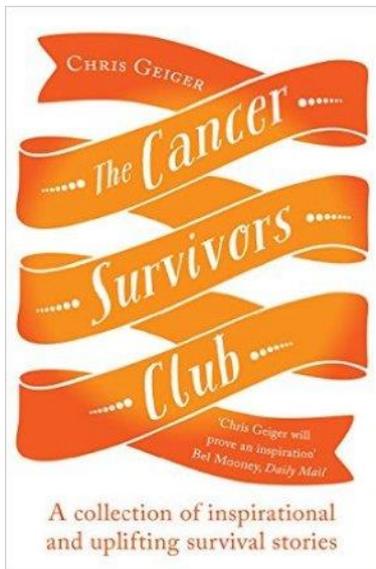


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



The cancer survivors club

Geiger C.
Oneworld Publications, 2015.
272pp.
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www.thecancersurvivorsclub.com

Average star rating 4.5 (out of 5)

Please note: reviews are of the first printing (2012), which had a different cover.

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This book dispels the feeling that you are alone and I like being able to relate to others in a similar situation. It is very easy to read and you can dip in as necessary.

Living with lymphoma (56-65) (February 2013)

This is ideal for anyone with a personal interest in cancer; it can take away much of the fear associated with diagnosis and as one contributor states “Cancer is a word not a sentence”. It should be offered to everyone diagnosed with cancer. It can be read at any stage of treatment or while trying to come to terms with a changed life.

There is an excellent balance of informative and thought-provoking experiences, stories of hope and stories of bare truth, no sugar coating just lots of reality. Some people put off seeing a doctor, others pursued the correct diagnosis. It is also good to read about complementary treatments as well as conventional treatments for those, who, like me, wanted everything the health professionals suggested. I empathised with some of the situations in which people found themselves. Many procedures and treatments are described and the book does highlight different practices across the country. I noticed differences in how breast cancer treatment was accessed and in some cases felt that I was treated better. However, although every reader is unique, we all have something in common.

The contributions are well written in everyday language and acronyms are explained. I particularly like the layout, which enables you to dip in and out. It is worth reading all the contributions; although the cancer described may be different, there are many shared experiences. The updates about the contributors are a good addition.

There is a real feeling that we can all cope with cancer once we know what we are dealing with. I am struck by how many contributors said they thought that cancer happens to someone else; we are all potentially that someone else. I also think the book will help people who suspect there may be something wrong to seek medical attention – persistence and not delaying is a common theme.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (January 2013)

This book should be on the NHS. It is a 'must-read' for anyone worried by cancer, at any stage. It gives the highs and lows and experiences of real cancer patients. It shows you that you are not alone, you can cope with treatment and you can come out stronger mentally. Each journey is clearly told – fears, reactions and the future – and feels honest. It's like chatting in the waiting room.

Breast and skin cancer survivor (66-75) (January 2013)

This book is full of positive stories by Joe Public showing the reader how they coped with cancer in their own way and continue to cope afterwards. You are uplifted from the first page. The cancer journey is difficult but it can be extra difficult at times and books like this can make it a bit better on bad day. It is ideal for anyone at any stage in their journey, patient, carer or friend; it makes you realise that cancer is not necessarily a death sentence, but that you can live with it and survive it.

It is very easy to read and dip in and out of. The title has a positive ring and makes you feel that you are a member of a special club, involved in the club and everyone's stories.

Cancer is always seen as negative but it can bring many positive things to your life: it may make you evaluate your life; it may make you more positive after undergoing treatment; post-treatment side effects may change your life completely; your life may change direction. This book shows you that. The positivity oozes out from page one – read it and feel uplifted and happier.

Primary bone non-Hodgkin lymphoma patient (46-55) (January 2013)

The book has real stories about real people and is well written in simple language that people can understand. It gives people and families coping with cancer belief. The stories aren't too long and the language is understandable; it doesn't bog the reader down with technical words. I like the updates at the end.

Because real people are writing in a very good way about a serious subject, the book is at times upsetting and thought provoking. Apart from the physical demands of treatment there is also emotional trauma of cancer – this book says hey you're not alone, don't give up, you can get through this.

Survivor of testicular and stomach cancer (36-45) (December 2012)

This collection of stories from people of all walks of life offers hope and inspiration. It is useful for getting through treatment from diagnosis onwards and offers insight for anyone with an interest in cancer. It struck me that many of the authors suffered from either late or inaccurate diagnosis in the early stages (though admittedly some cancers were not that easy to diagnose). It is imperative that symptoms are thoroughly investigated and that more cancers are diagnosed in the early stages.

Triple-negative breast cancer survivor (46-55) (December 2012)

Does exactly what is says on the tin – a collection of inspirational and uplifting survival stories told in an honest and open manner; they show how others have coped and the challenges they faced. It is easy to understand with excellent explanations of technical and medical terms in the text.

Bladder cancer patient (66-75) (December 2012)

This is an inspirational book collection of stories by some 27 cancer survivors, who write about their experiences in a very engaging way. These tales are humbling but uplifting, and a section at the end has information about each contributor's outcome. There are also details of useful cancer websites and blogs. Recommended reading for patients, carers and healthcare professionals as well as the public.

Living with throat cancer (66-75) (December 2012)

I love this book. Reading about different experiences and how people cope in their own way may help those not coping well to see there's light at the end of the tunnel. The way one of the authors described his experience had me crying with laughter.

Living with breast cancer (36-45) (December 2012)

This is a well written book in which cancer survivors give straightforward accounts of how they felt when diagnosed and how they coped. I would have been eager to read it after my diagnosis – it is inspirational and most importantly there is a message of hope throughout. It is very helpful for patients and carers to read how others coped, about their fear of what was to come and how they are now surviving after their cancer journey. Patients need reassurance that not all cancers are a death sentence.

It is a very easy read. The editor, himself a cancer survivor, has a good sense of humour and the stories by individual cancer survivors are very easy to read. They cover all different types of cancers; this is a good thing as one mainly reads about breast cancer these days. I love the design and colour on the cover.

I enjoyed reading the different accounts by the survivors of how they handled their diagnosis (I am sure all of us survivors can identify with this) and how they coped with their treatment, mentally and physically. Running through the various stories is the message that keeping positive against all the odds is so important, even though that might be difficult at times; there is always hope and this is what newly diagnosed patients and carers want to read!

A book where hope abounds is necessary reading for those affected by cancer. No matter how low you are feeling you could not fail to find encouragement and inspiration from this book. I highly recommend it.

Bowel cancer patient (56-65) (November 2012)

This is a very positive, upbeat and inspiring book of hope that shows that there can be life after diagnosis. Virtually every experience describes how medical staff dismissed initial symptoms or did not take them seriously. It may not be good or cost effective for the patient to have unnecessary tests, but perhaps the book could be used in the training of medical staff, if only to make them aware and be more responsive to what patients tell them.

Non-Hodgkin lymphoma patient (56-65) (November 2012)

This is a collection of stories by individuals who have survived cancer. The stories show determination and the struggle to overcome cancer treatments. The impact of cancer and its treatment on friends, family and the relationships with health care teams are explored and provide hope for those currently coming to terms with what receiving a cancer diagnosis can mean.

The scope of this book means that it can be useful to those newly diagnosed, those going through treatment and those whose treatment has finished and who are reflecting on their experience. In many ways, it is a reassuring book for the last group as it may confirm many thoughts they may have had during their treatment and support their feelings and thoughts.

The title of each chapter provides few clues to the wealth of material and observations within. The stories are not just about specific cancers but observations on the individuals' experiences. Attitudes to acceptance of cancer, responses to treatment and the ability to get on with life vary and in 20-plus stories we find evidence of a wide range of coping strategies and determination to support most people. For some, the stories will support their feelings and thoughts, for others they will serve as inspiration in their own personal journey.

This great resource should be widely distributed to those with a cancer diagnosis early in the treatment cycle. I could clearly relate to some of the experiences described and felt that I could gain from others in developing new coping strategies.

Living with colorectal cancer (66-75) (November 2012)

This book should be a standard text for nurses, doctors and administrators on cancer wards and cancer day centres. People attendant on but without the disease cannot get their heads around the sluggish nature of the 'cancer brain'. It is the shock, despair and loss of mental and physical control that are so crippling. The world lives at one pace; a cancer patient lives elsewhere. The book makes that point repeatedly. With the best will, clinicians are often too tired or stressed and cancer patients become a slow, cumbersome burden.

I like the honest flow of information and the skill with which the editor author has edited the content; however, he tries too hard to be witty in his own pieces. I am not going to argue with Andrea, but I don't think oncologists do mastectomies.

Metastatic renal cell carcinoma patient (Over 75) (November 2012)

This book is most beneficial for somebody recently diagnosed with cancer or starting treatment. All the stories have a positive outcome, which should fill the reader with hope and optimism. It is also a good read for friends and family, you get a true feel for what goes through the mind of someone diagnosed with cancer; whilst everyone is different, there are common emotions, such as fear, anger, loneliness and guilt. It also has real use for cancer patients who have finished or are close to completing their treatment. I had a lot of questions and emotions as my treatment was coming to an end and the book helps people deal with that. Many of the stories highlight how people have moved on and are now living their lives to the full.

It works well, especially as the author tells his own story first. It also works well that some of the longer stories are broken up with short articles by the author. These articles also bring some light relief from some of the main stories, which, while positive, do cover the difficult challenges of being diagnosed and treated for cancer.

The stories are written in the words of the people telling their stories. There are occasional glossary items that are explained at stages in the book. Some items may not always be clear to someone who does not understand some of the acronyms associated with cancer treatment. The cover and tone of the book are really appealing. There are no images or photos but I don't think the book needs it; photos would distract from engaging with the people's stories.

I like the positivity of each story. They all show that cancer is something that can be dealt with and overcome, often with a more positive life experience coming out of a cancer diagnosis and treatment. However, it's a tough read at times; it's difficult to read about people's treatments and circumstances. This does help enforce the positive message at the end of each story. A lot of the stories follow a similar structure (as you would expect) and sometimes perhaps focus on treatments in too much detail. As the stories are as written, this is understandable and helps you understand the individual.

The toughest thing I have found about being diagnosed and treated for cancer is the overwhelming sense of feeling alone. Whilst you do have people around you, the truth is that you can only truly relate to someone with cancer if you have had cancer yourself. The Cancer Survivors Club delivers this.

Sharing your cancer experience is key. This book is a change from much of the literature currently out there. It makes you feel positive about your experience and inspired to make the most of your life after cancer; this may be simply to live your life to the fullest or to take your experience and help others. The book has also helped me recognise that being diagnosed with cancer is a positive experience, a challenge admittedly, but one that can be overcome; you have to tell yourself it will be overcome and that the world can benefit from what you've been through.

This is a great read that resonated very deeply with me. I feel inspired to write my own story with a positive focus and perhaps be a contributor to a future edition. It's also just nice to feel part of an exclusive club!

Kidney cancer patient (36-45) (November 2012)

This is a superb book. It is a brilliant idea for patients to tell their story and feel part of a 'club.' It is arranged in bite-sized pieces and it is very easy to understand. I like the honesty; the stories are verbatim and all the better for that – I found it more realistic. It felt as if the stories were being told to me face to face and it gave me a little more understanding of other cancer treatments. I also enjoyed the author's newspaper columns interspersed with the stories; these lightened the read in places.

Oesophageal cancer survivor (66-75) (November 2012)

I really enjoyed this book and read it far faster than I anticipated. I definitely recommend it. It is very positive and this aspect would be useful to many affected by cancer: patient; partner; relative; or health professional. I also like the fact that it does not exclude the dark times.

Breast cancer patient in remission (46-55) (November 2012)

This collection of real-life short stories gives the reader a real-life view of what patients, family and friends go through. It is useful for both living and coping with cancer, but most helpful in the early stages. Each story is by a different author but the book has been put together very well. It is very easy to understand and there is no medical jargon because the stories are the authors' personal experience of their cancer. It is not a book for those looking for technical information; it is for those who want to experience what others have gone through and be able to relate that to their own experience. It touches the heart.

When I first got this book, I did not know what I to expect. I knew it was a collection of personal stories by people who have experienced cancer either as a patient or as a family member or even as a friend. Once I started reading it, I had to keep going. I wanted to read every story at the same time, but that was not possible. I did have to read to the end of each story though. My favourite words in the book point to how we have sent a man to the moon but we haven't cured cancer.

Breast cancer patient (46-55) (November 2012)

This collection of stories from ordinary people shows that you are not alone in the way you feel, that we all have very similar feelings and reactions when diagnosed and then go on to battle with and deal with our cancer in different ways. I was initially put off by the cover; it makes the book look as if it has religious content. Anyone looking for a book of cancer patient stories might easily overlook it.

Head and neck cancer patient (56-65) (November 2012)



When I was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 19, I felt very alone indeed. If only this book had been at my disposal then. To know that you are not alone, that others have been through the same fear, pain, confusion, distress and hope can be an immense help. These true stories, straight from the horse's mouth, are a useful emotional support tool and an insight into others' cancer journeys. This book should be available on prescription.

Former spindle cell carcinoma patient (36-45) (January 2013)

This book provides greater understanding of how cancer can affect people in different ways; no two experiences are the same, from symptoms and diagnosis, through investigation, treatment and side-effects, to coming to terms with the impact on one's own life. Above all, it provides hope that people can overcome enormous difficulties and emerge feeling empowered and stronger.

I like the honesty of each person's story, written in their own words. They convey the sense that cancer affects such a cross-section of humanity and the ability to conquer and keep going shines through. The stories are interspersed with Chris's newspaper columns. There are updates on each story at the end and this is my only criticism; I'd forgotten some of the earlier stories so had to look back; it might make more of an impact if the update is at the end of the story. I was puzzled by the statement (p. 8) that "lending your copy helps no-one; however, each copy sold will hopefully help many". Are proceeds donated to a charity or fundraising activity? If not, then why shouldn't we help someone else by lending our copy?!

There are perhaps almost too many stories for one volume. I began to feel weary towards the end and the stories began to lose their impact, which is a shame because each is remarkable. It is perhaps better to read one story at a time, over weeks/months, to absorb the significance of each story in its own right.

Living with breast cancer (46-55) (December 2012)

This has so many stories about different cancers, their treatments and their effects that it is a useful read for anyone at any stage in their cancer, however affected. It is easy to understand and the individual contributions all read well. The cover is good and I enjoyed and was reassured by the 'survivors update' at the end. I really enjoyed reading so many positive and inspirational stories, even the titles inspire. The stories gave me more of an understanding of other types of cancer – often ones I do not think about – and their treatments. I also enjoyed the inserts from Chris, the editor, and I will be looking at his website soon.

Living with breast cancer (46-55) (November 2012)

This book really taps into the emotional aspects of cancer and how people feel when they are diagnosed. People often find it hard to understand what a cancer patient is going through and they don't know what to say. This book will give them an idea of what the experience is like and some idea how to support the patient. It is really positive about the experience.

It feels like the authors, all cancer survivors, are there telling you about their experiences. The accounts are easy to understand and follow and each is short enough to be read in one sitting; this is useful because they contain a lot of emotion and some of this impact would be lost by putting the book down and continuing at another time. The book is a good size and the layout is good but the cover is off-putting and dull and I might walk straight past it if I saw it in a book shop. It is orange/yellow and the shadow effect is a little scary, like a horror novel. Cancer is scary and people do feel they are going through a nightmare, but the aim of the book is to be uplifting and give support; perhaps the cover could reflect this.

I was diagnosed and treated 14 years ago and tend to dip in and out of cancer books every now and then. I was 12 years old and there was not much support for cancer patients. I never met anyone else with the same cancer and saw only a few other young people on the ward with cancer. It was a hard time. This book is the support that people need when they are going through treatment and recovery. It has a running theme of membership in a "club" for all cancer survivors and I like that aspect – you are not alone and your journey will one day be a new chapter in the book.

I did find it quite a difficult read, but probably because I'm not a recent patient. Even though I deal with the transplant and after-effects every day, I have come a long way from treatment. When I went through my experience, I thought I would never forget a single detail. However, this book made me recall so many things I'd forgotten about the treatment and about hospitals. Some of the experiences are so raw that I was almost transported back to experiences I had forgotten.

I have repressed things and tried to move on from being a -patient to being "me, who once had cancer". This book would have been ideal for me when I had cancer and it would be for anyone going through or having recently been through the experience. But it was almost irrelevant now and took me back to a place where I didn't really need to be. It wasn't an uncomfortable read, just not for pleasure.

I will pass it on to a friend of a friend who has cancer. I've almost written my own "Cancer Survivors Club" account for her; she has found it useful and apparently, it has put her mind at ease and answered questions about personal experience that doctors cannot. I will give her this book and hope that it can help her too. Cancer can be larger than life and the diagnosis can be overwhelming. Sometimes it's hard to get the correct information from doctors and to understand the information that is given. This book is a medium between the two. It's the information that doctors don't give you and support from others who have come out the other side.

Osteosarcoma patient (26-35) (November 2012)



These short stories cover diagnosis, treatment and recovery – so the book will be useful at any stage of cancer. The stories are written by patients and carers and so are easy to understand. I like that the book covers different cancer types, including some rarer cancers.

Head and neck cancer patient (46-55) (February 2013)



I didn't really like much about this book, although it makes you realise how lucky you are compared to other cancer survivors. It doesn't give hope to those just diagnosed; it just makes clear how tough things will be. My wife found it distressing as it brought back lots of memories.

Whilst the book can be inspiring, it does not include any stories of survivors who went through normal, routine treatment; in all cases, the stories are about exceptional survival in extreme circumstances. It might go some way to letting others know what the patient is going through.

Mantle cell lymphoma patient (46-55) (January 2013)

This is a series of brief personal accounts of surviving cancer and this format makes it easy to read. I found much to admire in these accounts both the fortitude of the writers in the face of considerable adversity, and the nature and extent of the subsequent voluntary work (e.g. fund raising) that many of them undertook following their recovery. The book may serve as a source of benefit in two ways: firstly, it can help newly diagnosed patients and carers to understand and prepare for what may happen to them. Secondly, it may reassure them that people do survive.

However, and I know this sounds churlish, I was irritated for several reasons: firstly, several contributors credit their recovery to some extent to their positive approach. I was fortunate to be treated by an eminent oncologist who had a very candid and wry response on this issue: "I am unaware of any evidence to support the suggestion that looking on the bright side will remove your tumour". There is no evidence that optimists and/or strong-minded patients fare better than others in the survival stakes. To suggest otherwise is to raise false hope, place unnecessary pressure on patients to be positive and by default damn those who don't survive. It also downplays the dedication and expertise of the professionals who treat us. Even Lance Armstrong (never a man to avoid the plaudits) was honest enough to admit that his survival was a mixture of pure luck and supreme medical expertise.

Secondly, the format of the book causes the content to be rather superficial – some stories merited much more space and detail, and vice versa! I found the occasional inclusion of the author's own published articles to be rather illogically sited and

irrelevant in the context of the core theme of the book. Finally, the tone is rather too relentlessly positive and tends to gloss over the nature and extent of the suffering we experience. Again, this can be very misleading. We all like a happy ending and we rejoice in their collective survival but the picture the book paints is rather misleading.

I'm not sure who would really benefit from this book. If I were a current patient I'm not sure how much I'd be inspired by these stories. On the contrary, I might feel quite depressed that they all make it look so easy. It is of course reassuring to know that real people do survive but we know that without reading this book. I suspect that perhaps the main beneficiaries were the various contributors via the cathartic experience of putting into words their personal journeys.

Recently treated for testicular cancer (46-55) (October 2012)

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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