

5.4%: Beating the Odds of Pancreatic Cancer

Juliette Guidara

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When Frank Guidara was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, the doctor put his odds of survival at 5.4 percent, even after undergoing the conventional treatments of surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. This memoir shares a story that will resonate with anyone who has faced such a dark diagnosis and worked to beat the odds.

Written by Frank's wife, Juliette—together with a brief first-person account of Frank's Vietnam War days—the book initially details how the couple met and married and then shifts into a tale of survival when Frank receives the diagnosis of cancer just before the couple's first wedding anniversary. To augment his chances for success and lessen her own anxiety and panic attacks, Juliette puts them both on a raw-food diet and then begins investigating Tong Ren, a Chinese system of healing that is frequently used in Asia on cancer patients. Combining alternative and conventional therapies, the couple works their way through Frank's treatment and, eventually, to his clean bill of health.

Frank's journey is a mixture of medical suspense story, guidebook for other cancer patients, and memoir of a family undergoing an enormous crisis. Mostly, though, it's a valentine. Weathering the emotional storms of chronic illness can be defeating and exhausting, and although Juliette admits that she had some very difficult days, her deep love for her husband was her lifeline.

Throughout Frank's illness and subsequent rounds of treatments, the couple's connection becomes stronger and deeper, and Juliette's commitment to their relationship comes through beautifully in her descriptions, underscoring her main points about the benefits of seeking complementary therapies, staying open to medical alternatives, and holding on to hope despite the odds. Even when sharing her most difficult and fearful moments, Juliette has an admirable level of optimism. Her writing is often light and playful, with a straightforward honesty that is well suited to the medical realities of the situation.

Photos from various excursions the couple makes that are described in the book's second half demonstrate not just success with medical treatments but also the couple's propensity for enjoying what they have right now and for helping others as well. Juliette writes, "Our journey of teaching and learning will never stop. We will continue to read and keep an open mind. Adversity is a terrible thing to waste and we are dedicated to a willingness to change and adapt."

For those who have ever been confronted by disheartening odds—medically or otherwise—this stunning and well-written work will provide guidance, comfort, and most of all, inspiration.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (November 9, 2012)

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