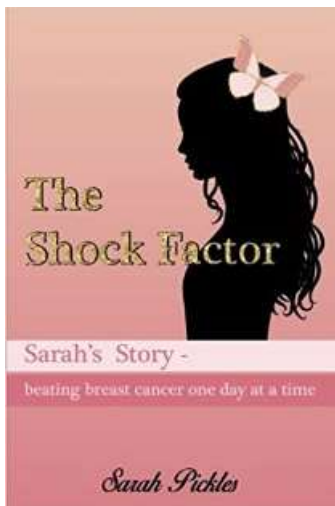


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**The shock factor. Sarah's story –
beating breast cancer one day at a
time (2016)**

Pickles SE.

Self-published using CreateSpace Independent
Publishing Platform, 2016.

154pp.

ISBN 9781511954464

Average star rating 4.0 (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.



This is a very down-to-earth and easy read. It is useful for anyone with an interest in breast cancer, particularly if just diagnosed or living with breast cancer, or carers, family, and friends. It is easy to understand, and technical words are explained throughout the text. It is appealing to look at, and the general layout is good.

There many useful tips, insights into what to expect, and helpful coping mechanisms. When I finished, I wanted to know how Sarah is now, and if she had her baby.

**Mental health nurse who has had recent breast cancer investigations (46-55)
(May 2018)**

I love everything about this book and wish I had read it when diagnosed. It is a useful reference book with lots of tips. The content is presented in an easy to read layout. It is very well written from a personal perspective, but with excellent editing and it is easy to comprehend. I really like the extremely useful tips – the sort of tips that only someone who has had breast cancer knows and the sort that really help.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (January 2018)



Sarah is a young woman of 32 diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer. Her book is most useful for someone with breast cancer, but a heart-warming story that could also be useful for relatives and friends. Five pages towards the end, “Dave's story”, give a moving account of Sarah's partner's journey through her breast cancer.

Sarah talks about each stage of her journey from diagnosis, to surgery and treatment, but she dedicates whole chapters to losing her hair and how she deals with that, and ‘boobs’ and the decision to have reconstruction. The many women whose self-esteem and femininity are affected by these things will be able to relate to her story. In addition, Sarah gives advice on diet, exercise and holistic therapies, useful for anyone going through surgery and treatment for breast cancer. Useful “Top Tips” and practical advice, for example, top wig shopping tips, a list of hospital essentials, and a list of benefits gained from exercising regularly, break up the text.

It is easy to understand, Sarah speaks in everyday language. The tone is very warm. Sarah invites the reader in on her journey with the aim to inform and inspire. She is very positive. The book really talks to readers, particularly younger breast cancer patients, and the cover and illustrations reflect this. The quality of paper is good. The main typeface is clear, but I did find the typeface used in extracts from her diary less clear. I like that she uses speech bubbles throughout for “Top Tips”.

Sarah is very positive and determined to beat cancer. She is also honest about her feelings of fear and worry and talks openly about this. It was great to read the concluding chapter, “Planning Ahead”, and to learn how the process of IVF works for a young woman faced with a breast cancer diagnosis. There is quite a lot of emphasis on using make-up and wearing high heels to make yourself feel good. This was important for Sarah and worked for her. Even if she felt awful inside, making herself look beautiful on the outside helped her through the tough times and kept her going. It's not that I disliked reading about this, but I couldn't relate to it. However, it's a personal choice and anything that helps is good.

An honest, warm account of a young woman going through breast cancer. I recommend it to younger women with a breast cancer diagnosis, particularly if they also have triple-negative breast cancer or a family history of breast cancer.

Breast cancer patient (46-55) (June 2019)

I found myself liking Sarah very much and her story has a nice ending (I believe she has now had her baby). Some of the tips make for very interesting reading and the information about treatments is useful.

The font size makes for an easy read and the book is a good size for reading in bed, but I don't like how the diary is interrupted by statistics; they are of course useful but make the read disjointed. The title gives little away, and the cover would be more appealing without the gold font. The tone is very honest, and I see where the author is trying to make it light-hearted, but this may not appeal to someone who is terrified! I'm writing my own book and learned a lot of what not to do, to avoid readers feeling that the story is digressing.

Living with breast cancer (56-65) (May 2018)

Sarah Pickles is 32, married, with a four-year-old daughter and a successful career, when she is diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer. Her book tracks her journey chronologically from diagnosis to completion of successful treatment. She does set aside certain topics (such as diet, looking good-feeling great) into themed chapters but this helps to clarify these issues and bring them into sharp focus.

The book is a paperback with a stiff shiny cover and good quality paper. The layout is very good – separate icons signify various tips, quotations or lists. Sarah's writing style is informal, friendly and engaging. Despite the severity of her condition and her initial despair on being diagnosed, she acknowledges the value of her wonderful husband and beautiful daughter, and friends, who help her in many ways, practically

and psychologically, throughout treatment. She has chemotherapy and surgery. Her chemotherapy treatment has a devastating effect on her, and she is obliged to spend a couple of days in bed, feeling very ill, after each session. Nevertheless, she strives to plan meals, keep up her networking with colleagues, and find special times with her husband, who takes over both parental roles when she is feeling at her worst.

Sarah does not say exactly what her profession is, but it is clearly related to the beauty industry. She mentions being a trainer in this industry, refers to her beauty room, and has some expertise as a nail technician. To her credit, she does not shy away from meeting her colleagues when undergoing treatment. Nor does she grumble about the consequences of losing her hair, or nail-related issues. The hair loss gives her the positive opportunity to buy and experiment with a human hair wig, styling and dyeing it. She does not allow her standards to slip, and there is a particularly engaging description of trying to glue on false eyelashes as she sits in her car in a car park, just prior to a work-related meeting.

Sarah shares her story in detail, but mainly not in a sense of offloading her own needs. She writes about her experiences and does not attempt to generalise about other forms of cancer, or others' experiences of cancer. She translates her story into helpful and inspiring words for others in a similar situation. I like that she is very authentic. She does not hide her feelings of embarrassment or perceived inadequacy. She distils her experiences into lists of tips that can help others in a similar situation. She strives to maintain a sense of humour and keeps a sense of light-heartedness, especially in her tip to drink champagne, meaning, I think, that it is important to keep a sense of fun in life no matter what you go through.

While I love the fact that the author is very generous with her tips, I think that people should seek their own individually created programs, for example for exercising upper arms, from a professional, that meet their specific needs. I could not really understand the thinking behind the "boob voyage party", a party Sarah held to celebrate her boobs, but that did not really matter. Altogether, this is a very easy and friendly read with a positive message.

Former health professional, friend, carer (56-65) (November 2017)

This is a practical guide for someone facing breast cancer treatment. The author explains her feelings and experiences of diagnosis, treatment, and day-to-day family life throughout treatment. She includes diary entries alongside 'top tips' on a range of topics, including exercise and how to keep positive. It is a good point of reference for breast cancer patients and includes chapters on aspects of the author's experiences, such as preparing for her operation, hair loss, and how to look and feel great. It has a very positive feel to it, without ignoring the realities of diagnosis and treatment.

The book is a mix of reference guide and personal experience and the author sets everything out in a logical, clear, and easy to follow style. It is easy to dip in and out and find relevant parts, but it can also be read from start to finish as an account of the author's time from pre-diagnosis to a year after treatment has finished. Just flicking through you can see that it includes different styles, such as diary entries, factual accounts, top tips, and a few pictures, so it appears accessible, which it is. I

found it easy to understand – the author writes as if she is talking to friends. Many of the factual parts are written in bullet points or easy to read chunks, so it is easy to follow and refer to them. She is writing from her perspective and understands her audience. There is very little technical or medical jargon as she is writing for people like herself who have found themselves thrown into a world they previously knew very little or nothing about. However, not having had the same type of cancer as the author, it is difficult to know if there are any inaccuracies.

The overall realistic but positive tone makes it easier to read than some other books about cancer. The chapters are very clear and break the book up into meaningful parts; this means that you don't have to read the whole book to get information or support from it. It is very specific to breast cancer, as the subtitle suggests. I feel others experiencing breast cancer will find this provides practical and emotional support. It may help readers to express their feelings and realise that others feel like them. It demonstrates that a breast cancer diagnosis is a shocking and devastating event but that it can be tackled and can have a positive outcome.

Living with incurable NET Cancer (36-45) (September 2017)



Although a useful book for all aspects of breast cancer, I feel that it is perhaps more suited to younger women in their twenties. It's very chatty and helpful. It is easy to understand but the text varies in style – typed narrative, 'handwritten' diary extracts and 'top tips' in speech bubbles – which makes it quite difficult to read through as a straightforward book.

I found the story of the author's cancer, dare I say, very similar to other breast cancer stories. Obviously, for the author, it is 'hers' and therefore valuable to write about. What makes it slightly different, is that it has a personal feel and quality; it is chatty and informative, almost as though the author is sitting having a coffee with you. I am ambivalent about it. It perhaps wasn't for me, but for other, younger readers, yes.

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

This is a very down-to-earth and frankly honest account of one woman's experience of triple-negative breast cancer. It could be useful for anyone newly diagnosed. There is a page of useful websites at the end.

The narrative is written in chronological order but there is a frequent and annoying tendency to say '...but I will come back to that later on'. which interrupts the flow. The book is simply written in an open and friendly style. Sadly, it is let down by poor or non-existent proof reading. At times words are omitted or misspelled, which changes the sense of the writing or confuses the issue. At first sight I thought I would find the mishmash of different fonts an irritant and very distracting but as I progressed through the book stopped noticing this and it was not a problem. It is physically appealing to look at, though I do dislike the use of 'breast cancer pink' on the cover!

I believe that this is another self-published book, printed by CreateSpace and with these type of books, (which seem to be proliferating), I have concerns about adequate fact checking. On page 26 the writer says, 'Chemotherapy is the only option to treat triple negative breast cancer'. This is misleading and just not true! I was diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer and my treatment consisted of a wide local excision, sentinel node clearance, and radiotherapy. I did not have chemotherapy and so far, there has not been any recurrence of cancer and my status has been 'no evidence of disease' for the last 12 years.

There are many similar books around these days detailing the bravery and resilience involved in dealing with cancer. I was hoping that the writer would focus more on the less well documented 'triple-negative' status of her breast cancer. I feel that this was a sadly missed opportunity.

Breast cancer patient (66-75) (December 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.

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, June 2019

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