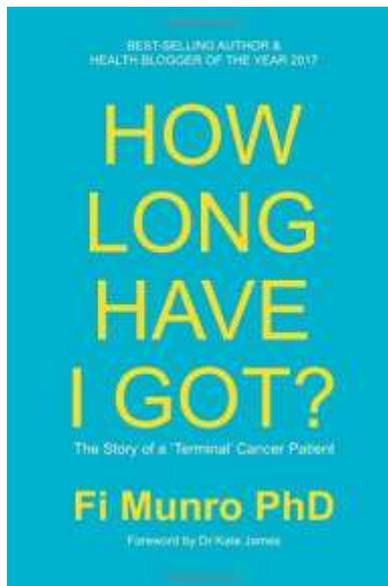


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# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



## **How long have I got? The story of a 'terminal' cancer patient (2019)**

Munro F.

Independently published, 2019.

344pp.

ISBN 9781790572915.

**Average star rating 4.8 (out of 5)**

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This wonderfully uplifting book reminds you how precious every moment in life is. In 2016, Fi was diagnosed with stage 4b ovarian cancer and had multiple organs removed, after being told her cancer was terminal. She has never asked how long she has left to live; as she says, we're all effectively terminal and will all die one day. She also doesn't want to be defined by someone's guess of how long she has left. She loves her life and credits cancer with awakening her to the beauty of living that we often forget when 'life' gets in the way of truly being alive.

Although Fi was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, it has spread, so her book will be useful for many cancer patients (or warriors, as Fi calls us!), particularly if you have to deal with a radical hysterectomy or stoma. It will also be helpful to partners (Fi talks about what a huge support her husband is), carers and health professionals. One of Fi's nurses read her book and says it helped her understand her patients more. Fi urges professionals to see us as people, not just the disease – two surgeons talked over her during one procedure – so it might help health professionals understand that we're more than just a disease.

It shows the gritty side of cancer: the days when you feel so terrible and want to die, mixed with fear of dying and dealing with losing your hair and coping with operations and scars. Fi shows that you can get through it, she invites you to see life in a more positive, different way, even with a terminal diagnosis, and offers suggestions as to how to live more positively and get through the bad days. In addition to being about Fi's experience, it's also a handbook, offering much advice, such as recipes for making your own shampoo, shower gel and household cleaners, if you want to eliminate chemicals from daily life. Fi also debates the theories around whether to eat sugar and what vitamins might be helpful when used in conjunction with your consultant's advice. There is also practical help: what to take to hospital if you're about to be admitted; find your own spiritual path through cancer and awaken your own healing power; and who to avoid as a cancer warrior (those who just want to talk to you to pick up the latest gossip and those who pretend they're your friend and then ignore you). Plus, it has chapters for friends of cancer warriors on topics such as what to bring if you're a visitor and what to talk about/not talk about.

It's quite a long book (305 pages), which can be daunting, but it's so interesting and engaging that it draws you in and was hard to put down in the end. Fi has been through so much and yet she's so optimistic and that love of life and happiness is present all the way through the book. It's also very easy to understand. Fi talks to you

as though you're a friend. She goes through her diagnosis and treatment in order, right the way through to where she is today, and any technical terminology is fully explained. There are also recommended books and websites at the back of the book, and links to Fi's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages. The only thing I noticed is that Fi mentions that, "Cancer is not an external source; it is created by our bodies". I'm not medically qualified but I understand that some cancers – cervical and certain lymphomas, such as the cancer I was diagnosed with – can be caused by a virus.

Fi doesn't shy away from the dark side of cancer when you're in so much pain or depression that you don't know if you want to carry on but shows you how to get through those days and find the 'good' and gratitude even in the worst times. She encourages you to pursue your dreams, regardless of how long you may have left. She even started doing random acts of kindness; leaving teal envelopes with money to random strangers to encourage them to discover more about ovarian cancer and use the money to pursue their dreams. The money she used had been raised for her and her husband to have a holiday to recover from all she's been through.

Fi discusses the good, the bad and the ugly of ovarian cancer and indeed other types in detail. It's a great 'How to...' book. Despite her harrowing experience, she deals with everything optimistically, enthusiastically and with dignity, inviting the reader to approach their experience in the same way. It's such a happy and uplifting (but real) book. I recommend it to women with ovarian cancer and to those with other cancers – Fi had to have 11 organs removed, including her large bowel. She is an incredible woman. She never gives up, despite the hell she has been through. It's inspirational.

### **Survivor of Grade 4b Burkitt Lymphoma (46-55) (September 2019)**

This book will appeal to many people: health professionals; those living with ovarian cancer; women in general; and men. Anyone living with, or caring for someone with, ovarian cancer will have much to learn from Fi's very personal account, from how she interacts with her husband, family and friends and what she needs to communicate during this time, to her discussions with her oncologist and what she feels is best in terms of treatment. The options are well explained. It is also valuable for women in general and even for men. The symptoms of ovarian cancer, I learned, are often mistaken for other things like cramps, or IBS and ignored. Fi trusted her gut and went to be tested and therefore this book is important to raise awareness of the symptoms.

The book is split into five main parts, breaking up Fi's journey in a clear and logical way. This gives the reader an in-depth view and experience of her journey with a very personal account. I found it easy to read without much technical jargon or many complicated terms. The language works well for the intended audience and for a wider group of people that could learn from her experiences and journey. Fi uses a great balance of informative style and personal viewpoints to discuss her journey.

The book is printed on good quality paper and the design stands out – the teal cover brings further meaning to recognising ovarian cancer symptoms with the TEAL acronym. The font size is easy to read and the use of spacing between paragraphs makes the page more appealing than long sections of text.

It is informative, personal, tear-jerking, yet, at times, humorous. It is a candid view of what it means to live with ovarian cancer but also how easy it is to miss or ignore symptoms before things become more serious. It is one of the most inspirational books I have read. Fi, faced with a dire diagnosis, provides an enlightened and motivational approach to how we should all live like we are dying. Her stark statement that she was dead for 30 years before her diagnosis, how it completely changed her life to re-evaluate her measures of success, is awe inspiring. So, whether you have ovarian cancer, another cancer, are caring for someone with cancer, are a health professional or just someone interested in reading an account of how we should live life to the fullest, this book is for you.

### **I lost my father to abdominal cancer (36-45) (July 2019)**

This book is suitable for someone with ovarian cancer, their partner, family and friends, and health professionals. Fi describes her journey from when symptoms started to become apparent to where she is now. It describes the good and bad aspects of medical professionals and her journey. It looks plain but the fact that it is about someone's journey with the same cancer appealed. It is easy to understand.

Fi explains her journey with passion and I got a lot of what she went through. I like her reactions to diagnosis and how she handled family and friends; they were very similar to mine, and I had felt that some of my reactions were wrong or mad. I don't agree with some of her decisions but Fi is clear that each of our decisions is our own.

A brilliant, must-read book for someone going through ovarian cancer. It is a book that I know I will go back to, especially prior to and after any change in my condition, side-effects and treatment. This is the first of this type of book I have read; I definitely recommend it to anyone with ovarian cancer, especially at the start of the journey.

### **Ovarian cancer patient (46-55) (April 2019)**



Few books are directed at people with ovarian cancer. Given that it has its own quirks and issues, this book is a useful way of identifying with someone else with the condition. I hesitate to recommend it for someone newly diagnosed. Fi Munro has had a particularly difficult time; in this she is not unique, but her experiences are not those of everyone so the book is best introduced after someone has been through some treatment and has some idea of their own experience of ovarian cancer.

It is the second book by Fi. Actually, it's a fleshed-out version of her [first book](#) and the better for it. Aspects in the original book seemed a little unfinished and the end included a lot of repetitive waffle. This version seems to have filled in the gaps and managed to get more clearly to the point of what she is trying to say. However, it is still unfinished, and it feels like we are on a journey with the author as her perception of life and cancer changes with each version. I've no doubt that if she wrote it again in 12 months' time that it would change again with some more new perceptions.

I like the look of the book. The colour is appropriate; teal is the 'colour' associated with ovarian cancer, although it is surprising how many people don't associate this colour with ovarian cancer even if they are diagnosed themselves. It is easy to understand but the tone is patronising at times. The author refers throughout to her aim to teach others how to reach a certain point in their diagnosis. The assumptions in this approach are a little annoying, for example: that no one else has realised some of these lessons themselves; that the author has been a trailblazer and is here to teach everyone else. It takes away from the general relatability of the book. If she had stuck to saying how she had learnt things rather than assuming that she has things to teach it would have been a better book; we could relate on an equal footing rather than have a kind of guru-student relationship.

It is mostly relatable. Even if you haven't experienced everything the author has, most people with ovarian cancer will have experienced parts of her story. Given the nature of ovarian cancer, it is very important to have points of reference like this, so you know that you are not alone, that it is ok to ask lots of questions and go to the doctors if you are worried, or occasionally feel badly done to.

The author has been praised previously for her positivity during her difficult cancer journey and this is reflected in the book, which is bursting with positivity. People newly diagnosed may find her story difficult to read in places as it highlights many of the horrors of an ovarian cancer diagnosis. Therefore, I suggest it is best for someone who has been diagnosed and been through some treatment initially and has their own experience of ovarian cancer to draw on.

Where I found the book less relatable is in the tone set by the author. Throughout the book she takes the stance of a teacher writing to her students rather than as a fellow person living with ovarian cancer. I found this stance a little patronising as it made a huge assumption that everyone reading the book was somehow less informed and that they all had the same lessons to learn from the author. Everyone is on their own journey and has a different life experience before and after diagnosis. People are not necessarily reading the book to be told something, but rather to be able to relate to someone at the same level. This is not how the author chose to treat readers. Unfortunately, because it is repeated throughout the book it does detract from the overall relatability of the book and as a result I couldn't give it five stars.

That said, it is an excellent book for anyone affected by ovarian cancer. There are very few books on ovarian cancer and not all parts of the UK have support groups for ovarian cancer and it can be difficult to find others we can relate to. This book is relatable and covers many of the issues that are relevant to ovarian cancer that are not well known unless you are directly affected. It lets you know that you are not alone. The positivity of the author shines through and it is a great book to read to get an idea of what it is like to live with ovarian cancer. Even if a book on living with ovarian cancer weren't such a rare thing I would still strongly recommend this to anyone living with ovarian or abdominal cancer or any incurable disease.

**Living with ovarian cancer (36-45) (May 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.

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

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