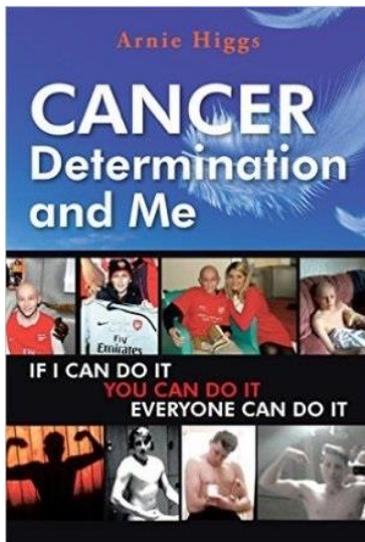


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



Cancer determination and me (2015)

Higgs A.
AuthorHouse, 2015.
xix, 110pp.
ISBN 9781496999511.

Average star rating 3.1 (out of 5)

**Macmillan Cancer Support
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7UQ**

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This is by an inspirational young man who talks openly about his treatment for a brain tumour. It offers emotional support and advice on being determined to recover and stay well and is full of hope and positive energy.

It flows well in a logical order and is easy to read and understand. The style is appropriate for younger readers. Arnie is very likeable and explains his experiences openly. He clearly appreciates everything that has been done for him in his recovery as well as all the attempts to give him and his family happy memories. The photos brought back difficult memories for me, as I had a mask like Arnie's for my treatment.

I like Arnie's positive attitude throughout and the honest way he explains his experiences. I found it emotional to read and was in tears several times, but I am pleased I read it. I recommend it, especially for teenagers and young people. I hope that Arnie continues to stay well and that he achieves his dream of helping other young people with similar illnesses.

Throat cancer patient in remission (46-55) (April 2016)

This is most useful for relatives and friends of the patient. It will also be appropriate for someone in their teens as Arnie is a positive role model. He is very honest and open about life with cancer and how it affects the whole family, not just him. It is useful to see how the family comes together to help Arnie as much as possible.

He handles the topic very well and is very open; he spells out, quite graphically at times, what it is like to have cancer and the after-effects of treatment. There is no need for a glossary as he approaches it in a very simple way. It would be better if the photos were interspersed throughout the book, as they relate to Arnie's progress.

I like the simplicity of this book. I love how the title is highlighted by using capitals for the three most important words, CANCER, Determination, Me. That, to me, is powerful emphasis.

Family member had cancer (56-65) (March 2016)

This is the story of a teenage lad that lived life to the full until given the news of cancer. This did not deter him. He resolved he would defy the odds and beat it and he did. His book will be most useful for a newly diagnosed teenage patient. They will be in a high state of anxiety, but Arnie demonstrates that staying positive and determined can have a positive influence on outcome. He got tremendous support from The Teenage Cancer Trust and a large network of family and friends and his book demonstrates the importance of building a strong network around you.

It is a very easy book to read. Written in a conversational style it attempts to involve the reader in the journey as if they were one of his mates. A nice glossy cover and largish font make it stand out and easy to read.

I like the continual optimistic feel. I will get through this. I will get my life back together and he did. For me, the 30 pages of photographs at the end of the book do not really add anything. That said, he got tremendous support from friends, relatives, and the Teenage Cancer Trust. Including photographs is a way of thanking them.

All patient journeys are worth reading. We all tackle the journey in a slightly different way. If you are a newly diagnosed teenager, here is an uplifting story for you. Arnie tackled things head on, determined not to fail. He never had any doubt that he would pull through and this unwavering optimism was a clear part of his recovery.

Brain tumour survivor (Glioblastoma Grade 4) (56-65) (February 2016)

The details provided in this book are useful in terms of 'mapping out' the processes involved in diagnosis and treatment. As a patient, this knowledge helps you and your family to prepare. It will be most useful to those with this cancer to learn about the signs and symptoms and the timescales involved in treatment. However, the author's incredibly positive and brave outlook is helpful for anyone.

The book flows logically and you sort of go along on the journey with him. It is very easy to understand and written as if Arnie is speaking. There are lots of slang terms and hundreds of spelling and grammatical errors. At first this really bothered me, and I felt that it needed to be tidied up but, in a way, it allows the character of the writer to come through and adds to the story. The images of the author should be bigger. The story is all about him and you get a real sense of who he is from his writing so a big picture of him would suit the overall theme.

I like the author. He is clearly a very brave and positive young man. He sounds like a bit of a rogue but his ability to cope with his illness and the treatment was incredible. I would recommend his book to young patients, but probably not to older ones. I guess that he meant it for young patients anyway.

Receiving treatment for follicular and DLBC lymphoma (36-45) (February 2016)



This might be a particularly useful book for a parent to read prior to passing on to their child as the author is a 13-year-old boy. The general positivity of the author's tale means it would be a useful read for someone recently diagnosed. A child facing the same struggles will relate to the author as he goes into his experiences in detail, but with humour and honesty. How the family dealt with the illness is well covered and an early read by affected parties may aid someone's journey in a positive way.

The book isn't written in exactly a diary format but does go through the author's experience in chronological order. The acknowledgements at the start allow you to realise instantly that he is well again, before his journey unfolds. The author starts with his normal life prior to diagnosis and then deals with how everything unfolded. There is not much medical detail, so it is likely to be most useful to someone who has just been diagnosed to give them some insight into how their life will change. The last section consists of photos showing his journey, including a radiotherapy mask; I imagine it could be useful to see this if you aren't sure what to expect. The cover is blue with lots of photos, including many of the author in football shirts. Stereotypically this may be more appealing for young boys who can directly relate to these pictures.

It is very easy to understand, with no technical words, but has not been very well proof read and has many spelling and grammatical issues. However, this could be viewed as personalising the experience, showing the author is not a professional author but a child who has gone through this illness and that the book is an honest account of events. An example of the lack of proofing is the incomplete sentence on page 42; this is annoying as it's a sentimental part and the reader wishes to know the detail but again it shows the honesty of the account. It depends how you view this as to whether it spoils the effect of the book. I chose to read it as though he was sharing his story with me for the first time. Knowing the schooling he had missed due to his illness and his failed attempts to get the grades to be a social worker I think this added to the value of his story in motivating others.

I would describe this book as a potential comfort blanket or emotional support as opposed to useful. However, if the reader is a recently diagnosed child it could be quite useful in the terms of understanding what their journey could be like. I would also give it five stars for a recently diagnosed child. It is an honest account with a happy ending (give or take the lost friends along the way of course). I consciously chose to not find it difficult to read but I could have found the spelling mistakes and lack of punctuation at times distracting from the detail.

My father is living with prostate cancer (26-35) (April 2017)

This is most useful for young people experiencing cancer (10-16), and friends or family that are looking for insight into how their loved one may be coping with their prognosis and would like a way to connect and understand. The information, although accurate, is not technical, therefore it isn't a good book for understanding how treatment works, but rather something to help learn how different emotions and concerns affect everybody.

The book flows well and tells a heartfelt story of how the author coped throughout treatment. There are mentions of family, and how they coped around him. There is no inappropriate language but there are some spelling and grammar mistakes that could be changed for the flow of words to run more smoothly. However, the story is inviting and easy to understand. The front cover is interesting and allows people to see that the story is based on the experience of a young boy. The paper quality is good, and the text is easy to read. The general layout inside is very clear and easy to follow. Chapters are split up well and are very clear using titles.

I like how the book is very personal and describes in detail how treatment was for the patient. I particularly like how the author includes his family and friends and how, although light hearted, it also tells a very true story of cancer experiences, including losing loved ones to the disease. However, although it tells an interesting story of the possible emotional effects of cancer on a young patient, the grammar and spelling could be improved.

I would be a great read for young people, showing that they are not the only people with cancer and that treatment isn't all as scary as some people think. It isn't appropriate for older people going through treatment as it talks about school and playing games, but it could be useful for parents or friends of young patients. Parents may be able to relate more to how their children are feeling. For children, school and friends are the most important part of their lives, and this story helps highlight this.

Student radiotherapist (Under 25) (April 2017)

Conditions other than cancer can cause a major disruption to life, thus requiring re-adaptation and acceptance (probably reluctantly). This book's positivity could be of benefit in such circumstances. The author expresses his feelings and thoughts honestly and this would help a fellow cancer patient feel less lonely and isolated. The book is also beneficial to anyone dealing with a cancer patient by giving a valuable insight into some of the feelings, difficulties, or frustrations they may be experiencing.

It is most useful for the realisation, understanding and acknowledgement of the life-changing effects of a cancer diagnosis. After coping with months of treatment and rehabilitation you may then have to accept (angrily and reluctantly) that you can no longer do what you want to do or used to do. But with imagination and alternative thinking, you can make your life meaningful. I didn't find the book inspiring or motivating, but the "take-home message" is to be thankful and concentrate on what you CAN DO, instead of grieving for things and a life you can no longer have.

The book follows the progression from life before diagnosis, through diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery, to life post cancer. Initially it flows well and is easy to read and follow. However, as the author's health deteriorates this is reflected in the narrative. The spelling/grammar are affected and there is some repetition. However, the reader must make allowances, and be mindful of the long-term effects of the treatment that the author has endured. Most chapters are short, and each section reasonably brief, which makes it a great book for when the reader has only short bursts of time or limited concentration. The author is a teenager and writes how a teenager would speak, using only a few commonly known technical terms.

Because of this, teenagers will probably benefit more from this book than other age groups, but older readers may relate to many aspects.

I found some of the photographs on the cover distressing and this may have put me off the book. However, the photographs inside are a lovely personal touch, enabling the reader to put faces to names and making them feel they are reading about a friend. All except one are at the end so the text is not interrupted, and readers have the option not to view them if they think they may be distressed. The size of the type, and the spacing between the paragraphs is appealing.

I like the honest and humorous writing. The lovable, chirpy, fun personality of the author pours off every page. I laughed at his childhood antics (which brought back memories of my early years) and cried at his sad experiences. From my experience of cancer, I could easily relate to the narrative. The author's positive attitude – appreciating life through all stages of cancer, being grateful, concentrating on what you can do and ignoring things you can't – is refreshing and uplifting.

There are three aspects of the book that I don't like. Firstly, the content is sad. As the author's health deteriorates this becomes obvious in the text. I found this distressing and could read the remaining part only in short sections. But, this is evidence of how cancer affects an individual, so is a valuable aspect of the book. Secondly, in the last chapter I became disappointed and felt let down by the author. He said that he wanted to motivate and inspire others, and that after cancer he felt mature and old before his time. Yet when he was given the opportunity to study at college towards his goals he acted the clown (just like his immature pre-cancer days!) and failed his course. Finally, I like books to be grammatically correct, so I found the errors in the narrative distracting. But the reader must make allowances and constantly remind themselves that the author is young, missed education, had a brain tumour, and has had to relearn many skills. What are a few spelling/punctuation/phrasing errors!

This book offers emotional support rather than the presentation of facts. Most readers will find something in the narrative that they can apply to their circumstances e.g. motivation, inspiration, positive thinking, or awareness of some of the difficulties and frustrations experienced by someone with cancer. Because of the honest account of the author's cancer journey I would be reluctant to recommend the book to anybody that I did not know. I would inform a relative or friend of the aspects of the book that I like and dislike, thus allowing them to make an informed decision.

I am amazed that a teenager (let alone one who has been as ill Arnie) found the time, inclination, and effort to share his experiences. A truly awesome book, well done Arnie!

Myxoid liposarcoma cancer patient (46-55) (October 2016)

The author is a young person, and the book is best aimed at children with cancer to see how bad things can get but that a positive mental attitude and the support of a loving family can have positive outcomes. It is most useful for children struggling with their diagnosis and what they can and can't do during treatment and recovery.

It is written in a logical order and the language is quite simplistic and easy to understand but it is not brilliantly written: some paragraphs are too long; there is too much unnecessary detail; and the author sometimes jumps about when telling stories. The photos at the back are brilliant to see his journey; it would be nicer in colour to really see. The cover design is simple and draws you in.

It is a charming book and I enjoyed reading it; it is heart warming and funny at times. The author writes from the heart and explains things that happen honestly; it is interesting to see a child's point of view. My main dislike is that it isn't well written.

Nurse looking after and caring for patients with various types of cancer (26-35) (September 2016)

This book would most appeal to young people with a diagnosis of cancer or a relative or friend to gain insight into Arnie's cancer journey. It may also be useful for parents or adults supporting a young person with cancer. It describes the diagnosis and treatment very well, providing an insight for those going through something similar or trying to understand what someone with cancer is experiencing.

Arnie tells his story very well. There is a good flow to the book from pre-diagnosis and childhood to teen life, diagnosis, treatment and then recovery. The book is appealing with a clear headline. Towards the end there are several photographs of Arnie's childhood. The pictures add value to his journey and allow Arnie to illustrate not only his cancer journey but also his bond with his friends and family.

Arnie is a strong and positive young man. It is a beautiful story and I am pleased that he could articulate it. He was diagnosed at an early age and tells the reader in detail about this. What I most liked was reading about the relationships and bonds Arnie had with his family. He first talks about his mother who supported him closely, and then when Arnie begins treatment the relationship with his brother unveils. Arnie expresses this relationship to be strong with mutual admiration and love. Post treatment Arnie's relationship with his father develops well. These relationships are expressed well and are touchingly interesting to read about.

The spelling, grammar and punctuation could be better. I noticed mistakes from the first paragraph and many statements and facts are repeated unnecessarily. I found this frustrating initially but as the book went on I noticed them less. Arnie is a teenager and the book has not been edited or proof read; this adds to the inspirational story and, despite the mistakes, it is easy to understand and suitable for all ages. I would recommend it, but also explain my frustrations.

Relative of cancer patient and healthcare professional (26-35) (August 2016)



Cancer is often thought of as an older person's disease, due to drinking, smoking, being unfit, and wear and tear, so this book would be useful for a teenager to get support. It might also be useful for their parents.

If I had seen the cover beforehand, I probably wouldn't have read it. It may appeal to the intended audience as it shows someone their age going through cancer but living his life. I don't think it flows well or is easy to read. It is in a vague chronological order – when he was a young boy, diagnosis, living with cancer – but it flits back and forth and can be confusing. The language is appropriate for children and young people as it isn't technical or scientific and is full of the author's feelings and emotions, but the grammatical and spelling errors make it difficult to understand. If it had been proof-read and professionally edited, it might have been more pleasurable to read. The photos inside need to be spread out; the book would look and flow better if some were on the pages describing that event.

I like that it doesn't hold back on what cancer is like for a young person. It is good at showing that it can happen to children and young people and that, while it is a bad thing, it is not always something to be so afraid of that you put your life on hold. It is quite useful for support and showing that you can continue to live and enjoy life.

I didn't really enjoy it. It isn't relevant to me or my situation, but it's also down to how it is written, the somewhat stilted tone and the spelling errors. I appreciate I am not the intended audience and a younger person may relate to it more. A positive aspect is that it doesn't sugar coat cancer. It explains how horrible it is, but also that there can be good times and it doesn't always have to be doom and gloom; it's very much how you deal with it psychologically as well as physically. I wouldn't recommend it to people my age or going through what I'm going through. However, I might recommend it to a teenager with cancer, or to their parents, siblings, and family.

Carer and relative of someone with Stage 4 oesophageal cancer, spread to lymph, stomach and liver (Under 25) (July 2017)

This was not the book for me mainly because of the poor quality of editing and proof reading. Perhaps that's my teacher head talking. I like the author's frankness and his book is easy to understand, but suffers from poor spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

However, for sheer determination and character, it is amazing. It is a very personal and real journey by a once very cocky teenager who excelled in sport and then got cancer, but who is now determined to help others. His spirit comes through and I would give him as a person ten out of ten for his tenacity and perseverance in the face of such a terrible illness. It is such a shame that the poor editing made his book very difficult for me to read. The cover is not the most appealing, but the paper is lovely and the font ideal for a nearly middle-aged person like myself.

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (MDS) (46-55) (February 2017)

This book was written by a teenage boy who was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of thirteen several years ago, and follows his initial difficulties, the diagnosis, and subsequent treatment. This is very much a personal cancer journey and there is little information about the precise nature of the treatments Arnie received and the decisions underway. However, it does highlight some of the major challenges faced by a young person having treatment and is most useful for showing the importance of the family when a young person has cancer.

Arnie is not someone who questions medical professionals or shows his worries about his condition. He has a 'bring it on' attitude to his treatment and retains a positive and mainly cheerful attitude throughout treatment. The reader is soon made aware of the dedication of family members and friends, who place his happiness and wellbeing as a top priority, even if that means going out in the middle of the night to buy a requested food item, only to return to Arnie's refusal to eat it.

It is important to remember that the author is a teenage boy who missed some education because of his cancer and subsequent treatment. It is written very much in his personal style. The spelling, punctuation and grammar are imperfect, but somehow, the reader can quickly get used to this and it gives an authentic voice to the book. I must say that the immediate impact of the book did not appeal to me. There are 'before and after' photographs; the former showing Arnie mid-treatment, and the latter with him in 'Mr Universe' pose, showing his muscles. The statement, 'If I can do it, you can do it' is aligned with these photos. Well, sorry, many people will not be able to 'do it' whatever that is, and it may seem a little insensitive.

Arnie was very fortunate to have family members who were totally committed to his wellbeing and happiness and his book demonstrates the effects that cancer may have on others. Family members sacrifice a great deal to care for Arnie in the best possible way. His brother, who was in the army, and doing a tour of Afghanistan, came home to care for his younger brother, and subsequently took a desk job in order that he could be available for Arnie's needs. Arnie creates much distress to his family by losing his appetite and drastic weight loss. He describes this, in hindsight, with his usual sense of humour, recalling throwing a sandwich out of the window, and hiding chicken nuggets under the pillow so that his inability to eat is not discovered. This is a common issue, and there is some interesting information about medical approaches to this.

Arnie remains upbeat and smiling throughout his ordeal. There is not a lot to dislike about this book, once the reader gets used to Arnie's writing style. It does not give advice, nor signpost readers to helpful organisations but is all very much about himself and his family, which may not always be helpful for others having treatment. Arnie's positive attitude is undoubtedly a major feature of the book and makes a very serious subject much more upbeat.

Former health professional, friend, carer (56-65) (May 2016)

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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