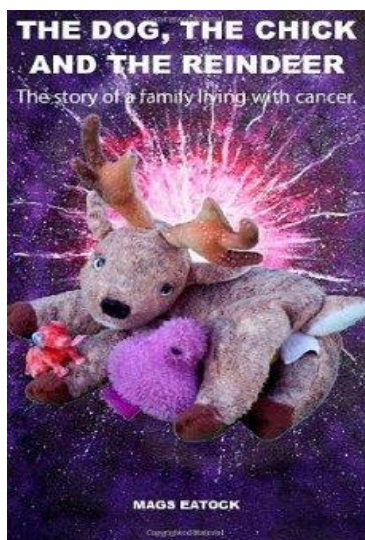


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



The dog, the chick and the reindeer. The story of a family living with cancer (2013).

Eatock M.

Book: Apollo Press, 2013.

ix, 232pp.

ISBN 9781907659058.

£9.99.

Average star rating 2.4 (out of 5)

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I found this book very informative about the carer's side of the story and the feelings they go through. It's very easy to read and there are no technical words to get your head round. I didn't notice any factual inaccuracies, but some words are missing. I love the eye-catching cover, but it would be easy to think it is a children's book.

I like how the author describes her emotions and how she copes with everything. Once I started it, I couldn't put it down. I wanted to know what would happen next.

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



This book is useful for partners, carers, family or friends of a terminal cancer patient. It offers emotional support to those providing care for someone they love. Some symptoms of ovarian cancer are mentioned, but this is largely irrelevant, and the book focuses on the practical difficulties and emotions experienced by carers. Relatives will especially identify with the stress of providing care and the frustration at a situation that is not helped by incompetence at care homes and hospitals. For carers, it will be useful to identify with the feelings of other carers. For example, the author talks about her relief that her mother is not suffering any more, but then feels guilty about those feelings. More than anything, the book highlights the struggles faced when caring for a loved one going through this at the same time as trying to juggle other aspects of life.

The book is written almost as a diary so flows well and many aspects of normal life are included. Some topical news items are also included, which are interesting for the reader as a common point of reference. I did not notice any factual inaccuracies as such, although there is some speculation in the book as to some of the patient's symptoms and whether they are cancer related. For example, her confusion is initially put down to dementia; secondary cancer in the brain is mentioned later, but only as a possibility and this is not confirmed medically.

The tone is very light, as if the author is chatting to you. The language is easy to understand; there are no technical words or words that are difficult to understand, but I did notice quite a few typos. Occasionally some words are used (not technical) that don't seem to fit with the rest of the language, and this detracts from the personal feel. The author has a large family and it is a bit difficult to keep track of who is who.

The paper quality is excellent, and very white! The photographs are a nice addition. However, I really don't like the cover and was quite put off by it! The design in the background almost has a science fiction feel and the text doesn't look right. I'm also not keen on the title, although I understand that the author was very attached to the dog, chick and reindeer. I'm not sure they work in the photograph.

The best thing about this book is the author's honesty. She talks of her frustrations at the situation, and how they end up being frustrations at her mother as she resists all efforts to go into a care home. It will be helpful for others to see the emotions experienced when caring for somebody who is loved so much and trying to cope with practical arrangements. I recommend it for those caring for a loved one or relative with any terminal cancer; it offers emotional support and it is useful to have the insight of somebody else in the same situation.

Breast cancer patient, in remission for two years (26-35) (January 2014)



This book shows the effects of terminal cancer on a family and is useful for the descriptions of the impact of the whole pathway on the family. It comes across as a true and detailed story of a large family and their life as carers facing the loss of a dear relative. The stress caused to everyone is described in minute detail. It is applicable to any type of cancer as there is very little about ovarian cancer per se at the heart of the book; it is more about the emotional stresses.

It is easy to read and uses common, everyday terms, although it does jump around in places. There are several unexplained acronyms that that might confuse some readers. The cover is well designed but some of the photographs are family album type photographs that may upset some readers or be of little interest. I did find the use of first names and abbreviations, for the multitude of people involved over four generations confusing. A family tree would have been useful.

At times there is almost too much detail. The reference to details of conversations, whilst accurate and typical, is too detailed to maintain interest. It becomes repetitive when describing the effects of dementia and, while very indicative of the condition, this detail does not add significantly to the facts of the case.

Living with prostate cancer (Over 75) (December 2013)

This book details the journey of an elderly lady through cancer. It starts in her womb and she has a hysterectomy, but because of difficulties with her health, her ovaries aren't removed. She survives well for a few years but then starts to have memory issues. It seems that this might be due to a recurrence of the cancer in the ovary or ovarian cancer that has spread to the brain. There doesn't seem to be any check on this and she goes on to suffer quite a lot with pain, personality changes; the fact that she is a very large lady also makes caring difficult.

It is written from the perspective of her daughter. The family is large and close, and the book describes a lot of their life, how they cope with their relative and how they pull together to look after her. There is a lot of detail on the inadequacies of the care system dealing with a "difficult" old lady who for no fault of her own is rude to them because of personality changes probably brought about by the spread of the cancer.

It is easy to understand and well written and shows how a whole family copes with cancer of a loved one. The cover is appealing – the pictures of toys don't relate to the story but may make people curious. The photos add to the general interest. Some of the details of family holidays are not relevant. I would have preferred more about the illness and perhaps some more technical details.

It is quite good and readable, but I'm not sure if it is useful. It captures your interest, but I have reservations. The patient's pain might be scare patients with ovarian cancer. I think pain relief could deal better with the condition than is described and there are mitigating circumstances as the patient was a very large lady who could not be easily moved. It might also worry people that the recurrence wasn't easily picked up by the medical profession. On the other hand, it could empower people to seek help with symptoms. It does explore how the family deal with the issue emotionally and practically and how they pull together, so it is good in this respect.

I think there are better books out there. This is a bit negative and negative isn't what you want when you are dealing with cancer. I would like to hear what other people think about the reservations I have expressed before I could recommend it as a resource. There may be better books, but it is worth consideration.

Womb cancer survivor (56-65) (December 2013)

This book is a little confusing. It is more the story of a family living with dementia, rather than cancer, and seen from that position it is a vivid picture of the stress and chaos involved. I found it strange that despite symptoms being apparent in 2010 (p. 85) (I appreciate that like us the family were not familiar with the disease) there is no further mention of ovarian cancer, and no mention of medical checks or interventions to diagnose the cause until 2012 (p. 177). Easy to say with hindsight, but why did no one pursue the cause of even one of the problems that Mum was suffering?

I very much empathised with the situation when Mum was in hospital in 2012: waiting for the ambulance; the lack of information; the delays in assessment and admission; the uncertainty about what happens next; medication issues; the 'she's going home, no she isn't' chaos. Our experience was very similar, including the contrast between staff who cared and those who didn't.

I am not sure that this is a book for those with dementia or ovarian cancer. It could be quite frightening for someone with, or caring for someone with, dementia, and ovarian patients might think that they will become as confused as Mum. It is a mostly an interesting read, but as someone with only one sister and whose wife was an only child, I felt overwhelmed at times by this huge, extended family, whose involvement in looking after Mum seemed to bring almost as many problems as it solved.

A husband who lived with ovarian cancer for six years (66-75) (November 2013)



This reads like the personal diary of a carer and her journey through the protracted struggle her mother went through in her fight with cancer. It captures very intimate details of the emotions and experiences of the author and her family and as such it is a very good memoir for the family involved; however, sometimes the experiences are too specific to convey much to the reader.

As a cancer patient, I do understand that a carer's perspective on the disease and the struggles involved is bound to be different. The key drawback of this book is that it is unorthodox reading material that may struggle to attract an audience. It offers little other than a detailed personalised journal. The author was rightfully dealing with the situation and reacting to it on a day to day basis but the usefulness of this for other readers may be limited.

GBM-4 brain cancer patient (36-45) (March 2014)

This is more of a general journey rather than cancer specific. It is difficult to know who would benefit from reading it. It reads as a novel and at a superficial level is an easy read and understand. However, there are several typos and spelling mistakes and no clear logical progression apart from a time line of a journey.

I like the story about cancer affecting the lives of family members, but the book does not give a positive image. My wife and I (both former healthcare professionals) read it and neither of us found that it had much to contribute to supporting anyone affected by cancer. It is difficult to see what the market is. The descriptions are at a superficial level and the lack of reflection and comments on examples of good and poor care is an omission that robs the book of any value.

Bowel cancer survivor (66-75) (December 2013)

This book is written by a carer and it talks a lot about the physical and emotional impact on her. It seems the book could help anyone to understand what this particular carer went through and offer an idea as to what others may also experience. It's important for patients to understand what carers go through, despite the difficulty that may bring when they are going through tough times themselves.

It reads reasonably well, although at times feels like a relentless procession of facts and anecdotes. Many feel irrelevant at times, but perhaps contribute to the life of the carer at the time. The language is sometimes a little informal, but it might be the best way to reach a mainstream audience. It's a very chatty style, as if the reader is sitting in a room having a natter with the author. This limits it, and mostly stops it from entering the realms of deep thought and emotion, in which I am far more interested.

I don't like the cover. The background image of an explosion feels unconnected to the title and content. I like the title, and the presence of the three toys, but the explosion seems wrong.

I like how the writer talks about the psychological effects on her but many of the small anecdotes about the family are unrelated to the main situation, e.g. one of the men playing golf, the tornado. I didn't feel they were necessary, interesting or relevant. These anecdotes vastly outweigh the emotional support and possible useful information in this book, and it suffers because of that.

Parotid cancer survivor (36-45) (November 2013)



While the subject of this book is ovarian cancer, it does not feel particularly targeted at people affected by ovarian cancer. A lot of it is about dementia and general family life. It might be upsetting for ovarian cancer patients and their loved ones and I am not sure if it would interest anyone else.

It is in chronological order, with most of the parts about cancer in the opening and closing sections. Other parts talk about family members and events, so it is an easy read but not that interesting, a bit like a very long family newsletter! It is very easy to understand as there is little technical detail. I did not notice any inaccuracies but there are several grammatical and spelling mistakes and one or two abbreviations (e.g. ITU) that not everyone may recognise.

I did not find it a particularly attractive book; the pictures, all black and white look as if they have been photocopied from snaps. The close-up pictures of 'mam' when she is quite close to death feel quite intrusive. Other pictures are strange, the oddest (p. 78) being of 'flies inside the lampshade in the caravan' (yes, really!). The paper is good quality and the print is clear. The author writes as if she is talking to someone, which makes it easy to read, but there is so much chat related to the family in general that sometimes it overshadows the point of the book.

I won't recommend it. Some images would be distressing, and the fact that 'mam' is very elderly means it might not appeal to many people. There is not a lot of positivity; while I realise it is hard to be positive about someone dying of cancer, it could still have been better represented. I did not find the family chit chat interesting and much did not seem to have any bearing on the plot, for example the caravan saga!

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (January 2014)

I am not sure if this book is useful at all. It charts the last years of the author's mother's life but doesn't relate it to anything outside of the family. It is easy to understand but I don't like the style. I don't think it is meaningful to anyone who doesn't know the family concerned.

I struggled my way through it, hoping to learn something useful or to empathise with a family dealing with cancer – I didn't do either! I don't want to belittle the family's experiences, I understand people's need to write about their experiences, it's very cathartic and I do it myself, keeping a journal and writing poetry. But unless you are an accomplished writer or aiming to raise money for a cancer charity, I question why you would want to publish your work.

Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (56-65) (January 2014)

This book could be useful to a family living with any cancer, not just a specific type. Rather than life revolving round cancer the author has tried to show that day-to-day life continues and that the patient can still be part of it.

It is easy to understand, and the language is appropriate for a wide range of people. However, although the author has tried to deal with events in order, the story keeps going off on a tangent. This makes it disjointed and difficult to follow at times. The title is misleading and unless the reader looks at the back cover, they could be under the impression that it is a children's book. I struggled to see the significance of the title in relation to the content. The font is a good size and easy to read.

I am sorry to say that I didn't like this book and didn't find it useful. I understand the author wanted to make it an account of everyday life with cancer but is too intent on telling the reader what she was doing. I am not sure what describing the flies in the caravan has to do with ovarian cancer!

Uterine cancer survivor (56-65) (January 2014)

This was not for me. The appealing and intriguing title drew me to the book, but it was disappointing. The style of writing did not appeal to me and if I had not been reviewing this book I would probably have given up on it. It seems to be just a series of busy events: we did this, we did that; we are doing this next. So many people are mentioned that it is hard to remember who they all are. I did not feel any empathy for the people in the story and was fed up with hearing how stressed the author was.

I don't feel I learned anything that would be useful to a cancer patient or their family. For much of the book, you think Mum has Alzheimer's and it is speculation that the cancer went to her brain and affected her mental state. The author does talk about having care packages at home and getting respite care for her Mum; knowing it can be such a struggle to get these (no cancer or terminal diagnosis at the time), I would have been interested in how she achieved this.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (November 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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