

25 Months

Linda McK. Stewart

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One warm autumn afternoon, the author finds her world turned upside down when she awakes from a nap as usual, but her husband does not. Instead of waking normally, Jack's return to consciousness is abruptly overshadowed by the sudden onset of chronic disease.

This book tells the true story of a woman's encounter with deadly illness. Stewart is a travel writer whose work has appeared in major metropolitan newspapers and magazines in the U.S., Canada, and abroad. She takes her readers along on her personal journey through the bewildering twenty-five months following her husband's diagnosis with Alzheimer's disease. She paints a lovable portrait of Jack Stewart, a retired *New York Times* editor and her spirited companion. Jack is actively inquisitive; during frequent bike rides, "he liked nothing better than to pause to exchange views with joggers, strollers, dog walkers, baby buggy pushers, skate boarding kids and of course with the mailman with whom he kept up a regular exchange of information."

But the images Stewart paints of a physically and emotionally healthy man are starkly contrasted by the present realities of the ever-diminishing faculties of an Alzheimer's patient. Ghosts of cause are chased after in vain. The progressive degeneration affects Jack's mind and body against his will: "He made a strenuous effort to be attentive," Stewart writes, and his walking became "so uncertain [that he] would come to a halt as his hands groped for the doorframe, the table's edge or the chair back to steady himself."

Despite the bleak circumstances she faces in Jack's decline, Stewart takes her road resolutely, one day at a time. She manages to find joy in small doses, including Jack's occasional moments of coherence, the goodness of family and friends, and the beauty surrounding their New England home: "the eastern sun, pouring in, low and lemony, seemed a reminder...of nature's restorative powers."

Stewart's narrative includes tidbits of "official" medical information about Alzheimer's gleaned from websites, foundations, books, and her own experience with Jack's doctors. She sprinkles in details of her purposefully navigated day-to-day existence. The result is a valuable insight into life with this mysterious disease. Stewart's experience as a travel writer may have contributed to some overly flowery language that borders on long-winded, but in general, the story carries just enough detail for the reader to build vivid mental imagery and interest in its characters.

The few moments when Jack offers insight into his condition, through Linda's recollection, creates a longing for his perceptions that weren't recorded. Even if *25 Months* does not dictate a first-hand experience of Alzheimer's, it will undoubtedly be useful for the families and survivors of those stricken with the disease during their own twenty-five months.

MARITTA COPPIETERS (August 18, 2009)

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