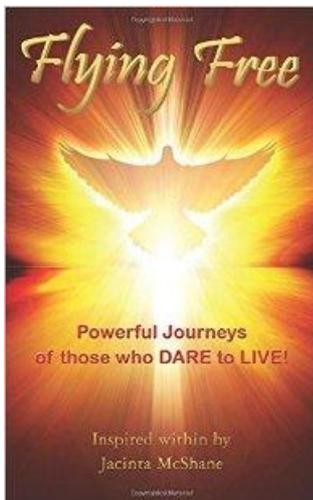


**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**

# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**Flying free. Powerful journeys of those who dare to live (2015)**

McShane J.

Claygate, Surrey: Grosvenor House Publishing, 2015.

xx, 254pp.

ISBN 9781781484944.

**Average star rating 3.4 (out of 5)**

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

**These reviews were written by people affected by cancer and are not the views of Macmillan Cancer Support. These reviews, and the publications reviewed, should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this review or publication or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. For more information about the review process and how to get involved, please go to the end of this document.**



Jacinta has collected eleven stories that show how people have dealt with a cancer diagnosis in their own way and the paths that enabled them to "Fly free" and be much more than a body with cancer. She does this in a supportive, understanding, and non-judgemental way with an overall message that only you can decide what is the right way for you to deal with your cancer journey – we are all different.

It is easy to understand, and any technical words are in the context of an individual's story. The cover is eye catching and brightly coloured. Inside, the typeface and size are good and there are photos of the author and contributors.

It is a very uplifting book considering the subject. Sometimes when you are struggling, reading about how other people have dealt with a situation can help you see things in a different light. I like that Jacinta uses the term "Cancer Thrivers" rather than "Cancer Survivors"; it sounds more uplifting. I like the little bits of advice at the end of each personal account. They are also listed at the back of the book.

It's inspiring to read how others have dealt with a cancer diagnosis and helps us to realise that we must all deal with things in our own way. Although it is primarily aimed at those with cancer, it could also inspire anyone who is facing difficult life challenges; we all struggle with things daily. The stories can help us believe that we are stronger than those challenges and that we can survive and thrive.

### **Living with pelvic cancer (in remission) (56-65) (March 2018)**

This is a simple collection of people's experiences retold. It offers examples of people who have not only coped with the emotional upset that cancer can bring but who have found a way through it. It would inspire someone with cancer as well as those close to them. It offers encouragement and hope and is therefore useful in terms of thinking about, and coming to terms with, a cancer diagnosis as well as coping and thriving when going through treatment or living with cancer.

It is very easy to understand, and a glossary is not necessary. It looks simple. The paper quality could be improved to give a weightier impression as presently it feels a bit cheap, which negatively impacts the book's appeal.

It does not offer practical advice, but something perhaps often overlooked – a sense of hope backed up by the examples and experiences. Readers can also glean some nuggets from the end of each story where a little advice is highlighted. It may also give others affected by cancer, including healthcare professionals, an insight into the possibility of a positive and powerful way to live through and with cancer.

This book is easy to read and offers inspiration in the fascinating tales told by real people who have faced their challenges with courage and grace. I like the message; the stories offer hope and acknowledge the power within oneself to heal, empowering the reader. The reader is left with an overriding impression of a sense of hope, inspiration, encouragement, and a feeling of confidence to live fearlessly – as the title suggests, you are left “Flying free”.

### **Living with lymphoma (46-55) (August 2016)**



This book is useful for all aspects of living with cancer as it includes different perspectives from different people. That's what makes it valuable. I did not like the design. It is not a book I would have picked up, but the format and themes are great, and it is very easy to understand. I like that the stories are not too long, which means that you can read as little or as much at a time as suits, but that each has value. I like the photos of the contributors; it's always a good thing to put a name to a face.

### **Acinic cell carcinoma (36-45) (August 2018)**

This inspirational collection of stories and experiences of people who have beaten the odds and survived cancer by turning to non-conventional treatments would be suitable for anyone who has a cancer diagnosis that is classified as palliative, when conventional treatment has failed. It could encourage patients with a poor prognosis to research the “Yes to Life” charity and alternative treatments. It may help health professionals and family members understand that there are alternative treatments.

It is very easy to read and understand. It is made up of personal stories and experiences of people with different cancers. The cover is attractive, and I like the layout and typeface. The pictures and colours are good.

I love the honesty of this book; I was blown away by the determination of the people featured and their fight to beat cancer. The author interviewed people from all walks of life. There is a good mix of stories and experiences, all with positive outcomes. I love the quotes before and after each story. At the end of each story there is a little advice section, which gives you tips on how to deal with certain situations.

Before reading this book, I was very sceptical about alternative treatments, but having read these stories and experiences, I have had second thoughts! If one is determined enough and has the finance to go after the alternative treatments featured in the book, then there is hope! I recommend it to encourage patients who

are receiving palliative care. I was very inspired by the stories and it has made me think about my lifestyle and diet to keep me fit and healthy. It is very useful for people who have the resources to seek out the alternative treatments featured. I hope that one day some of the alternative treatments mentioned may be available in the UK.

### **Breast cancer 2011 (66-75) (October 2016)**



Jacinta McShane has brought together stories of people who have had cancer but have resisted putting their entire faith into the NHS medical cancer team. Jacinta is a founder and chairperson of the charity 'Yes to Life'. Some of the storytellers refuse all medical treatment and pursue an alkaline-based diet and anti-stress lifestyle. Some put their faith entirely in God's hands. Others travel to Mexico or Germany to have expensive treatment in clinics there. Almost all not only survive but thrive.

There are some stories that are more (or less) useful for each reader and the cover strongly hints at what lies within. I was pleased to see that one of the storytellers (Iain) was generous with his research findings, listing in detail the dietary changes that he found useful in his recovery. This will be helpful to those thinking about embarking on an alkaline-based diet. However, there is a tendency by some storytellers to suggest that their faith and determination pulled them through their ordeal. I did not like that medical doctors and surgeons were generally discounted in the grand scheme of things, and that determination and spiritual approaches conquered cancer. This leaves the reader with the conclusion that people who have died of cancer may have lacked this determination and spiritual integrity.

It is inevitable that the reader will be more drawn to some stories than to others. I found Iain's story most interesting. He spent a great deal of time researching an alkaline-based diet and generously lists the important features of this in a helpful way. One storyteller mentions a Coley injection that she had in Mexico, but gives no details, other than that it worked for her. Some people give the impression that God has chosen them (and therefore, not others) to survive, which I found less appealing.

The benefits, or otherwise, of this book will depend on the needs and disposition of readers. The parts about an alkaline diet, stress reduction and dietary supplements are interesting and worthy of consideration. I was less inspired by the assumptions by some of the 'thrivers' that it was their own skill and attitude that had beaten cancer. Some of the views are disrespectful to cancer and surgeons. One writer said that her breast was poked, prodded and drawn on with pens by males treating her, and that she had been burnt, poisoned and cut in her NHS treatment, referring to radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgery. This does make the reader think about what we succumb to as patients. I consider that in many cases, it would be possible – and desirable – to undergo medical treatment and take up an alkaline-based diet, stress reduction and supplements.

### **Former speech and language therapist (head and neck cancer); sister of person with brain tumour (56-65) (August 2018)**

This is a collection of accounts from cancer survivors, in which they tell us about their personal journey and how they handled diagnosis and treatment. Each chapter telling a different story. The language is easy and written as a conversation with each person. As the book is not intended for professionals or to give information on cancer, it reads as a story. The cover has a picture of a phoenix and is bright in colour. The quality of paper is good, and the font is about the correct size. I would like more spacing between chapters. The tone of the author is supportive.

To summarise, the book is about the author's transformational journey through surviving cancer and other travellers she has met along the way. It doesn't give advice or guidance about aspects of cancer, but contributors give a unique insight into what worked for them, be it alternative therapies, diet, or religious faith, in managing their illness. I sometimes felt that the author expects readers to feel that reading other people's success stories can be positive. If someone is struggling to cope emotionally and physically, they might feel that they are not trying hard enough.

### **Survived spindle cell sarcoma (2008) (26-35) (July 2018)**

This book describes how people deal with cancer diagnosis and treatment. It would help someone living with cancer with mental wellbeing. I feel it would be most helpful for people coming to terms with the initial diagnosis of terminal or inoperable cancer. It provides an insight on how to deal with cancer on a spiritual level and where you can go from the initial diagnosis. It might also help someone look at alternative methods of living with and perhaps treating the cancer.

The author introduces herself and then clearly introduces the different people, each with their own cancer story. It is relatively easy to understand, although some medical knowledge is needed to understand it fully. I assume the intended audience is adults. I doubt that younger people will be able to understand it or handle some of the context. Any alternative and/or spiritual cancer treatments are briefly explained in the text. The only issue I have is that you can sometimes forget who you are reading about. The stories are all written in the first person and it can be confusing if you dip in and out. However, this is a small issue in comparison to the overall effectiveness of how the book is written. I'm not keen on the cover; it isn't clear that the book deals with cancer. The spiritual element is however obvious from the calming colours and the winged bird/angel.

I like the fact that you can easily dip in and out, the short stories allow this. You can read one person's perspective and then put it down for another day. I also like that it is a positive book and reads in a very uplifting way. However, I feel that the content will suit only those open to the spiritual element of life. Someone who believes only in pure science might not be open to enjoying or getting anything out of this book.

### **I have experienced the loss of several family members to cancer, in particular, the death of my father last year from terminal lung cancer (26-35) (July 2017)**

This consists of the stories of people who have adapted to life with cancer in different ways. There are some similarities, the main one being that everyone tried to take control of their situation and looked inside themselves for answers. If you read one story it can be easy to get sucked into trying to copy everything they did. However, because this book includes different stories, it is easier to start thinking about options rather than get stuck on one possibility. It focuses on the positive. All the stories have an uplifting feel to them. Though there is sadness in some stories, there is still a feeling of people being able to cope well with what has happened to them. It is appropriate for someone with cancer, or other chronic life-threatening condition, their carers, family, and friends. It will depend on the reader, and where they are in their treatment and in their own emotional space. For some, it may be uplifting, others may connect with the stories, but some won't.

The focus is people for whom orthodox treatment is deemed to be unhelpful or unavailable. Even though not all the stories have a happy ending, they are written in such a way that you can take something positive from them. It may not be for people undergoing orthodox treatment; for those who have been told that no treatment is available it may be an interesting read. Even if you don't wish to follow the same path it can be uplifting to hear about others who have beaten the odds.

It is easy to read; each story is separate, so you can read one at a time whenever you want, in any order, without losing anything. There is no technical language. It is initially appealing, a good size. The chapters are short, ideal if you can't concentrate for long periods. The text is easy to read, and the layout is good; each chapter is distinct and topped and tailed with quotes and advice in bullet points. If anything, the book does have a "religious" look about it and there is a theme of religion throughout, but it could be read without a strong religious view. However, it could put off some people; this is a shame as the book has many other messages that can appeal to all.

At times, I felt it was trying to sell me things: the Issels treatment centre in Mexico (this appears to be how all the people featured met); the church (the Centre of Living Hope appears to be a link to religious organisations); the author's previous book; and various websites and resources such as "Yes to Life". However, I read the book with an independent eye and think it is well intentioned. Certainly, after reading it you want to look up some of the resources mentioned by the different authors. So, it would be more of a criticism not to provide the contact details.

I think the book is intended primarily as emotional support, particularly for people with a less than ideal prognosis. In general, the "advice" is all around trying to stay positive; however, in a world in which we are constantly comparing ourselves to others, I do wonder how many people will feel worse because they don't feel that they can do it when someone else has. I don't think that is the intention, but it's a possible effect (like watching the Olympics and saying, "oh I wish I could do that, but I'd never be able to"). Being ill with cancer can drain your energy and your desire to live (just getting up in the morning can be a trial) so trying to stay positive, take control, do research, and challenge your doctor's prognosis can be incredibly taxing.

For these reasons, I would not recommend it to everyone affected by cancer. It could be a positive read for some but not the right time for others. Not everyone will connect with it as everyone has a different experience. In one context, it is useful to

all as there is a focus on the positive. But this can have a flip side. Someone who doesn't have the money to go to Mexico may experience things differently: "It's not fair that I can't have this treatment just because of lack of money".

I enjoyed it. I want to hear about positive experiences. I'm not necessarily going to book a treatment in Mexico on the strength of this book but reading about people who have survived the odds is uplifting. It is also inspiring to read how people have changed their lives in many ways (something that I had already chosen to do) and how they feel they have benefitted. It makes me feel like I have made a good choice with my lifestyle changes and has encouraged me to continue to take responsibility for my own health. These latter points are good messages to take from the book.

### **Living with ovarian cancer (36-45) (August 2016)**



This might be most useful to someone considering alternative treatments, someone with advanced cancer where conventional treatment has failed, or perhaps someone in need of inspiration.

Each chapter tells one person's story. It is very easy to understand. It's an appealing book physically, but also the premise that there is hope beyond medical science.

I love reading tales of those who have beaten cancer in their own way, with or without hospital-based treatment. This book also highlights the need to change the way you are living, which I believe is necessary, but not widely known.

Although I quite enjoyed reading this book, I think it has limited appeal. It is useful to inspire people but might be a turn off to people who don't already have a faith. The objective is laudable, but there are better, more informative books like this.

### **Person who had breast cancer in the past (46-55) (June 2018)**

This book was not for me. It may be useful for those with a Christian faith. It is easy to understand, very simply written and there are some pieces of good advice – such as find someone to talk to who can listen objectively, don't panic, rest, and make yourself your priority – and some uplifting moments. But, for me, it's too much about putting your trust in God. This is great for those who believe this, but not for me.

Peoples' beliefs are rammed down readers' throats and we are not given the opportunity to take it or leave it. As I have no faith, I found it difficult to read accounts of getting well and surviving cancer because of believing in, having faith in, and praying to God and Jesus. It made me feel uncomfortable. Perhaps I am too prejudiced and believers and non-believers alike might find solace, comfort and confidence in these stories.

### **Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (November 2017)**

# 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](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

**© Macmillan Cancer Support, November 2018**

**Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SCO39907) and the Isle of Man (604).**