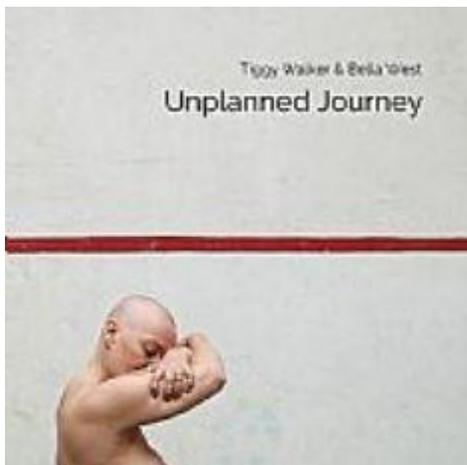


MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT
RIGHT THERE WITH YOU

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



Unplanned journey (2015)

Walker T, West B (photographer).
Kibworth Beauchamp, Leics.: Matador,
2015.
160pp.
ISBN 9781784625115.

Average star rating 4.2 (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.



This is an appealing book for sure; the cover and content interested me. The author's journey is referenced and underpinned by photos all the way through, giving a unique look into her experience of breast cancer. It is very easy to understand.

It is most useful for someone who is struggling to come to terms with all they have been through and facing changes in their body without the tools to deal with them. I like that it is so image heavy, but it could be too graphic for some; I understand why that might be the case.

Lived experience of acinic cell carcinoma (rare cancer) (36-45) (February 2019)

This is a good quality book, full of very personal photos of Tiggy and the procedures she underwent, quiet moments, and very recognisable environments when attending appointments. Some of the pictures are graphic (of surgery) but for anyone who can face the stark nature of the images, the photos are a very good illustration of the impact of cancer. It would be useful for someone who would like an honest and brief account of one person's journey from diagnosis to recovery.

The book is in a chronological order, presented as a photo journal type book, and is very easy to understand. Tiggy writes as I believe she would speak and therefore comes across very naturally. She is very honest about her feelings and relationships, and her entries are concise like short diary entries, making this a quick read. I read it twice: once to read the words and skim over the photos; the second time to look at the photos without reading any text. I like the brevity of Tiggy's 'diary entries'; they feel real and relatable and I appreciate her ability to recall her feelings and moments with very specific expressions. I don't dislike anything about the book, though the images may be a bit too much for some people, or perhaps not even to 'taste'.

Having now been in many rooms waiting for appointments, scans, the photographs represent a reality that I can recognise easily – including moments of brevity and humour in amongst the serious stuff – so I feel this is a good reflection of how things can be. If anyone wants an idea about what the day to day of living with cancer looks like in a series of snapshots, I recommend this book, with the warning about imagery.

I hesitate to use the word 'brave' as I've heard and read many accounts of people living with cancer to various degrees and all can be called a brave account for being told; this book however separates from the written accounts for being visually accessible and open to reaction and interpretation in a different way.

Carer and sister of cancer patient with T4 breast cancer, secondary to liver, lungs and bone (36-45) (January 2019)

What an AMAZING book – a cancer story told through words and photos in diary form. It is so different and informative, giving a real insight into the thoughts and actual processes of cancer and its treatment.

It was refreshing to read something that contains similar thoughts and feelings as other books about cancer, and specifically breast cancer, but that is presented and told in a different way. The photographs enable the reader to see what it is like inside a radiotherapy machine, what chemo is like, and what a tumour looks like! It is very easy to understand. The author uses simple language and the photographs are clear. It is quite arty and designed to appeal to those of that inclination.

For me, this is a fascinating book. I love photography, and this makes a real change and maybe has a bigger impact. However, it may not be to everyone's taste. The photo of a tumour is gritty and real and not for the squeamish. The photos of chemo being administered could recall some difficult memories for those who have gone through the process, but the positivity of the photos, for me, overrode this and could provide the empathy that one seeks. It could be very useful for friends and families.

Insightful, thoughtful, positive, real, and utterly brilliant!

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (May 2018)

This is a good introduction to the effects of cancer treatment (chemo, radio, surgery) on the body. It is a descriptive and photographic account of Tiggy Walker's breast cancer journey, from diagnosis, through treatment, to finishing treatment. The honest photographs shed a small light on how cancer may affect your body.

It is a very appealing book, particularly for those who are artistically inclined, and brilliantly easy to read and understand. The photos also make it useful for those who do not have English as a first language or for younger, but mature, readers.

Walker uses alternative medicines to complement orthodox cancer treatment. This is an important distinction. She never relies on alternative medicine alone to treat her cancer. She does, however, assert that sugar causes cancer. She also stops eating dairy (amongst other food groups), asserting that the hormones in milk cause cancer. I refute this; it is fine to go on a diet, but it should be a well-informed decision if you are a cancer patient. [Cancer Research UK](#) reports that a high-calcium diet lowers the risk of cancer and that there is no direct link between sugar and cancer, although sugar may make you put on weight, which increases the risk in menopausal women.

The honesty through the photographs of Walker's changing body is endearing and relatable. The photographs are juxtaposed with her diary excerpts about how she views her body. She is often hard on herself; the reader is potentially more forgiving, hardly noticing what she appears most uncomfortable with. As well as her self-doubts, the book includes her moments of lashing out at Johnny (her loved one), which again, unfortunately, most of us will relate to.

Walker offers her reader an honest and touchingly vulnerable insight into her journey. You feel like you are going through it with her. I adored reading it and immersing myself in her journey. I love her foresight in deciding to photograph it all to share; there is a strong sense of optimism and I wish I had had the same idea. She is very human, likeable and cheeky. Her outlook through cancer is joyful, and she is often smiling despite her diagnosis. I respect this a lot. I imagine if you are going through breast cancer and following a similar treatment plan, this could provide comfort and make the ordeal feel less isolating.

Ex cancer patient (osteosarcoma) (26-35) (April 2018)

This book shows in graphic detail, through photographs, exactly what someone with breast cancer might expect to go through. It will be useful for anyone wondering what treatment will be like and the effect that it may have on their body. It begins with an introduction to the author and carries on from when she is first diagnosed to the end of treatment and her reconstruction.

I'm not sure that I would have picked it up on the cover alone because it's not eye catching, mostly grey with a photo of Tiggy Walker. However, inside it is set out well. It isn't a traditionally sized book, more like a small photo album, which in effect it is. The text alongside the photos explains what is going on in more detail. The text is spaced out nicely and the font makes it easy to read. It is very easy to understand.

I warmed to the author straight away and I like the whole tone of the book. I like the fact that she didn't hold back with the photographs; many are quite graphic, but she really does get across what it was like for her.

This is a fantastic book. I've read a lot of books describing what it is like to go through treatment, but none have had the impact of this one. I love the fact that she chose to write and photograph her journey as she did. It really brings it home more than just reading about it. I also really like the style of the photos; some are quite arty whereas others capture her feelings perfectly.

My mum had breast cancer (36-45) (June 2017)



Unplanned Journey is a diary spanning 18 months in the life of Tiggy Walker, married to Radio 2 broadcaster Johnnie Walker, through breast cancer diagnosis, treatment and breast reconstruction. It could be useful for anyone about to embark on treatment. Tiggy's words are accompanied by beautiful and haunting photographs by award-winning photographer, Bella West. It is a unique story, capturing the rawness of breast cancer and its treatment. It is not for the fainthearted or squeamish; the images are candid and rare, but beautiful at the same time.

Tiggy speaks in a strong and candid voice. Her fear, strength, pain and hope can be heard in her words and seen in the photographs. The language is realistic and easy to follow, and the book is haunting and beautiful. The photographs are aesthetically arranged, some in colour, some black and white, some small, some large. The words and images are candid, and I found myself smiling and cringing at the same time. The images reflect Tiggy's forthright and bold language; no details are spared, it is candid and true. It speaks of the discomfort of treatment, the painful side effects and the tremendous test that cancer can bring to the toughest of individuals and strongest of couples. It is a diary and a book of art. It is also a story of hope, ending with a photograph of Tiggy looking healthy and radiant following successful reconstruction.

I did not dislike anything but if you are squeamish or would rather not see the effects of treatment, you might find some of the images (before, during, after surgery) hard. However, if you prefer to face your fears, then this is the book for you. It is bold, intimate, funny, tender, and candid. The photographs bring to life the challenges and joys Tiggy faces. Her words and Bella West's accompanying photographs have made me laugh out loud, peer closely and look away – it is an emotive but uplifting book.

Friend of someone with cancer (46-55) (January 2019)

This appealed to me on two counts. Firstly, the patient-carer relationship replicated my journey; I care for my husband who has a neurological disease and I was then diagnosed with breast cancer, which changed everything for a while. Secondly, the book features Johnnie Walker, and I love listening to him on the radio. It captures Tiggy's and Johnnie's rollercoaster journey when their world is turned upside down. They share their laughter and tears openly as they work their way through treatment and bravely share their photographs. It provides a very real insight into the patient-carer relationship and is useful for anyone who finds themselves in the role of carer. It shows how difficult it can be for an independent person not used to being cared for!

It is in the form of a diary, logging daily events throughout the journey. It is easy to understand and follow; the language is relevant to patients and carers and is technical or medical. The title is perfect and summarises the whole experience. Initially, I didn't like the cover and I wouldn't have bought the book in a bookshop. Once I had read it, however, it enabled me to put it into context. The photographs bring the story to life, providing an insight into what you can expect pre- and post-surgery; they also capture the couple's emotions, negating the need for words.

It provides an insight into the challenges faced by patient and carer. I particularly like the last entry describing the journey as nearly over and getting on with life, albeit a very different one. It is matter of fact in places, but this demonstrates how the journey evolves; going for a mammogram and receiving an earth-shattering diagnosis in one visit. It provides an insight into the journey from diagnosis to treatment. It highlights the importance of a sensitive and supportive carer – the driving from appointment to appointment, the hand holding and being someone to talk to, on top of the daily routine of cooking, shopping and dog walking – and the impact this can have on a relationship. The royalties are being donated to Carers UK, an amazing charity supporting the work that many people undertake every day with little recognition.

Breast cancer patient (46-55) (August 2018)

This is a very honest book. The graphic photographs make it quite hard to read, but it is very interesting. It is very easy to understand, and I like the author's honesty. I may recommend it, but I am not sure due to the photos; it should come with a warning.

Living with breast cancer (46-55) (June 2017)

This is best read after surgery. I don't think it is helpful beforehand as some of it is graphic. As it is written in diary form, it is reassuring to follow the journey of treatment to its conclusion. It is easy to understand, and medical terms are fully explained. The cover doesn't scream "cancer" (which may scare people away) and the photos are artistic and emotional. The texture is nice, the pages are soft and smooth.

I like the number of photos – some speak louder than words – and the sense of humour in the book mirrored my outlook. I also like the comparisons to the work on her house. I might recommend it, but it will depend on the person.

Living with breast cancer (lobular) (46-55) (May 2017)

This is an honest recount of the realities of living with a breast cancer diagnosis. It offers an insight into the realities of the treatments that patients must endure.

It is laid out in diary form, following Tiggy from diagnosis to reconstruction surgery. It is easy to understand. Tiggy explains her feelings well and you feel you are being given an insight into her feelings. She is very honest, and the photographs are an honest recounting of how breast cancer affects your body. The photo on the cover is a little disconcerting but I understand why it was chosen. This book tells it as it is – no sugar coating – and the cover reflects this honesty. The typeface is clear, and the photos are in black and white, and colour.

I like Tiggy's honesty and personable nature. She has an excellent relationship with her photographer and this comes through clearly. Initially, as a relatively recent breast cancer patient, I did not like all the photographs, I found them graphic and unsettling; however, as I read the book, I understood why they had been used and realise how well they complement the dialogue.

This book is beautifully written, and you feel that you have been allowed into Tiggy's world. I feel slightly that the author wrote this as therapy, rather than as an informative book about breast cancer. However, it offers an insightful look into Tiggy's life after diagnosis and during subsequent treatment. If you have just been diagnosed the photos may be upsetting, but if you are the sort of person who likes to get all the facts and is not squeamish, then it's great.

Breast cancer survivor awaiting reconstruction surgery (46-55) (March 2017)



The group of readers most likely to benefit from reading this book are older teen/adult readers, after they have been treated and recovered from any type of cancer. They would be able to relate readily to the narration and feel some comfort that they are not alone. Because the book offers a condensed, visual account of a long journey, the reader would have an improved awareness of what they have experienced and coped with. Hopefully this realisation and appreciation of their personal strength and coping ability would be a valuable confidence building exercise for life post cancer. The author recounts her experience of breast reconstruction in a positive way, which could reassure a patient about to undergo this treatment. Any reader who has not experienced cancer, or health professionals would gain a profound insight into many emotional, physical, and behavioural aspects of this condition.

Regarding other reader groups, the benefit of this book is questionable. In its favour, it offers an honest, open, and valuable insight into the fears, anxieties, emotional, and psychological aspects of cancer, so readers in the same circumstances may feel some comfort from feeling that they are not alone. The author also tackles the delicate and (sometimes) taboo aspects of funerals and death. Similarly, this could benefit readers in similar circumstances because it offers them the opportunity to discuss and explore these sensitive issues with loved ones. To its detriment, it has factual errors, "advice" that has no scientific basis (and contradicts current medical recommendations potentially causing harm), and negative comments. Some of these, especially those regarding treatment, are overly dramatic, and understandably could cause fear and distress in someone about to start treatment. For these reasons, I don't think the book is a reliable or useful source of information for newly diagnosed patients, their partners, carers, or friends, or health professionals.

It does have some value to breast patients, in particular the admission of fears and anxieties, introducing "taboo" sensitive subjects, and the writer's brief recounting of her positive breast reconstruction experience. But the factual inaccuracies, well-meaning but "misinformed advice", and the melodramatic, negative comments make it more distressing than useful. It is not a book I would choose to read if recently diagnosed with breast cancer. It would have been better suited (and less distressing) if the author had consistently reminded and reassured the reader that the cancer experience is unique to every individual, and that this book only represents HER experience and opinions. However, this statement is not made at any point.

The narrative is easy to follow because it is in the chronological format of a diary. It flows in a logical order, consisting of chapters describing life pre-cancer, surgery, prognosis, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and breast reconstruction. These are interspersed with chapters detailing the normal life happenings of the author.

Unfortunately, the book contains several factual inaccuracies, and incorrect advice. For example:

- The author states (p. 2) that her tumour was Grade 3-the most aggressive level. A variety of reference information I checked stated that Grade 4 is the most advanced.
- The author describes her “cancer healing diet” (p. 24). A “cancer healing diet” does not exist! To suggest one is irresponsible and harmful. The current medical guidelines are that no food group should be excluded because by doing so the body will be deprived of valuable nutrients.
- The author claims (p. 26) that stress caused her cancer. My extensive literature searches found that any connection between stress and developing cancer is weak or has no clear evidence. So again, the reader is misinformed.
- Stating that “fear started the cancer” (p. 62), is also incorrect and provides false information to a non-informed reader.
- The writer links cancer cell growth with the hormones found in cow, sheep, and goat dairy (p. 105). Cancer Research UK confirmed that this has not been scientifically proven, and it is not advisable to limit any food group.
- Weight gain is not an inevitable factor of breast cancer (p 137); by stating that it is, the writer could cause unnecessary worry and distress to the reader.
- The author states that Herceptin jabs probably affect the heart and keep her fat (p. 137). The proven scientific evidence is that heart problems can sometimes develop in some patients, and patients frequently lose weight on Herceptin (due to the side effects of vomiting and diarrhoea).
- Her similar statement (p. 146.) that “Herceptin keeps your weight up” is inaccurate (see above).

The author is disparaging of traditional cancer treatments but is very enthusiastic and has gained benefit from various forms of alternative medicine. However, she does not inform the reader that alternative medicine does not benefit everyone, and that it is imperative that the reader obtains advice from their cancer team prior to using alternative therapies.

The book is well written, fast flowing, easy to read, and can be read quickly because it is predominantly photographs. Each diary entry is dated, and there is ample space between entries. This makes reading easier on the eye and provides the opportunity of frequent natural breaks. Most of the technical terms are standard and do not require any explanation, however an appendix clarifying the alternative therapy terminology would have been useful and interesting. A delightful element of the book is that the author has a good vocabulary, grammar skills and is very descriptive in her account. However, I found her language to be occasionally offensive.

The cover is not visually appealing or eye catching. However, the title and cover photograph may pique the interest. It is a relatively large and heavy hardback, so the reader is unlikely to take it out and about. The paper is good quality and the typeface

is clear and a good size (some readers may find it too small). The chapters are clearly indicated and separated by a title page. The photographs are of an excellent standard and artistic composition. They include those found in a typical family album, clinical equipment, the author in various partially clothed or fully naked poses, some very graphic surgical procedures, the excised tissue and resulting scars. However, the number of photographs, and the content of some are not necessary. They made me feel uncomfortable and embarrassed, and I questioned whether I was reviewing a “top-shelf magazine” or a book designed to prepare an individual of what to expect when diagnosed with breast cancer. Not a book to read on the bus!

The writer is honest and open about her emotions and her tone changes depending on her “rollercoaster” emotional state, evidence of the psychological impact of a cancer diagnosis. I like this honest, direct, no-feelings-spared approach to emotional and behavioural aspects e.g. admitting that her jovial, positive attitude is sometimes replaced with feeling low and negative. I could relate to some aspects of the narration, and it is reassuring to know that I wasn't the only person to experience distressing emotions. The frank admission of her arguments with her husband is very honest. This will resonate with some readers (and their partners) and comfort and reassure them that others experience it too. Throughout, the author is disparaging about all aspects of treatment, so it is refreshing and a “hurrah!” moment when she eventually appreciates conventional treatment (p. 112) and NHS staff (p. 153).

I would like a contents page; it is useful to have an overview of the book before reading it. Although the author has good written communication skills there are some spelling and grammatical errors. I found her bad language offensive and her comments about Jesus Christ disrespectful; thankfully both are occasional. The tone varies according to the author's mood, but some comments are inappropriately silly, sarcastic, or satirical. The author has a very warped and negative approach to her treatment. Some of her comments made me angry, e.g.: “as the first syringe of red poison went into my arm”; “I hope I don't become a ghastly, puking, exhausted, bald and grumpy friend/sibling”; and “tomorrow I truly take on the part of the cancer victim, I am having the poison I always swore I would never have”. These may have been her feelings, but they are too dramatic and could cause unnecessary fear, anxiety, and distress in a patient about to embark on conventional treatment. I could relate to her frustrations regarding her radiotherapy sessions, but she should have shown more understanding and empathy of the demands on a busy hospital department.

This book is of some use in offering emotional support, a valuable insight into fears, anxieties, and sensitive issues, but this usefulness is minima and it does not provide a sound purchase for any group of reader. It offers only minimal emotional support to a recovered breast cancer patient. The factual inaccuracies, strong but unhelpful opinions, and misleading advice make it of questionable use to a patient newly diagnosed. There are more informative, useful, supportive, competitively priced books available for people newly diagnosed or recovered from breast cancer.

Recovering from myxoidliposarcoma (46-55) (July 2017)



This book wasn't for me. I was left feeling quite low. When I picked it up I had high hopes for something unique and different. I still think it is that but found it uninspiring. I was glad to finish it rather than left wanting more as I have been with other books about breast cancer. Some of the photographs are useful, particularly in the clinical areas, but otherwise it is just more pictures of an attractive and brave woman, like so many others in the same position. It's important to acknowledge not only the physical effects of cancer but also the emotional and psychological effects on the patient, family and friends but the negativity leapt off the page with little respite!

It is a very personal autobiographical journey. There is little technical information; it is more about the process of treatment and the feelings invoked by the journey. It may be useful for the emotional and psychological aspects of diagnosis or to give thought to how relationships with others may change. I'm sure the author will find it a helpful review of her journey, but I am not sure how useful that is for other people, especially those just about to go through their own journeys.

It is very visual with professional and 'arty' photographs. The photos in a clinical setting are most helpful – I failed to appreciate those in a derelict house! It is like reading a diary with photographs; I think that this is what the author was trying to achieve, so from that perspective it works.

I think that this is much more about the author having something to look back on for herself, her family and friends rather than a helpful resource for other patients. Whilst the honesty is appreciated, it leaves the reader feeling low and uninspired. It is not a book I would recommend at any stage of diagnosis or treatment but especially not for people early in the journey. If I had read it before my own journey it would have done nothing to push me on with hope and positivity, despite the positive outcome for the author. Although it offers a promise of addressing the emotional aspects of breast cancer, it is quite self-indulgent and negative. It is more a piece of artwork than help and support for patients.

Breast cancer survivor (56-65) (February 2019)

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 everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we’re right there with you.

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

© Macmillan Cancer Support, February 2019

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