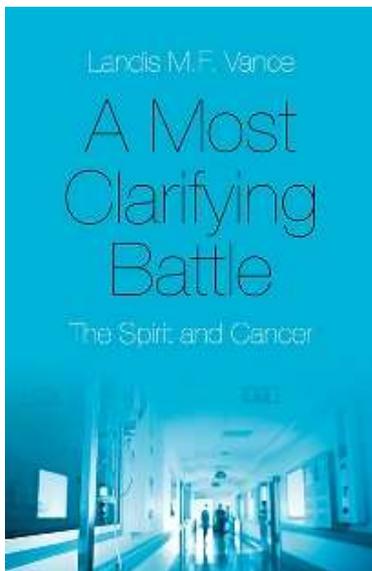


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BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



A most clarifying battle: the spirit and cancer (2017)

Vance LMF.

Winchester: O-Books, 2017.

152pp.

ISBN 9781785355455.

£9.99.

Average star rating 3.8 (out of 5)

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This brilliantly written book contains thoughts, knowledge and information that anyone with a connection with cancer will find invaluable. The author describes her journey as her condition progresses and deteriorates. I was very much interested in how she was coping, her strategies, the alternative treatments she tried and how her faith followed throughout her story.

I found it easy to understand although the philosophical approach may not be for everyone. An excellent glossary at the end explains all the technical/medical terms. I like this book and it would be one I would want to pick up and read. The front cover is appealing and matches the content and the title is a perfect fit. It is very easy to read, with a good typeface and font size. I found the illustrations a little more difficult, but they did not distract from the reading and understanding. I did find it difficult to cope with some of the American comments and practices – they are not necessarily the same as would be experienced in this country.

The author shows a strength of character that has allowed her to write a deep and meaningful text. I identified so much with her case that I was able to understand and generally found the text very relevant. For me, one of the main strengths of the book is explained on page 22, “Just as physical pain can cause psychological pain, social, psychological, and spiritual pain can heighten the physical perception of pain”. As a person of faith, I felt the book mirrored many of the thoughts, conversations, hopes and dreams that my husband and I had experienced. The greatest is the hope that the author displayed; throughout she appeared happy and positive. She believed in herself and this led to an acceptance that I found spiritually gratifying.

This is a sound account and logically covers the many issues faced by someone with cancer and those around them. It is most useful for understanding the emotions involved. I was most heartened to read how faith and spirituality can give underpinning strength. In cases where death is inevitable the book gives a journey which is a brave search for a happy death. “Loving Oneself”.

Carer – oesophageal cancer (66-75) (June 2019)

This is a well-written and well-researched book covering illness and spirituality and how you can use your faith to help and guide you. It will be most suitable for anyone who has cancer or is living with or caring for someone with any cancer at any stage.

The author handles the topic in good order, from the early to the later stages of cancer. The book has main headings and subheadings and a glossary explaining some of the more difficult terminology. It has quotes from other books should you wish to do further research and lists other spiritual books and resources that may help. I like the layout, size, and typeface. There are no photos, just little sketches.

I like the author's journal entries and how she describes her experience of dealing with cancer. It is pleasant and easy to read. It can be a bit complicated, so you do need the glossary, but it is very interesting.

A relative of someone who has had cancer (36-45) (January 2018)



This is a true account of living with cancer, especially metastatic cancer. It explains the tests, treatment and side effects very well; even though everyone's experience of cancer is different, tests and treatment are similar for everyone. The author explains everything in terms that we can all understand. The glossary is very useful.

When I started to read it, I thought that it was all about spiritual beliefs. However, the author is not preaching to the reader, but showing that being spiritual can help with some aspects of metastatic cancer. She was very honest, and I could relate to a lot of what she went through – I felt I was sharing her journey with her.

In the first part, the author explains the concerns of having a chronic illness and the challenges that people face in daily life. Spiritual wellbeing plays an important part in chronic illness and the author has researched the topic intensively but although having a positive attitude has helped me, I don't believe everyone will benefit. The second part relates to the author's experiences of metastatic cancer. I have much admiration for her as she was so honest and sincere. As stated previously, I can relate to what she went through, not just the illness but with what it is like living with it day to day, sometimes losing friends and family because they do not really understand what we are going through and the pain we are sometimes in every day.

This book has everything you need when you have a diagnosis of secondary cancer. It is factual and informative. I like the fact that the author explained everything that she went, from tests to treatment. I especially love that she did not sugar coat things or brush things under the carpet. She described the physical and emotional aspects of living with her illness. Her accounts are upsetting at times, but I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and recommend it to anyone with metastatic cancer. The author was inspirational and, even though she died from her illness, showed that you can live life to the full and enjoy time spent with friends and loved ones.

Living with secondary breast cancer in the liver (46-55) (January 2018)



This is an interesting balance of resource and journal entries; the first half feels more academic, the second, more personal. Someone looking for that combination would like it for that balance. It is easy enough to understand but I do not feel qualified to comment on its accuracy due to some of the more clinical references.

It will appeal to a certain person – someone who is looking for information combined with lived experience. I do like the fact that there is an academic element, but I feel that this would have worked better as two separate books.

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

I was disappointed with this book as I had great hopes when I read the preface and first part. The author describes chronic illness well: the loss; the lack of reliability and consistency; and the need for normalcy. “Hurrah”, I thought, “At last, someone who understands”. But then it becomes too vague and earnest as Landis talks about spirituality, suffering, and how her illness made her realise that out of trauma comes a chance for positive life changes. I can’t reconcile myself to this, but maybe I haven’t yet reached that stage. Others may find it useful for coping with the inevitability of death, but also any part of living with a chronic disease.

The language is user friendly although the journal entries are easier to understand than the research into illness and suffering, which I found convoluted and difficult to follow. The illustrations are weirdly disturbing.

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (February 2018)

I am not sure of the target readership for this book. The blurb informs potential readers that the author was “claimed” by cancer” so it is not a book of surviving and thriving. The author considers that it is for anyone and will help those with cancer. It does not try to give tips on managing treatment. Instead, it aims to help people to strengthen their spiritual coping ability and to enhance their quality of life. I found it a difficult read, to be frank, somewhat sad and depressing. Others may not agree.

It is described as a “scholarly review and memoir” and divided into three main parts: Research into illness (not necessarily cancer); My personal experiences of illness; and Turning the corner. The first part makes for an interesting, but dispiriting read. The author explores the subject of illness, suffering, and spirituality. She quotes various books and articles written by those who have suffered through illness and pain and been misunderstood by others. At times, this is an excruciating read, but would be interesting to those who wish to explore this subject. Perhaps health professionals reading this may feel humbled, perhaps not. This is the part of the book that I would not recommend to people who are ill. My worry is that the well-articulated sufferings of others may suggest and promote a certain attitude in the reader too.

As for her treatment (part two), readers cannot help but admire the author's stoicism. She accepts her condition and examines ways of living as best she can, while acknowledging the terminal nature of her illness. She includes journal entries, in which she describes her options and her decisions in a very logical way, while being mindful of her emotions and spirituality at all times. In this section, the reader is drawn into her mindset, and it is impossible not to like this woman, with her pragmatism and gratitude for life.

The final part of the book is an acknowledgement of her imminent death, and her thoughts. These are not too distressing; in fact, she writes that she has "rediscovered silliness and great guffaws of laughter" (perhaps a lesson to us all). She also observes, "I shall miss this world", as death approaches.

It is very well researched and written in a warm and engaging way. Any necessary jargon is explained. I got to like the engaging style of the author. She had great compassion, empathy, and the ability to look beyond her own concerns to that of a broader picture. However, although I liked the author immensely, especially towards the end of the book, I did find this a difficult read.

Friend, Former carer, Former health professional (56-65) (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.

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

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