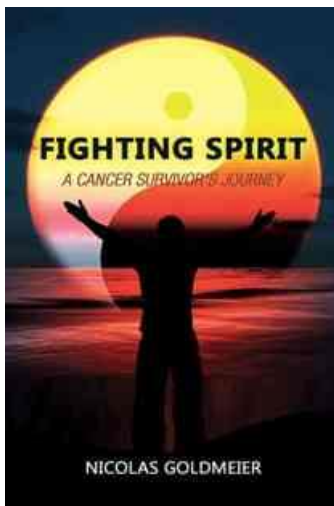


**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**

# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**Fighting spirit. A cancer survivor's journey (2016)**

Goldmeier N.

London: Austin Macauley, 2016.

160pp.

ISBN 9781786126658.

**Average star rating 3.3 (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.**



I really enjoyed reading this book. I have not suffered from head and neck cancer, but the author's story and positive attitude are an inspiration, and I think the book will appeal to people touched by any type of cancer (or indeed, any life-changing event).

It would be useful throughout diagnosis, treatment, recovery, and beyond. The author is very positive throughout, even when describing the shock of his diagnosis and the traumatic treatment he had to undergo – the after-effects of which he will carry for the rest of his life. But at no point does he express anything but positivity and gratitude for the strength he's gained from his commitment to martial arts, and from his close friends and family. Because of this, it's also a good read for anyone supporting someone with cancer, as it really shows the difference you can make.

Generally, the book moves chronologically from the author's diagnosis, through his treatment. The author also side-steps into more general issues as the book moves along, and looks back to the past, describing his involvement in martial arts, and the skills he's picked up from this that he has applied to his fight with cancer. It is a personal perspective and doesn't include much technical information beyond the author's own experiences of diagnosis and treatment (if you're looking for a more medical book describing head and neck cancers, this isn't the one); as such, I didn't find any factual inaccuracies. The author writes very engagingly. I read it in just a couple of sittings, as the easy-to-read style and story is a real page turner!

The design of the book is quite basic (no photos or illustrations) but is perfectly fine. It's not immediately obvious from the cover what the book is about, but having read it, it is a good reflection of the content.

This book offers emotional support and inspiration, rather than technical information. As well as reading the book in its entirety, I also think it would be good to dip into whenever you feel the need for a boost. I like the author's positivity and engaging style of writing. His "fighting spirit" certainly comes across! I found it an uplifting book. The author is positive and encouraging (without being annoying!), and I think the book will provide emotional support and inspiration for anyone dealing with cancer.

**Leukaemia survivor (26-35) (September 2017)**



This is not a book for the faint-hearted. It pulls no punches when it comes to the damage caused by head and neck cancer.

It's an easy to read book, apart from the descriptions of the damage such cancers can cause, and is generally in a logical order, although coping aside of his Christian faith and martial arts comes before using his abilities in coping with appointments or waiting for results, for example. The cover is striking and conveys the 'fighting' content. It's short enough (166 pages) to be read in a few days. I felt encouraged by the book's appearance and title to see if there was anything that could be used in the way of coping strategies for any cancer. The encouragement to fight is excellent and there are plenty of examples of what the author went through to show that it is possible to fight in the extremes of cancer.

It is clear from early on that the author's financial, and his father's medical, background gave him privileges that most people with cancer can only envy. Few of us are lucky enough to have a father who can arrange for us to see a 'consultant colleague', taking us to be 'pushed ahead of the queue', but who among us would not take advantage of such privilege? There is also mention of 'people who leave anonymous envelopes with hundreds of pounds'. It will also not appeal to atheists; the Christian quotes can be irritating, although the author's faith obviously helped him through. However, many with faith, particularly Christian, will find it uplifting.

It is not until page 107 that this book comes into its own for me. From there on, the reader will find many familiar experiences with references to films where the same fighting spirit was needed by characters, and which can be used in the never-ending hospital visits, and to fight the loneliness and despair and the "ever increasing roller coaster of emotions".

The author has clearly been through horrendous trials and suffering and some patients with cancer might be a bit concerned at reading the detail before (or if) they experience it themselves. The inability to eat ordinary food, the food that escapes his mouth and must be cleaned away promptly, and the drink that might come out of his nose. That said, those with similar cancers will recognise the treatments and the very difficult experiences. It is not an easy book to read from the point of view of the appalling damage head cancer can do, but it is an inspiring book, one of courage throughout the most challenging trials. The rousing finish, quoting the Dalai Lama, and encouraging others with cancer to shout out loud and clear, "Cancer may have started the fight, but I will do everything in my power to finish it" is inspiring, encouraging and, as a carer I found it helped renew my strength at a difficult time. However, if you are of a squeamish nature, you might like to start at page 107.

**Caring for someone with oesophageal and prostate cancer (66-75) (July 2018)**

This is a valuable resource for anyone. The author provides brief information on his head and neck cancer, with a factual insight into the immediate physical struggles and potential long-term complications. He honestly and openly expresses his fears and anxieties. Anyone diagnosed with any serious health condition will be able to relate to these and feel comforted, reassured and less isolated. They could also help non-cancer readers improve their awareness, knowledge and understanding of the psychological aspects of diagnosis. His detailed description of initial symptoms could also benefit the non-informed reader by improving their awareness and knowledge of critical indicators of head and neck cancer.

The author reflects on his pre-cancer life-learning skills and knowledge – martial arts, personal/professional life, and religious beliefs – and uses them to develop his coping strategy. This positive, practical mindset is inspiring and engaging; hopefully readers can try this approach to assist them with the challenges they face. Despite the traumas of his journey, he continually praises and appreciates the people that have supported him. This is beneficial evidence to readers providing treatment, care, and support, that their efforts are greatly appreciated, and are an essential part of treatment, recovery and adaptation to life post cancer.

It is quite a useful read for a newly diagnosed head and neck cancer patient, or their partner or family and friends. In addition to the points above, the author provides simple, clear, brief explanations and information of some clinical procedures involved, radiotherapy/chemotherapy treatment regimes, his experience in hospital, and the side effects of surgery and treatment. However, because of the degree of honesty and openness, newly diagnosed patients may be alarmed or distressed by some aspects. The author should have reminded readers that this is his experience, and that every patient's cancer journey is unique.

The book falls into four parts. The first consists of a short forward and prologue. The second (the first half of the book) is the author's cancer journey. This follows a logical sequence of life pre-cancer, diagnosis, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and surgery. Abruptly and unnaturally, the third section (the second half of the book), consists of an ad hoc recollection of film scenes and quotes, martial arts training and tactics, bible excerpts, and life pre-cancer; the author cleverly reflects on these to develop his "fighting spirit" and mindset. The fourth section is less clear cut, switching between the author's cancer journey and boxing. This arrangement is confusing and because each chapter is relatively short and complete, this disjointed approach is more irritating than detrimental to the flow. To a patient attempting to read it whilst undergoing a demanding treatment regime it may be tiring and require too much concentration. Clearly divided sections and an author's note at the start giving a brief overview of the structure of the narration would have been beneficial to the reader.

The following are not factual inaccuracies, but readers should be aware of them.

- The author had chemotherapy and radiotherapy simultaneously. It would help readers if he had explained that the terminology for this is chemoradiation.
- He states that his wife was given his diagnosis over the telephone in his absence (p 27). If true, this demonstrates a gross breach of patient confidentiality. This could alarm readers in a similar situation and undermine their confidence in their medical team.

- Family and friends seemed to visit at any time (pp 30, 31), a unique and flexible arrangement that may not be available to everyone. Readers may be surprised or disappointed if they think that this is normal practice.
- It may be helpful to explain that the nauseous smell during radiotherapy for nose and sinus cancer is due to radiation damage to the nasal or paranasal cavities (p 36). The author applied oil of cloves to a tissue and his sleeve to combat the smell, however he omits to discuss the side effects associated with using this preparation. (My research found that oil of cloves contain eugenol, and that this substance can cause dermatitis, permanently numb skin if repeatedly in contact, and result in photosensitivity burns).
- For a newly diagnosed reader it may be more helpful (and easier to relate the author's surgery to the terminology used in medical information booklets), if the author had explained that the "clear tissue taken from round the tumour" (p 45) during surgery is referred to clinically as "taking a margin".
- On page 97, he writes about the anti-oxidant effects of green tea, vegetables, fruit, vitamins A.C.E. and selenium. My literature findings agreed with the author except for the anti-oxidant properties of vitamin A. The value of this vitamin as an anti-oxidant was found to be debatable

It is well written, descriptive, interesting and engaging. Most chapters have an imaginative title that piques interest. Generally, it is easy to understand. I'm not familiar with boxing and martial arts terminology, or the author's choice of films, but because the narration is tied in with something I could relate to, I could follow the meaning. A good level of language is used, and there appears to be only occasional grammatical or punctuation errors. The vocabulary is appropriate for adults and older teens, but occasionally the author uses some strange, silly, and childish anomalies in an unnecessary attempt to describe his experience further. He also uses some sports abbreviations; an appendix with additional information would give the reader a deeper understanding and help them relate better to the narration. Unfortunately, there is no contents page to help readers locate a specific piece of information later.

The book has a bold, brightly coloured eye-catching cover. The author's name and positive, inspiring title are clearly displayed. It is a light weight softback and a convenient size for taking out and about. The paper is good quality and the typeface is relatively large making it easier to read. The text is thoughtfully set out with space between each paragraph, and each chapter is identified by its bold print title. Unfortunately, there are no photographs; this is detrimental to author/reader rapport. Unusually, for a book reflecting on a cancer journey, the author's tone remains consistently relaxed, informal, unbiased, friendly, and sometimes jocular.

Very few authors of cancer books remind the reader of the possibility of recurrence, this author does. This is a valuable and essential "prod" to the recovered, euphoric cancer patient that they must be constantly vigilant, and emphasizes the importance of attending their follow up appointments. Another element of the cancer journey that is not often recounted in a book is the author's involvement in a research trial. This provides a patient's prospective of being involved in research. If the reader is subsequently asked to participate in a clinical trial they will have patient experience, and official trial information from which to assist them in their decision-making process. I also thought that the insight into the author's character from a friend and his Surgical Prosthodontist was unusual and beneficial.

The author is very honest, open and descriptive about his experience, and I could readily relate to his emotional and physical "rollercoaster" journey that such a diagnosis can result in. I was moved by his continual expression of his appreciation and gratitude to everybody involved in his treatment and recovery. Not being familiar with boxing, martial arts training/tactics, films, the author's religious beliefs, or his pre-cancer life experiences, I expected to have problems understanding how he applied these to develop his cancer coping strategy. This is not the case. Each chapter in the second half is dedicated to one component, which is well explained in its specialist context, and then "shaped" to be appropriate for his requirement to cope with cancer.

Each chapter is complete, and relatively short, allowing the reader to digest what they have just read, and reflect on their own learnings and current requirements. This may give them the inspiration and imagination to identify their own skills/beliefs to develop their strategy for coping with cancer or other life difficulties.

The author deals with many sensitive aspects of diagnosis, but his chapter "An encouraging thought" (p. 146) is especially poignant, providing a plausible answer to a question many readers will be able to relate to. He does rely heavily on his religious beliefs to help him cope with this difficult time, and atheists or followers of another faith may struggle to relate to how he applied this to his coping strategy. Depending on their faith, some readers may be offended or distressed by some of the text.

Occasionally the author misuses words, which is surprising given his wide vocabulary and slightly irritating. However, I was angry and disappointed with his referral to cancer as being a "nemesis" (p. 56). According to two dictionaries, the definition of a nemesis is "retribution and punishment for evil". Not only is this incorrect and insensitive, it is distressing, unsupportive and unhelpful to a fellow cancer reader. Another aspect that angered and offended me is the several occasions when the author insinuates that an individual has control over whether they develop cancer. He is partially correct in that there are well-known lifestyle choices that can predispose an individual to specific types of cancer, but many cancers have an unknown cause.

This is a well-written, positive, interesting, engaging account of how various life skills acquired pre-cancer, together with support and beliefs, can be transferred and developed into a personal "fighting spirit" to assist with the challenges of a cancer diagnosis (or any life-changing event). It gives some insight into the emotional turmoil that can result from a diagnosis of cancer, and subsequent treatment/adapting to life post cancer. It impassively provides information regarding treatment and short/ long term complications. It is interesting, easy to read and relate to. The author has a positive, constructive approach which engages the reader, and inspires them to reflect on their own beliefs and strengths to develop their "fighting spirit".

I am always reluctant to recommend books. I would give prospective readers a non-judgemental overview of the content, followed by my likes and dislikes. In the case of this book, I would remind prospective readers that the narration is about the author's experience, which will probably differ from their own. I would also inform them of the writer's strong religious beliefs, and his reliance on them in his coping strategy.

**Recovering from myxoidliposarcoma (46-55) (August 2017)**



I like the positivity of this book. It isn't my favourite book about cancer, but it made me aware of a very different type, which is important as rarer cancers are often not written about. It is most useful for keeping positive and never giving in.

It does jump about, relating specific experiences to his martial arts training and recovery; it's not a cancer "journey" with a clear beginning, middle and end. Despite this, it is easy to understand, and any technical language is explained.

How Nicholas coped with his illness is very interesting and different from those that I usually read about. However, I found it quite samey and got bored about two thirds of the way through. I found the constant religious parallels difficult – there are many of them and I don't have a faith so couldn't empathise with this aspect of his recovery.

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

This is useful for all aspects of living with cancer. The author covers not just the ordeals of treatment, but also the aftermath (to a lesser degree). It is easy to understand but the book itself is not appealing. The cover design could be construed as a sunset or sunrise and I would prefer something more positive. There are no illustrations. If this were a website. I'd describe it as dull. I appreciate that the subject matter is serious, but there should be something to lighten it a bit.

I like how the author tries to tell the reader to use anything and everything in his/her armoury to defeat the disease. No matter what that may be, any weapon should be used – physical, emotional, psychological. However, the author's weapons – his hobby and his spiritual beliefs – may turn off some people. Perhaps there is too much emphasis, and time, spent describing these things but, to be fair, without these, the book would be much shorter and perhaps not get across the message.

I may have been a little harsh, but although it is addressing a difficult, sensitive, and serious subject, there should be a lighter side. In my experience, it is important to try to see the better side of life at a difficult time, even commenting on silly things that happen. He must have experienced something silly during treatment – I can think of many things that happened to me – but maybe that's part of my armoury, and not his.

### **Getting over (hopefully) tongue cancer, lung cancer and jaw cancer (56-65) (April 2017)**

I like the powerful message in this book that the author, Nicholas Goldmeier, overcame his cancer diagnosis by applying the skills he learned through martial arts. There's also a spiritual message that the author called on, particularly when alone on the cancer ward, which helped him to cope. It is most useful for people dealing with the diagnosis and treatment of maxillo-facial cancer, maxillectomy and living with an obturator (prosthesis worn in the mouth following oral surgery).

I could not see any factual inaccuracies, only editorial ones. It is easy to understand; technical words are explained, and the author includes a chapter on general oral hygiene following the fitting of an obturator. The cover is dark but there's a “yin and yang” symbol, along with the author's powerful message that a “Fighting Spirit” helped him to deal with his diagnosis and gruelling treatment.

Anyone in the world of writing and publishing will probably be aware of the publishers Austin Macauley Publishers Ltd. It isn't particularly well edited (not the fault of the author) and the writing is flabby, and a step removed. This creates distance, a feeling we that don't really get to know the author very well, despite it being his experience. It also feels that the book sometimes loses its way; some chapters could be removed to sharpen up the story. The order could be a little better; chapters that feature in the middle of the book read as though they should be in the conclusion. However, it could be very helpful for anyone with the sinus cancer that Goldmeier is diagnosed with, at the very young age of 26 despite never having been a smoker. “Fighting Spirit” refers to the skills and control learned in martial arts to deal with the diagnosis, treatment, and its aftermath. The book also looks at the importance of spirituality for the author, particularly referring to The Old Testament and Tolkien and how Goldmeier came to find real meaning in these works.

#### **Lymphoma survivor (36-45) (January 2017)**



I really wanted to enjoy this book but, unfortunately, I didn't, and I do not see a natural audience for it. The cover suggests that it is a motivational style of book and I think that is what the author attempted to write; sadly, I do not feel he succeeded.

There appears to be no flow, no pattern to the story that Nicolas is trying to tell about his journey and his fight against his cancer. It feels like a series of anecdotes pulled together in no order with, often clumsy, attempts to weave in references to martial arts, boxers, or armies at war, sometimes all three in the same chapter.

What frustrated me more than anything is that Nicolas clearly has an incredible story to tell – of constant challenges, of one setback after another and his inbuilt strength and determination to face each of those challenges head on. Unfortunately, his story is lost amongst the mishmash of fighting-related references and his attempt to get the word “fight” or “fighting” in to as many paragraphs as possible.

This book could be extremely powerful and motivational if Nicolas had concentrated on the story of his cancer and how his faith and martial arts training had supported him through it. I think that was his intention, but he appears to have concentrated on making the book fit the title. By the end, I was quite disheartened because I felt Nicolas had missed an opportunity to deliver the inspiring book that he appears to have set out to produce. I am sorry to say that I cannot think of an audience that I would be happy to recommend it to.

#### **Evictor of HPV soft pallet and throat cancer (46-55) (February 2018)**



# 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).**