has changed Parul's life, and how she has coped with the fear of recurrence that she often expresses. I would also like to know more about the financial and practical implications of how Parul and her family managed and the impact on her family; her situation is complicated by the costs of intercontinental travel and issues of getting visas, but her family also give her huge amounts of love and support.

It is very detailed in approach. It tells you what you need to know and more (including things you might not have thought of); this enables you to go to appointments with a better understanding of what is may happen with a treatment or drug and ask to be put in touch with other sources of help if it is not offered. My only reticence is that Parul is understandably doing all she can to avoid a mastectomy. This may increase the fear that many women have of this option and may mean that they don't choose the treatment most likely to save their lives. I understand how she feels, but if had not eventually chosen this option, I might not be alive today.

Living with breast cancer (56-65) (October 2015)

This book is so frank and honest that it will help those going through anything traumatic. It makes me feel more normal – I now know that I was not alone in some of my experiences. The first part is very honest about the early stages, including treatment, and the second part tackles living beyond a cancer diagnosis, trying to feel normal again, and understanding how your life has changed. I like this format.

It is very matter of fact and uses terms that anyone would be able to understand, the technical aspects are described well. The cover looks a bit spiritual and serene; my first impression was of a self-help book. Everything else is just right.

I like Parul's honesty and the fact that she deals with myths, stigmas and how moving forward is as hard as dealing with the cancer. It makes you feel that you are not alone and that someone else is feeling the same. It is sometimes a tough read when you have experienced a lot of the same things but it's emotional in a cathartic way.

A great find when you have been through such a traumatic experience.

Breast cancer patient (26-35) (October 2015)

This is an honest account of the author's treatment. It is suitable for anyone, not only breast cancer patients, but most useful for someone newly diagnosed and about to undergo treatment. It is more of a factual book about treatment, how it was carried out and the downsides of the treatment. Parul doesn't much deal with the emotional side, apart from difficulties with family. Her family were supportive, but the book highlights their emotional difficulties in giving support to someone so close.

I particularly like this book because it sticks to the subject it is describing, namely the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. Although it does go into the author's life, it doesn't go off at a tangent into uninteresting aspects of another person's life. I think it would be helpful as it describes chemotherapy and radiotherapy in detail, which is often hard to find in the literature available.

Overall, this is a very good factual aid for a breast cancer patient, their family and carers. The book is well structured in that it is divided into two parts. In the first, the author undergoes conventional treatments. It doesn't pull any punches and does describe the harsh reality of cancer treatment. Depending on the personality of a newly diagnosed patient, it could be a bit scary but on the whole, I think people want to know what they are up against. The second part is more about complementary therapies, counselling, and self help after treatment. Often it seems that once treatment is over, a patient is on their own. If they can try to become healthier and have other types of therapy, this might be helpful – the book explores these options. I also like how the author dispels some of the cancer myths, saying it is not down to karma or something you have done or not done. Unfortunately, the internet is now full of such stuff; this book sticks to reality.

Had womb cancer (66-75) (August 2015)



This is a well-written book by an author who comes across in a warm and friendly manner. She describes how she dealt with her cancer but does not try to make this seem like the only way or best way to handle it. It will be most useful for someone newly diagnosed or going through treatment.

The author handles the topic in a logical order and the book is very easy to understand; she explains technical terms well. The author comes across well in the tone she uses and makes you want to read more of her story. The quality of the paper is good, and the appealing, bright cover gives a positive feel to the book. A smaller book may be better, so it can fit in a bag more easily.

Living with breast cancer (36-45) (March 2016)

This is most useful for support through the treatment phase. The author describes in detail her treatment, the support from her family and health care professionals, the side effects she experienced, and her gratitude. It's easy to understand with disease-related terms defined in footnotes. The design elements are fine, and the tone is conversational and straightforward.

I don't dislike anything, but it brings home the necessity of physical, emotional, and financial support to be able to have treatment and focus on getting through and recovering from it. I do not have family support around me, so I can't imagine going through chemotherapy with no one to cook, clean, shop, provide sympathy, humour, and love to help me through bouts of sickness and extreme fatigue, and to free me from financial worry whilst doing so. Her detail about the side effects she experienced may cause some concern for readers trying to decide on treatment; I hope not – being fully informed helps one to prepare.

Living with locally advanced invasive lobular cancer (46-55) (December 2015)

I enjoyed this book. It has much to offer to patients and carers on a practical and an emotional level. It is a well-documented experience that will resonate deeply with anyone on their cancer journey, from diagnosis to getting beyond the big 'C'. The chapters in Section 2 are particularly useful: 'Rediscovering myself', 'Complementary therapies and cancer support centres' and 'How could you help someone going through cancer treatment?'. The first talks honestly about recognising and accepting the new 'me', coming to terms with deep-seated lifelong issues and appreciating the smallest of joys daily, essential, I believe, to moving forward. The author devotes an entire chapter to explaining her efforts to accelerate recovery by trying a wide variety of complementary therapies of benefit to patient and carer, particularly those less widely known and pursued, e.g. EFT (emotional freedom technique), biodynamic massage, and hypnotherapy. This is very informative and valuable during cancer treatment and afterwards. Knowing how difficult and complicated it is to understand the nature of cancer, the author gives much needed and succinct tips on how she feels she could have been better supported during her journey.

This is a deeply personal memoir but still reads as by a polished author comfortable with all the medical aspects of her journey. It is very easy to read from start to finish. The author's introduction is a beautiful way to introduce herself and her life up to diagnosis and the book logically follows her experience through treatment, recovery and survivorship. She writes well about a deep and life-changing experience on physical, emotional and psychological levels with clear references, footnotes and explanations of medical terminology. There is no glossary but there are many relevant and appropriate diagrams, references and footnotes that make for interesting reading. I like the cover very much. The paper is good and even though I've been thumbing back and forwards, it's retained its quality. The font is very clear and readable. The author writes from her heart and her tone is honest and frank.

It's a great combination of personal experience and practical suggestions. I enjoyed the chapter 'Self-awareness or my spiritual quest', which acknowledges and addresses how cancer causes stress and ways to deal with its impact. The author talks about a course called 'Coping with cancer stress', exploring several self-help tools and concepts to manage stress – valuable information. There is nothing I dislike, although the thanks in 'Cancer and my relationships' would be better in the acknowledgements. Also, the impact of cancer on intimacy and relationships, which would have been useful and relevant in this chapter, isn't addressed how I expected. The author mentions the effect of cancer on starting a family but the overall impact on intimate relationships really isn't discussed – an opportunity missed. It's a very important part in relationship adjustments throughout treatment and beyond.

Breast cancer patient (56-65) (December 2015)

It is easy to become the girl who has cancer and feel you have lost your identity – you need to try not to be defined by your illness. Something not always mentioned is that the cure can be tougher than the disease; I felt exhausted after radiotherapy and could not understand why a simple x-ray could make me feel so rough. Parul encourages you to take ownership of your wellbeing and her positive message promotes a sense of taking charge and being rational about your illness. The support of family and friends is so important; her mother encouraged her to keep to a normal routine like getting up at the usual time. I like the reminder that information is the power behind rational decisions and the 'I will survive' mantra. Bring it on!

Breast cancer survivor (56-65) (October 2015)

This does a nice job of describing breast cancer treatment and providing great insight into the emotional and spiritual components of treatment. It follows the author through treatment and beyond and is very easy to understand. The diagrams, especially in Section II, are extremely helpful. I like that Parul talks about medical treatment, but also the very personal self-reflection and empowerment that accompanies treatment. It highlights complementary therapies to help cope with many aspects of treatment and its after effects. One thing it has that many books do not, is an insightful chapter on how the patient can help their family and friends.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (October 2015)

Although I had a different cancer from the author, I found her book useful because we all go through similar emotions. Some of the emotions can be hard to understand but the thoughtful discussions in the book are helpful and I like that the author has a Hindu background; this helps to give a slightly different perspective on some things (although this is not a major focus of the book).

The first half is the author's story and how she was affected by cancer. The second section focuses on (in the author's words) "how I approached my life after cancer – my struggles at the physical, emotional and physiological level, how I coped with the stress, and how I changed with the experience of cancer in important and valuable ways". There are a couple of chapters suggesting practical help – for instance "Some wonderful books I read", "How could you help someone going through cancer treatment?", "How can a cancer patient help their family?" – so it is useful from a carer's or a patient's perspective. Parul writes with honesty about her feelings and what she found difficult to accept, so it may be useful to those struggling emotionally.

Parul discusses her experiences in approximately chronological order, with helpful practical suggestions towards the final sections of the book. It is easy to understand; Parul describes her experiences in clear language and does not use too many medical terms, except as an illustration of what she found confusing. Pages 24-26 describe clearly the staging and grading of cancer, often a subject of confusion for non-medical people. The text occasionally refers to footnotes for medical terms, e.g. page 92 has a footnote about Tamoxifen, what it is, and a further reference for extra information if required. The book seems thoughtfully and well written, with links and references to any quoted data, eg there is a table of UK breast cancer statistics (p xxiii), with the sources cited beneath, and the date that they were last accessed, a useful touch for anyone looking for recent data.

The cover has a silhouette of a woman in a field against a sunset, which forms a hopeful image – it looks like a self-help book which I suppose in a way it is. It is a substantial (but not too heavy) weight with a decent number of pages. The paper is good quality, the layout clear and spacious and the font large and clear.

I like the fact that it is written by an "ordinary" person who went through extraordinary things. Parul writes honestly, caringly and thoughtfully, even when she has difficult emotions. I find it helpful when people discuss the practical and spiritual things they have tried and thought about to help deal with the emotional effects of cancer. She took part in the "Coping with cancer stress course" at Paul's Cancer Support Centre, which I have done, and so it was interesting to read what she got from the course and compare it with my experiences. I also found it helpful that she discusses friends who had neglected to keep in touch with her (p. 139); again, I could identify with this and she takes time to discuss why she thinks this happened.

I really like this book; it is a good balance between personal experience and helpful suggestions that would apply to anyone dealing with cancer in some way. Some of these spiritual (not necessarily religious) matters may be new ideas to some people, but I found them very useful and powerful and still do even six years after diagnosis!

Uterine cancer survivor (46-55) (September 2015)

This covers every aspect of dealing with and healing from cancer. It is a holistic approach from the point of view of the patient and those around them. It looks at all aspects and touches on areas that I had not read of before. The author clearly describes how each patient reacts differently to the medical and emotional aspects of healing. Patient, carer, partner, friend, work colleague, you will learn so much from it.

It is laid out very logically following the author's journey through cancer and written in the true "KISS" style (Keep It Simple Stupid). It is written from the heart, it is honest, practical and an exceptionally good read. I praise the author and publishers for putting together an extremely well laid out book, from the cover right through to the notes and backup documentation.

I like that the author talks not only about the medical process she went through, but also the other therapies, the diets, and the emotions of going through the cancer healing process. She does not cover some areas that I feel need covering when you are diagnosed with cancer, but you must wait for my book to read about that. Anyone with any form of cancer, caring for someone with cancer, or who just knows someone healing from cancer should read this book.

Healing from Diffuse Astrocytoma Grade 2 brain tumour (56-65) (September 2015)

This is a personal account of going through breast cancer mixed with detailed information about treatment and breast cancer; the explanations are detailed enough for the book to make sense to someone who doesn't have breast cancer or work in the field. Although I don't have breast cancer, I can imagine that it would be a useful insight for someone who has been diagnosed or thinks they may have it.

The journey through diagnosis and treatment is vividly described, often in detail. I was curious to read about the similarities and differences between our experiences – there is much that is similar. Section II focuses on Parul's foray into complementary therapies and is tackled in a comprehensive and thoughtful way. She goes into the impact of the diagnosis and its implications in detail and thoroughly documents the impact of treatment. It would be a helpful book to read before treatment starts but the shock of diagnosis might make it difficult to absorb.

It follows a timeline that is logical and makes sense. There is effective use of footnotes to explain technical terms, along with the sources. The only criticism I have of this technique is that the internet references are very long and sometimes take up half of the page; I find this a bit annoying but that's a personal thing!

The author had private healthcare in the UK – minimal waiting and consultants on hand 24/7 to speak to on the telephone or visit. It would be interesting to see how her experience would have differed had this option not been available, to compare the experience of NHS treatment. I found the section on the spiritual quest (p. 222) a bit mystifying, especially the sections on the "Coping with cancer stress" course, quoted over 32 pages. Trying to condense down a nine-month course makes it a bit preachy and hard to access and apply without the benefit of being a part of the group. I would rather just read what the author got from it from a personal perspective.

The author's emotional journey is touchingly described; questions about fertility and the impact of treatment are honestly handled and I think bravely examined, right from the start. Her experience of complementary therapies is a useful touchstone when considering such options, regardless of what type of cancer you have.

Living with stage 4 tonsil cancer (56-65) (September 2015)

This is a very useful book for carers, family, friends and health professionals. It will help them understand the emotional, physical, painful and everyday aspects of cancer. It will also help carers deal with their own needs and understand the importance of trying to maintain some normality through this difficult time. It may be useful for patients who want to find out everything about breast cancer.

The author handles her story in a logical order. She writes well, and a lot of research has gone into the second part of the book, which deals with information and instruction for someone going through a cancer experience. It is easy to understand; the author explains medical and technical terms as she uses them. At first glance, the book is attractive and one that I would pick up in an information centre. There are no photos, but it is easy to read and well set out.

One thing that stands out is that Parul had access to private health care as well as the NHS. She was treated quickly and had great support from the private medical team as well as her own GP. Her consultant was available to call night or day. He came to see her in the middle of the night when she had to be admitted during a crisis. No hanging about for appointments if there was a problem. It would be wonderful if everyone with cancer had such high-quality treatment and personal care.

This is a very honest account of the author's journey with breast cancer. It was interesting to read about cultural differences and attitudes to a cancer diagnosis, and how some of her relatives and friends reacted to her during the journey. The second section is written as an information resource for patients and carers. I didn't really like the graphs and statistics. It is interesting to some people, but I found myself dipping in and out. I will probably recommend this book if I think the person will really benefit from reading it. I don't think it is suitable for everyone with a breast cancer diagnosis.

Breast cancer in 2011 (56-65) (August 2015)

Parul's book may help people to understand the things they may go through; she explains what to expect during treatment and what she found helpful. She writes in detail and there is helpful information throughout. She also talks about the emotional impact and the things that helped her cope better, e.g. different therapies; this helps to make the patient that such feelings are normal and less alone. The contents are well organised, and the book is easy to understand. Parul signposts people to websites, other resources and sources of support and these are listed in footnotes on the relevant page. Parul did a lot of research. She explains everything and each step of her cancer journey very well. Well done.

Breast cancer survivor (56-65) (August 2015)



The author describes day-to-day life with cancer in detail and includes good interaction with family members from initial diagnosis through to treatment and beyond. I identified with a lot of the detail. She is very concise in laying out the facts of her diagnosis and treatment and the timeline of each stage of her journey. It is very easy to understand and includes handy footnotes on certain topics; these give further insight.

The author's initial description is very appealing and easy to identify with, but I finished the book not really liking the way she dealt with some of her relationships. She was very harsh in describing the perceived inadequacies of certain friends and very unforgiving about how she had been treated. Some people close to me shied away but only because they were scared themselves; I didn't hold it against them.

I did struggle towards the end of the book as I began to resent the author's attitude and almost felt like I didn't like her. That said, the book is very factual, and I identified with a lot of what she went through.

Living with breast cancer (triple-negative invasive ductal carcinoma) (36-45) (February 2016)

This covers many aspects of living with cancer and may strike a note with anyone affected. It may help people understand that their feelings are not unusual or wrong. It is good for shared experience, but I would be careful about recommending it.

It is easy to understand, and the first half is in a good order, but I found the second part a bit jumbled. I like Parul's honesty and her ability to express the thoughts and feelings that many people with cancer suppress, in particular her references to fears of recurrence. Some of the information on self-help groups is good, if a bit local but there is perhaps too much detail on her support activities. For those living the experience, some of the help information near the end of the book would be better placed at relevant points in the story; with everything else that is going on readers may not reach this information when they need it.

I read this book some years after my main treatment and found it interesting and informative. As a considered read after the fact it was enjoyable. My one concern is that while Parul's determination to take something positive from her experience is commendable, she has been fortunate to be able to make the space and time to look for that outcome – it is not easily available to all. This is such a focus of the book, that those struggling through treatment who need to get back to earning/caring/living as quickly as possible and who are not able to find that headroom, may feel inadequate or disappointed that they do not achieve a "betterness" from their experience.

Living with breast cancer (46-55) (October 2015)

This is a very detailed description of one person's experience, perhaps too detailed for some patients. It is written in clear and simple English and looks quite attractive but threatens a long read from the start. Emotions and experiences are described in every detail, often with a side issue alongside the main theme. It can get quite boring and does not make easy reading. It is a life history as well as a cancer journey. It is commendable in its openness, but it does weigh heavily on the reader as progress is slow. If you can read it through in every detail it is quite valuable, but it does take much effort. Not for anyone with inhibitions as the details can be off putting!

Living with prostate cancer (Over 75) (October 2015)

This book would be useful for breast cancer patients and it would also give family members or friends an insight into what the patient is going through. It is very relevant for younger women who haven't had children as Parul talks about some of the difficult choices she faced. She also talks about the impact of cancer on her relationships, so it could help people to work through some of their own issues.

It is mostly a personal journey through diagnosis, treatment and recovery, so the order is easy to follow. Most chapters have lots of very short sections, which makes it easier to pick up and read if you are tired or busy. Although it is quite large (not one to carry in your handbag), with a lot of text, it is not difficult to read; once I started it I wanted to know what happened next. There is quite a lot of medical content, but it is pitched at an appropriate level or explained in the text. There are several footnotes with links to further information that could be useful, although they could quickly get out of date. The cover is striking, with a beautiful sunset and bold title.

Parul is very open about what she did and how she felt, physically and emotionally. People may find it very reassuring to know that what they are going through is "normal". The final section has several possible strategies to help you move on following the end of treatment. Whilst people will need to pick and choose the things that might best work for them, I found this section very interesting.

In several places Parul talks about various side effects and suggests they are inevitable. She could be clearer that these were her symptoms and might not be the same for everyone having the same treatments. She also in several places turns having cancer into a more positive experience than it is, by talking about the impact it had on her and how it has made her a better person.

I have rarely (if ever!) found it so hard to decide if I really like or dislike a book. At times, I found the author endearing and liked her. At others, I found her frustrating, even irritating. Part of the issue is that a lot of what she writes resonated deeply with me, in terms of the journey she went through. And therefore, when her view on something differed from my own I found it quite jarring. I saw a lot of similarities between us in terms of our personalities and again at times that was helpful, but at other times it made it harder.

Recovering from inflammatory breast cancer (36-45) (September 2015)

Although not everyone will have the same experience as Parul, her book might be useful for someone caring for or supporting a breast cancer patient to know what might happen and what the patient is afraid might happen. Not everyone realises how treatment can affect the patient and Parul's book tells that very clearly. However, it describes almost everything that could go wrong – Parul seemed to have the most extreme side effects – and this could frighten someone newly diagnosed. Having said that, it might be useful for those who want to know the worst-case scenario up front.

It is very easy to understand. I like how bits of information such as statistics about cancer and descriptions of grades and stages are slotted into the book in logical places. I would like to see the same kind of information about lymphoedema as this is something that affects many breast cancer patients. Also, the reasons for taking tamoxifen are not clear. I didn't notice any inaccuracies; the only thing that brought me up short was where Dr Parto says that there is nothing that can be done to prevent a recurrence (p. 108). I understand that some things can reduce the risk of recurrence, such as being more active and losing weight.

It's easy to read and I like the chatty style and smiley faces, although I suspect some people might find them irritating. The typeface is easy on the eyes and the paper has a lovely weight to it. However, I felt self conscious reading it in public, I don't know why. It's not about the book necessarily, maybe I don't want to be associated with cancer; I'm still less than 18 months from diagnosis so, although I describe myself as a 'survivor', in some ways I'm still getting there.

I like Section I because it is honest; it doesn't skirt issues but remains upbeat. I like the additional information and links to other publications. At several points, I thought 'that's what I did/thought'. For example, I spent ages playing with statistics, as did Parul, and concluded that an 80/20 chance of survival meant 50/50 for me. The part where she says that she was unable to tell her parents really resonated; it took me several days to tell people I had cancer, and I had to ask a friend to tell some people. The description of the time immediately following diagnosis is so real; that's the thing that made me want to finish the book, and why I was so gripped by Section I. I like the conclusion. Like Parul, cancer has given me a new perspective and I use my new awareness of my mortality to ensure I make the most of my time and opportunities.

I don't like Section II. Section I told me a story and I was interested in it, but Section II seemed to be telling me what to do. Parul seems to assume that because something worked for her it will work for everyone. I was uneasy about her wanting to be treated privately. I would not want anyone to think that they will get lower quality treatment on the NHS. I know it is her experience, but I would like a more balanced view of treatment and its effects: not everyone finds mammograms painful; not everyone is as severely affected by surgery; not everyone will have the same degree of skin damage. I have no experience of chemotherapy and can't comment on her description of its side effects. Something that grates is when Dinesh says that Parul 'will make it through this. She is a strong-willed woman.' (p. 213). I spent a lot of time having imaginary conversations with my breast care nurse when people told me that I would be fine because I was strong and had a positive attitude. I found this incredibly unhelpful and the imaginary conversations were all about accepting that I might not be fine despite being strong and positive. Parul herself says elsewhere that getting

breast cancer is pretty much a random event, nothing to do with personality or actions, and so it's wrong to suggest that personality might affect survival.

It is interesting rather than useful. The useful information is available elsewhere so, although it's nice to have it here, it's not essential to read this. The bits that I like, mainly Section I, I really like because they are honest descriptions of events and emotions. The bits I don't like, mainly Section II, are irritating because I don't want to be told what to do and what I will find helpful. I would probably recommend Section I to people who have completed treatment. Some might find Section II useful, although I don't like its approach and am glad I didn't read it before treatment. After surgery, I had six weeks to learn if I would need chemotherapy and tried to come to terms with my fear of needles so that I could decide (I was waiting for the result of an Oncotype DX test). The description of the side effects of chemotherapy might have persuaded me not to. Since then I have become part of a support group with people who have had chemotherapy and who have not had the severe side effects described by Parul.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (September 2015)

This book seems to be about a journey of self-discovery for the author as she deals with her diagnosis and treatment. This journey is spiritual, philosophical, heart-warming and at times inspiring. The first half deals with diagnosis, treatment, dealing with side effects, and helpful therapies. The second is more about life after cancer and the writer talks of valuing and prioritising the gift of life, the importance of love, friendship and care and the desirability of family support.

Parul's personal disclosures gave me a feeling of great rapport with her and I found myself nodding silently in agreement and solidarity. Parul grew up in a middle-class family in India and I found it particularly interesting to read of the social and cultural differences as well as the strong family support.

It is very easy to read and understand. The writer uses of everyday language and few technical terms. Everything about the book is perfectly acceptable though physically there is, perhaps, little to distinguish it at first sight from the many others now available in this genre. A couple of years ago, I would probably have given this book a much higher score, but I am starting to feel that the market is becoming slightly saturated with books in a similar vein. Perhaps the fashion for starting a blog to document the 'cancer journey' is leading to the expansion of blogs into book form?

Breast cancer patient (66-75) (August 2015)



This may be useful for the day-to-day aspects of living with breast cancer. It is very easy to understand and the whole book is well set out. However, it is all a bit mundane and I found it boring and long.

Breast cancer patient (36-45) (September 2015)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Being told ‘you have cancer’ can affect so much more than your health – it can also affect your family, your job, even your ability to pay the bills. But you’re still you. We get that. And, after over 100 years of helping people through cancer, we get what’s most important: that you’re treated as a person, not just a patient.

It’s why we’ll take the time to understand you and all that matters to you, so we can help you get the support you need to take care of your health, protect your personal relationships and deal with money and work worries.

We’re here to help you find your best way through from the moment of diagnosis, so you’re able to live life as fully as you can. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

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