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BOOK REVIEWS

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Gift of time (2013)

Maclean R.

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This book, in diary form, recounts the last five months of the life of Joan, a well-loved woman of 80 with advanced cancer with metastases in her liver and brain. Living alone, Joan suddenly lost the use of one leg, was in hospital over Christmas and came home to the house of her eldest son Rory and his wife Katrin, a house in the same village as her own. She lived five months, longer than expected by her oncologist, and remained hopeful for much of this time but Rory and Katrin found themselves caught up in caring for longer than expected. The feelings, both positive and negative, of all three, but mostly those of Rory and Katrin, are openly discussed.

The diary includes entries by Rory, the son, Katrin, the daughter-in-law, and Marlie the youngest child of three, with entries by Joan herself. The entries reveal the facts bit by bit but are well shaped into an engaging account – it is quite hard to put down. The main author, Rory Maclean, is a published travel writer. The language is easy to understand, and the few technical words are explained at once. It is a standard-sized paperback of just over 200 pages with an attractive cover – there are no illustrations inside. The print is clear, and the layout is helpful – each diary entry is marked by date and author and the different authors' tones are distinctive.

I did not notice any errors, although an over-imaginative reader might be concerned by the sentence (p. 67) about a Horizon programme that suggested that cancer might be a contagious virus; some cancers are the result of changes caused by a virus but are not themselves contagious.

It might be very helpful to be able to mull over this story about one family. Most people seem unwilling to discuss end of life – all are different – but this is a well-written, open account about one person and those close to her. It might be a bit bleak for someone with advanced cancer (though the story is possibly interesting to consider) but it will be useful for partners or carers, particularly those able to commit enough time to caring. It is also useful for relatives or friends; the increased psychological 'distance' makes the account less worrying.

Breast cancer patient in remission (Over 75) (December 2013)

This is really interesting to read and easy to understand. The author deals with the topic in a sensitive way. I definitely recommend it; it's well worth the stars.

Endometrial cancer patient (46-55) (November 2013)

This is useful for understanding the day-to-day reality of caring for someone with cancer. However, it is a very emotional book and those at certain stages of their own journey may not appreciate it. Certainly, professionals will find it very useful in understanding the experience of patients and their families.

I like the honesty of the writing and the three viewpoints and voices speaking about their experiences. The author is a professional writer, and as such has a practised way of presenting the story to flow well. It is very easy to understand, with few, if any, medical terms. The cover is lovely, and the text layout is good.

I will probably recommend it. It will depend on the individual and their circumstances, but I think most people would, if not enjoy, certainly appreciate this book. It did make re-reflect on my own losses and shed a few tears.

Former cervical cancer patient (56-65) (November 2013)

Gift of time documents the last months of the author's mother from the viewpoints of the author himself, his wife and his mother. It would be beneficial to anyone who is terminally ill, or their loved ones and I consider it an excellent read for people currently living with cancer as well as family, friends and carers.

It combines in chronological order the diaries of Rory, his wife and his mother. The accounts of events are honest and genuine; all three document negative and positive feelings, thereby maintaining a true reflection of their lives, emotions and feelings and providing the reader with insight into all three perspectives of the situation. The book will help those interested in family dynamics when someone is terminally ill.

It is easy to read, understand and follow. The diary entries flow well and the reader is given an honest, genuine account of day-to-day life (possibly because Rory is a writer). The cover is intriguing and once you start reading, it is difficult to put it down. I base this on the honesty of the three individual's accounts. It may perhaps have been too difficult to incorporate entries from the brother and sister, who lived in Canada and London respectively, but it would have been interesting to hear how they dealt with their mother's illness. Although perhaps this would be another book.

From my experience as someone living with cancer, the book provided an insight into the thoughts, emotions, and feelings of those around me. It has also helped me approach thoughts about the progression of my illness with more ease and less trepidation than I had previously experienced.

A very well written, honest account from three perspectives.

Living with Ewing's sarcoma (26-35) (November 2013)

This account of taking a terminally ill patient into your home for their end of life is touching and frightening – I don't think you could find a more optimistic or honest guide. It is an extraordinarily powerful book that just bursts with life and was destined to be written; it will inspire anyone close to a cancer patient to celebrate the small stuff. The experience is all about family; it is a beautiful tribute from a son to his amazing mother and a wonderful description of the feelings between a wife, her husband and his mother.

From the outside, it looks like a very personal memoir, but the inside is respectfully professional; an emotional experience for the reader, it is unemotionally, unpitifully and a times hilariously written using the diaries of the three authors. There is no jargon and it is an easy read for anyone who can handle the topic. As far as possible, a hideous subject is dealt with in a vaguely humorous way – the end of life is given such consideration and dignity that surely it is more than most would aspire to. To see Joan enjoy the tennis, a glass of wine, the flowers, to the end, will be a great comfort for anyone caring for elderly dependants.

I really like the ordinariness of the feelings – the disappointment in the devastating progress of the cancer, the enormous efforts made by the family to continue to stimulate, exercise and include a diminishing patient. The medical services are portrayed as highly active, respected and involved, a bit of a mixed bag. It was sometimes disappointing when they seemed to intrude and their mistaking a cancelled bath seat for the patient's death was unforgivable. I wish the authors had had the idea to write more things on happier terms, before cancer came into their lives. I like the intelligence and insight that comes from all three authors; there are no winners or losers, no victims, just a family wanting to do their best to love each other to the end. I particularly like the honesty of the authors – the mother not wanting to be a burden, the family feeling inadequate.

Cancer aside, this is a lovely book about relationships across generations and about getting the end of life right. It is a very personal account of life (physical and spiritual), death, hope, bereavement, parenting and the future. It could be a text for anyone supporting the elderly, but it is also a beautifully written story about caring enough to do that little bit more. Anyone who has loved someone who is terminally ill would gain comfort from this account. It goes beyond dignity to total selflessness – what a privilege to share!

Treated for breast cancer in 2005 (46-55) (October 2013)

This book is very well written, well laid out and very easy to understand. It is written with great honesty and tenderness but does not pull any punches about the devastating effect that a diagnosis of cancer has on all the family. Although it is at times painful to read, it is at the same time uplifting and inspiring, and I would recommend it to anyone who has been affected in any way by cancer.

Living with throat cancer (66-75) (October 2013)

This honest, moving and heartfelt book has taught me so much in so many ways. It has really made me think and what I have read will stay with me. I have never read anything as moving. I would recommend it to anyone, but as it covers the end of life, it could be particularly useful for someone who has cared for, or is caring for, a terminal patient. It provides facts and offers emotional support. It gives a touching insight into a taboo subject, which makes it a very worthwhile and moving read.

It flows beautifully. Everything is explained well and would be easily understood by anyone. The cover depicts the subject perfectly and the natural setting reflects the lives and loves of the three main characters. The title almost tells you what to expect, which is good. The sub text is perfect as is the quote at the top of the cover. I love how the book is written from three angles. It gives a wonderful insight into a very difficult and highly emotional time for all three people involved. Therefore, it can be very helpful for anyone in each of these situations and really, the wider family.

A truly unforgettable book. I thank Rory, Katrin and Joan for touching me in such a profound way.

Carer of lymphoma/renal cancer patient (36-45) (October 2013)

This well-written book about one family's cancer journey manages to be both sad and uplifting. The patient, Joan, and her family carers are inspirational in their approach to the fate that befell them. Without melodrama, they tell a story of a journey of terminal illness and the toll it takes on patient and carers. It may be a hard read for someone with cancer or a carer, but it is very thought provoking and ultimately will allow reflection on one's own approach to dying.

The honest approach will help others understand that caring for someone who is dying is hard, however much you love them. My daughter died of a brain tumour a month after her sister's wedding, so this book was very poignant but reinforced my view that we must use the 'gift of time' wisely.

Carer of brain tumour patient (46-55) (October 2013)

In this book, one person's story is used clearly and succinctly to explore the physical, emotional and spiritual effects on all involved when a loved one is living through their last weeks. The issues raised need talking about whilst people are well. We need to get better at talking about death, only then will we be better prepared to meet it.

The book is primarily about one family's way of coming to terms with, and dealing with, terminal illness and the inevitable loss of a much-loved relative. The strength of the book is in communicating with those left behind, as I have been 'left behind'. It removes the isolation of having had this powerful experience and struggled through it as best you can. There is much in the book where I recognised 'I did that, I thought that, that's how I felt'. It would therefore perhaps be most useful to those who have nursed at home and – importantly – those who want to understand what people go through when they do nurse at home.

It is a quick but fulfilling read, easy to follow and understand. I did struggle slightly with the style, which did not seem to be able to make its mind up if it was a diary or not. It follows a diary format, yet the entries are too reflective for a genuine diary (I kept a diary too). The layout, with person's name in bold immediately followed by text, is confusing – it is like the layout of a play. I like the front cover with its clear title superimposed on the hazy picture of a tree. The three people on the bench, looking at the same view, have not interlinked their arms. This reflects well the story line – the three characters face the same situation but from their own perspective.

Their love jumps off the page, yet they are rounded human beings who also get cross. This is so much more powerful than painting them as saints. Jean's humour is beautifully captured. It is uplifting to read of a family who pull together so strongly to give their much-loved mother a peaceful death at home. And yet it raises the problems this can create – the guilt of the person dying for causing pain to those they love, the stress on relationships, and that dreadful fear...How long can I keep this up? However, the message that a steely grip and positive attitude keep you alive longer are hard to swallow by those of us who have had the dice loaded against them.

This book is not about living or managing cancer, but explores the physical and emotional issues at the end of life. As such, it has the capacity to be very useful if targeted at the right audience. It would not be appropriate to direct everybody with cancer to it. It would not have helped me to prepare for what was to come, but it would have (and has) supported me in reflecting on my experience. It has a role to play in getting people to talk about death and as such, needs to reach a wide readership. In the context of the current agenda to support people to die at home, families need to be better prepared and this book would help.

Carer, now widowed, having nursed my husband at home with a terminal brain tumour (grade 4 glioblastoma) (56-65) (October 2013)

This would be a useful book for anyone, but especially relations/carers, to help them deal with and care for someone with terminal cancer. It has useful hints about day-to-day living, such as practical tips about feeding, care, and the help available. The story flows beautifully and there are no technical terms needing explanation. The typeface is fine and the tone very honest. I love the cover showing Rory, his wife Katrin and his mother Joan, also the quote 'What survives us all is love...'.

Although this book is obviously very poignant and sad, I love and admire the bravery, honesty and love shared between the three main people as well as the rest of the family and their support network. I was inspired by how they dealt with the day-to-day reality of living with a relation who is dying and how Joan deals with that herself, still on most occasions managing to keep positive and still finding joy in life. I felt sad when Joan passed way; at the same time, I was relieved that her suffering was over, and that the family could eventually move forward.

I love this book; it is beautifully written and a testimony to how close the Maclean family were and are and to the respect they have for each other.

Living with breast cancer (46-55) (October 2013)

This book focuses on caring for a person with cancer at home. There are some practical aspects but the most useful part deals with coming to terms with the illness, and eventually, the death, of a much-loved family member. It is not really a book for those who want facts, though there is some mention of the support available for people at home; it is more about the emotional effects of cancer and loss. Most of the text deals with the family unit and the thoughts, hopes, and fears of the three writers.

I read it on the day it arrived, finishing at 3:00 am, which says much! It reads like a novel even though it is a true account based on extracts from diaries the family kept at the time, edited some years later. It reads easily and immediately, as if you are chatting over a coffee. The narrator is a travel writer, and it shows. His mother and wife also have wonderful writing styles. This sets the book apart; the narrative drive never stumbles, and the writers come to feel like intimate friends. The written form, though, means that they are very honest about expressing their true feelings, for example, the son wanting his mother to die at times, as it is so painful to see her so changed. The three voices give a multi-layered take on events, enabling us to see the same thing (a hospital visit or Christmas lunch) from all sides. As well as detail about what it was like to nurse his mother in his own home, there are many enjoyable flashbacks to family life before the illness, and the family is warm and loving but real.

This is the best book I have read for several years! The family live in a village not far from where I used to live, and this gave me added interest, as the setting is familiar and therefore easy to imagine. They are loving, but not sentimental, and frank about some of their least welcome thoughts. I felt I was living with them; I really entered their world. The book also gave me hope that the son and daughter-in-law could come through the bereavement and make their own family and new memories. The last short chapter extends beyond the death of the mother, but I wanted more! I love everything about it apart from the title, which, although it is explained in the text, reminds me of Mills & Boon! This might have put me off buying it.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (October 2013)

This book provides a graphic insight into the practical and emotional implications of caring for a terminally ill relative at home. The content, whilst inevitably poignant, is very thought provoking and prompted me to consider how I will react when called upon to care for elderly parents. It takes the format of a diary, which mostly comprises a sequential description of events. There are occasional flashbacks but they in no way detract from the development of the tale. The brief, episodic format makes the book easy to read and digest. The writing style is admirable, especially given that three contributors are offering their differing perspectives. Wonderful descriptions and insightful observations are peppered throughout the book.

It is an admirable example of how to provide palliative care for loved ones. It's written with candour, which offers reassurance that even the most conscientious carers are only human! I will recommend it, with the caveat that it might best for people facing similar circumstances rather than simply anyone affected by. A moving book that will, I think, provide me with a model for my own actions when the time comes.

Recent survivor of testicular cancer (56-65) (September 2013)

I really enjoyed this book. It's very well written, easy to understand, with no complex language, and honest. Sometimes negative emotions appear but always wrapped in love; the fictional diaries I've read never quite capture that. It will be very well read!

Breast cancer patient (36-45) (August 2013)

I love this book. It is written well and deals with the topic in a dignified and real way. It describes issues that everyone dealing with a terminal illness must face, from caring for the patient to clearing out a house full of memories. It is a depiction of how one family managed to cope with what must be one of the worst situations.

The format, extracts from three diaries, lets you see how differently mother, son and daughter-in-law perceive the same incident, so it will be good for patients, carers, relatives and friends. It illustrates that everyone can get angry and frustrated – the patient with themselves and, illogically, with others, carers with the patient. It is very honest. Although the author loves and cares for his mother, he feels that he has reached the end of his patience. He and his wife were trying for a baby so had to deal with that disappointment as well. I like how they spoke about the mother running the taps while using the toilet – it is written with dignity for the patient and the carers.

It won't suit everyone, but I found it comforting to know that people go through a range of emotions and don't always act in a selfless manner. I wouldn't want to read about someone for whom nothing was too much trouble and who never needed any outside help to care for a dying relative – that's not at all real.

In remission from breast cancer (46-55) (July 2013)

This would be a good book for a carer or a cancer patient as it is a good guide of what to expect. It is easy to understand (there is no glossary) and the layout and typeface are clear and make you want to read it. Overall, a very good book.

Friend of breast cancer patient (56-65) (June 2013)



This lovely book is well worth a read. It will suit anyone as it is more general in its approach, but I am not sure it is specifically useful for people caring for someone with cancer. It focuses on the relationships of a family coping with a member who is near the end of life and how they deal with day-to-day issues. It deals beautifully and sensitively with family dynamics. It is written in a very emotional but heart-warming way and would encourage carers who may be struggling with the end of life situation they are facing but it is not particularly useful in a factual/informative way; many of the other books I have read are more specific. I would probably recommend it as a general read rather than a factual book.

Living with TNBC and BRCA 2 gene mutation (46-55) (January 2014)

This is a good book, which deals with a difficult topic in a sensitive, yet open manner. At first, I really didn't think I would enjoy it because the story of a close family that has little time left together is not going to be a happy one. Indeed, it's the reality of the situation and the honest way it is presented that did initially make it hard to pick up and carry on. Then I felt as if I had come to know the characters and I couldn't wait to continue reading. Perhaps this was also partly because I live in the same area as the characters and know the shops and other places they mention.

It is very easy to understand – it's not intended to be factual or technical – although the series of diary entries does give the book a rather staccato feel at times. However, this is also a good reflection of the way they're feeling and the rhythm of life at that time. Each entry is not too long and is easy to read, this makes the book easy to pick up and put down. Having entries from three people's perspectives does make it more interesting than a monologue. The cover is attractive, the font is clear, and the length is just right. The title does warn of the content somewhat.

It becomes increasingly easy to forget the main issue temporarily as life carries on normally in many ways for the family. Over time, questions such as opinions on life after death are raised, but never in a depressing way. There is some mention of how the stress of the situation affects one another and then there are conversations about trivial matters to avoid the real topic. There is always the unknown time limit hanging over the family; many people who have found themselves in the same boat will be able to identify with this situation. Life goes on for the family but then there is the reality of making funeral plans, clearing out papers etc, which is all dealt with.

There is no element of surprise about the story and this was never the intention. It is a very open, honest account of ever-changing emotions within a close-knit family while they face the same situation as thousands of other people. There is a great deal of hope at the end – the son describes his feelings and how they coped after the death of his mother and the now have a five-year-old son. I like the honesty of the author at such a difficult time, but probably won't recommend it; if you are going through cancer, the story of the downhill slope is probably not what you want to hear. It is not for the very sensitive or vulnerable.

Former cancer patient (ovarian and womb) (36-45) (November 2013)

This book is about facing death, so those who are undergoing treatment and their families must decide if it is something they want to read. It is written from the view of the patient, her son who becomes her main carer, and her daughter-in-law who is supporting both her mother-in-law and her husband who is facing losing his mother. Anyone could read it – after all death is a part of all our lives – however as a former carer I felt some connections with the families' experiences. It gives an insight into some of the practicalities of caring for a loved one and the impact on the family.

It begins with the prognosis that the cancer is no longer curable, and an estimation of the time left. It then looks at how this time was spent, from different perspectives. It describes the rollercoaster of caring for a loved one, when you know they are going to die. You can feel the son's heartache at watching his mother deteriorate and battle against the effects of cancer, knowing that they both need to let go. I like the different

perspectives on the same situation, the insight into the mother's experience of cancer and facing death and those who are about to lose the person they love and how they want and need to do the right things for her. It is candid in the descriptions of the emotional and physical impact on all involved.

The author is a professional writer, so the book is well written. As it is a personal account, it does not focus in detail on the cancer itself. The cover picture of three people sitting together on a bench in a park under a tree is, I feel, a reflective 'picture'. The title is thoughtful and will mean something different to each reader. The tone is one of sadness, but with a hint of hope.

Former carer (Rhabdomyosarcoma) (36-45) (November 2013)

This descriptive and informative book is very well written. The author shows great emotions and explains everything well. It looks very appealing and makes you want to read it. I really enjoyed it but think it is more for family or carers, to see how others have coped. Patients in the same position may be able to relate to it and it may help them in their final days of life. It made me feel how lucky I was to be here and be able to read this book and see how families deal with losing a family member.

Cancer patient in remission (46-55) (October 2013)

This book gives a personal insight into the lives of a family caring for someone with cancer who is nearing the end of her life. Whilst every journey and every family are different, it gives an idea of some of the challenges and issues that those in a similar situation may face. It highlights the difficulties and hurdles and is an honest account of how the family feel. It doesn't gloss over the difficulties and it is heart-warming to see the family come together at such a difficult time.

It is quite useful for emotional support for carers/relatives of a terminally ill patient. I might recommend it to a family in a similar situation to show that, although the situation is very difficult, it doesn't all have to be miserable. Remembering the good times is a positive thing.

Breast cancer patient (26-35) (October 2013)

This easy to read book is most useful for considering end-of-life options. It helps you to see things from different perspectives and does show that there can be happy days too. I like the book's truthfulness about how each person is affected.

I found it very emotional and thought provoking. When I nursed my mum, I did not know anything about the medication or alternatives available and I would have been better equipped to ask the relevant questions if I had read this book at the time. I would definitely recommend it, although it will depend on the person.

Living with Hodgkin lymphoma and formerly main carer for lung cancer patient (46-55) (October 2013)

I cared, with my mother, for my father. This book rang true. It clearly reflects some of my experiences and is an honest reflection of the patient's journey. It helps you appreciate what the patient may experience and made me understand that perhaps my father was suffering in silence, not wanting to be a burden. It also made me realise that terminal patients need time alone to deal with their affairs.

The reviews on the back make you want to read it and I did not want to put it down, I needed to know what happened. It is easy to relate to and easy to understand. There is no glossary (there is no technical jargon) but I would like to see some explanation of why the drugs were prescribed. The order is logical although there were occasions where I had to go back, recheck who was relating their part of the story, and remind myself how long Joan had been ill. It would have been nice to see a family photo.

I perceive terminal cancer to be a frustrating illness for the patient and the carer. I think it is important that any carer realises how emotionally and physically draining the process is for them and their patient. I would do it all again, but it is hard work. This book provides an insight of what to expect as a carer. I wouldn't say it is emotionally supportive, but it is definitely of general interest.

Papillary thyroid cancer survivor (36-45) (October 2013)

This book brings out the work involved in intensive caring but also the emotional rewards. There is no shortage of facts, if you want to look, but the raw emotional detail is not so readily available. This book helps fill that gap. It also shows that when the caring ends, the carers themselves are left with emotional needs. The meticulous detail in documenting the events of the closing months should also be of interest to health professionals. However, it is not a book for someone with cancer – we are all fighting without an acceptance of an early end (can't be responsible for reckless bus drivers) and reading a road of decline is not motivational. I believe there is a need to combat negativity – there is plenty of bad news around. That said, some will want to understand how the end will be – offer this book selectively to those.

It is a very personal account. Putting together three diaries gives an intensity of detail to what happened to a family and that detail is its strength if you want to know about it. It is not an enjoyable read but how could it be, given the subject matter. It is a splendid book for the very reason that it is a book and not an anonymous medical journal. It has the look and feel of a novel. Its typeface and layout are quite appropriate. I cannot imagine any photos or diagrams that would enhance it. The narrative is certainly in a logical order although the challenge of bringing three diaries together occasionally jars with the flow. Someone outside the cancer world (i.e. not a patient, carer or medical professional) would not be familiar with the drugs/treatments used. That said, I do not feel the book would benefit from a glossary; it is not meant to be a medical reference book.

Many people will not want the detail of how the end could be. I have always preached that there is always hope but I suppose, (I write as a grade 4 GB brain tumour patient eight years post op) there does come a time when hope expires and it is a matter of facing things with dignity and care. This book spells these things out, if you want to know. I will probably recommend it, but it depends on the individual. For anyone

closely involved, it could be an emotional read. However, if you want to learn of a real family's story, is there a better read?

It is an emotional book to read, writing about it is no easier. It brings back advice given to me by an ex-boss. As I departed to see my father in the hospice 600 miles away, he said "Whatever you do, be there. I didn't get back in time for my father, but my brother did. It's been the biggest regret of my life". I did get back in time and had a proper conversation and a firm grip and two weeks later, I was there for dad, mum and myself. Rory will always have the feeling that he was there. He will know that his mother appreciated all that he and Katrin did for her and eased her closing period.

Living with glioblastoma multiforme grade 4 (56-65) (October 2013)

The front cover of this book reflects the content – a gift of quality time with pain and helplessness. Although the book focuses on cancer and end-of-life, particularly emotional and spiritual issues, anyone with a terminal diagnosis would find it useful – an opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the reality of caring for someone at home and the effects on the individual, their carers, and their relationships. It can help prepare individuals emotionally and provide opportunity to discuss end-of-life decisions about care at home, its limitations and the challenges involved

It is the author's experience, and so an emotional and practical journey very specific to the author and his family. Although a lot of it is relevant to everyone, there are some very individual and personal decisions that are questionable.

I like the honesty and depth of expression. There is no doubt about the level of love and unconditional care given and wholly appreciated. I also like its transparency in terms of communication leading to shared support. It demonstrates the importance of maintaining normality and inclusion at a very emotional time, through sharing responsibility and care and allowing the patient to be actively involved in organising their own end of life. Regardless of the prognosis, the 'will to live' overrides everything until unfinished business has been concluded and goodbyes said.

The pain, distress and helplessness are openly demonstrated by carers and patient. The book also shows the patient having to give in to physical deterioration and accept practical aids to maintain control and dignity for as long as possible. It shows the impact of physical and emotional strain and sheer exhaustion, regardless of resilience and determination. It is easy to relate to from a humanistic perspective.

This is a very well written book by an author who openly shares his experience of what it's like to care for a loved one at home at a very difficult time. However, it won't be everyone's cup of tea; views about end of life differ for various reasons and not everyone has the same family dynamic, support network or financial security. This could make some feel inadequate, guilty or a failure. In addition, not everyone has access to same level of care from health professionals; it depends where you live.

Living with the consequences of breast cancer (46-55) (October 2013)

This book is useful for anyone; although cancer carers would benefit, as would families affected by stroke. It is easy to understand and deals with emotional issues well. It is a quick read and it is great that it has three different views of how the family was connecting and feeling.

Head and neck cancer survivor (46-55) (October 2013)

I started reading this book at 10.00 pm and could not put it down. I finished it at 2.30 am and then had a sleepless night thinking about the events portrayed. It is a deeply moving, warts and all, account of the progression to the end of life of a much-loved mother. The last few pages are extremely difficult to read, and I found myself holding my breath in anticipation at times. The outcome was inevitable in one respect but there are surprises in the last couple of pages that are ultimately life affirming.

It is not too lengthy, and the diary format means it flows well. The author is a layman and so it is easy to understand. I wish that photos of the three writers had been included but perhaps that would have been too personal given the difficult nature of the disclosures in the book.

This would be useful for anyone affected by a terminal diagnosis but could be a very difficult read for some people. It is brutally honest at times and thought provoking.

Breast cancer patient (66-75) (September 2013)

This is a factual and moving account of the illness and death of Joan. It flows very well and is very easy to understand. The author and his wife explain the situations and their feelings and those of other family and friends, and Joan herself has input; their contributions are based on diary entries written at the time. It is heart-warming, and I am sure anyone would find it a worthwhile read. I felt as if I could walk into the situation at any point.

It is a great record of every aspect of Joan's diagnosis and death. The family pull together to make her illness and death heart-warming and moving. The book is an open, honest reflection of the love of the family, and the hard work and feelings connected with the death of a loved one – Joan's hope after the diagnoses for recovery, Rory's awareness of the situation having spoken to the hospital team unbeknown to his mother. I also enjoyed the everyday comments in each diary entry, for example the garden, plants.

This book would be good for anyone thinking of taking home a close family member to look after until death and I would probably recommend it, although I would clearly explain the content. I gave it four stars because in an ideal world your son and daughter-in-law would look after you and treat you as these fantastic people have done, but it's not an ideal world.

Recovering from lung cancer (56-65) (September 2013)

Rory Maclean is a successful journalist and travel writer. He and his wife, Katrin, decide to care for his mother Joan at home when they learn she only has a short time to live. The book is a diary record of her last months, mostly written by Rory but with remarkably descriptive insights from Katrin and sparse, but telling, input from Joan for whom writing must have been difficult. It's a short read but covers a wide range of the emotions and physical difficulties faced when caring for someone you love at home in their last months.

It is one family's experience and, as such, must be accepted as the way it was for them, warts and all. My mother died of cancer in hospital and I've always carried guilt that I didn't care for her in my home in her last few weeks. At the time, I had an 18-month-old daughter and reading this book confirmed that there was no way I could have given her the care she needed and deserved – quite cathartic I suppose.

Joan lived much longer than expected and this put a much greater strain on her carers than they originally signed up for. Joan was very aware for most of the time and very concerned about the strain on her beloved son and daughter-in-law. She was very practical and organised and had prepared for her death in many ways that made it easier for the family, for example, sharing out her possessions. She was clearly a much loved and appreciated mother who had gifted her children many admirable qualities. In fact, love forms the basis of this book and the relationships between the main characters are quite beautiful and very moving at times.

Because it is a diary written by carers and the patient, it has insights for both groups. It is probably more valuable for carers and hopefully professionals – it features a wonderful cancer care nurse and an insensitive district nurse, two extremes of care. It also movingly portrays the last days of someone terminally ill being cared for by their family, so it should be of interest to anyone. It is useful for understanding some of the reasons that motivate us to push ourselves to extremes – love, grief, loss. Acknowledging the difficulties and downright hell at times of caring for someone you love as they deteriorate physically and mentally, the physical and mental exhaustion.

I am grateful to the Macleans for sharing their story without pulling any punches. I hope my family will be able to do what they did and enable me to die at home if it comes to it – families do it all the time and I don't think we realise the enormity and sacrifice of what they do, the love involved. I would love to have had that amazing gift of time, to be together with my mother at the end of her life as she had been there for me for all of mine.

Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (56-65) (August 2013)



I did not enjoy a lot of this book and, towards the end, it made me realise that I would rather go into a hospice than expect someone to care for me. I wouldn't want to put my family through this, and, let's face it, many families wouldn't want the responsibility. I don't think it shows the true story of a person dying. I work with a cancer group, and none of the deaths has been peaceful or nice.

It's well written by articulate and educated people, but I wouldn't be happy giving it to someone caring for a relative dying with cancer. It's not the story of many of us; not everyone has the facilities, money, or knowledge to seek advice and help to be able to look after someone, and few of us work from home, or can afford to choose when or not to work. Most families are frightened towards the end of life and would be wary of trying to keep someone at home in the last stages, because of a British trait of not speaking about death and dying. For most, it's a frightening journey. I cared for both my parents when they were dying and know the difficulties, especially as I didn't have financial support and had to work – the case for most of us.

Living with laryngeal cancer (66-75) (October 2013)

I would recommend this book only to someone supporting a carer. It highlights the importance of time together and what happens at the end; it is too much for patients. It flows well, it is easy to understand – no technical words to explain – and the language is appropriate for the intended audience. The front cover is lovely, the size and type of the font is fine as is the quality of the paper.

I like how it shows a family coming together to support a loving mother in her final few months of life. However, I dislike the fact that the son contacted a funeral home to discuss his mother's funeral before she had died, and I hated the fact that the three children divided up the mother's possessions before she died. The doctor tells the son much more information about his mother's condition and even states that she may not be here in eight weeks. Surely, this is not something a doctor would say to a relative without first asking the patient's permission. The son never asked the doctor to tell him how long his mother had to live.

Family member of mesothelioma patient (36-56) (October 2013)

The usefulness of this book is down to individual personality. It may help both parties acknowledge and accept that their feelings are natural and normal. I like this honesty; it acknowledges the feelings of guilt and anger that everyone has but may believe they should not have or are weak to have, when this is not at all the case.

It is based on dairies and in a logical order but at times I had to read passages to understand them. Sometimes it took me a while to work out who was saying what about whom and the writer jumps from topic to topic. There is no need for a glossary; although the odd medical word is used, it is perfectly clear from the context. Further information, for example on specific drugs, would not add value to the story.

The title and the book's aims are appealing but it is not for everyone; it could be distressing if too close to home. If I hadn't been reviewing it, I probably wouldn't have finished it. That could be because of the type of person I am and where I am in my treatment. It will be most useful for relatives/carers, although anyone, depending on their character, may benefit. I will make a judgement about their personality and openness before recommending it.

Breast cancer survivor (36-45) (October 2013)

This is a straightforward read, but there is no emotional support in the content; maybe I was looking for something that is not there. The use of the first letter of people's names is off-putting; I had to revert to the front cover to remind me who was who. A carer may find some comfort, but, for someone trying to come to terms with cancer, the continual discussion about impending death and arrangements is out of place. I assumed it was a diary of events, but the content did not come across like that to me. I don't feel that it is any use, so I would not recommend to anyone.

Living with a prostate cancer (56-65) (September 2013)

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

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