

All of Us Warriors: Cancer Stories of Survival and Loss

Rebecca Whitehead Munn

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All of Us Warriors includes twenty stories of survival and loss, told in the words of everyday people; it puts a realistic face on cancer.

Rebecca Whitehead Munn's revealing collection of cancer stories, *All of Us Warriors*, comes in the words of everyday people.

Munn's experiences with cancer began in the spring of 1984, when her fifty-something mother was diagnosed with late-stage breast cancer. While Munn was gripped by fear, her mother, who came from a long line of strong women, believed that the mind was stronger than the disease; she focused on healing. She first turned to traditional treatments, including chemotherapy and radiology, which led to humiliating, uncomfortable side effects; she also made use of visualization techniques, healing walks in nature, and Eastern medicine.

Munn records that her mother went on to live cancer free for seventeen years before she was diagnosed with colorectal cancer, from which she passed away, in 2006, at the age of seventy-seven. The nuances and associated trauma of her battle with cancer left an indelible mark on Munn; when a friend of hers was diagnosed with cancer later, she heeded the calling "to write about these stories from the front lines of those living with and surviving cancer."

The twenty people who share their personal stories are all based in the United States, and were diagnosed with several different types of cancer, including breast, brain, lymphoma, colon, and lung cancer, in stages I to IV. Regardless of their locations, their advice, borne from personal experiences, stands to be universally understood and appreciated.

Each chapter follows the same structure: an individual's story of discovery and diagnosis, the treatment experience, advice for others, and surprising experiences. This structure mirrors the physical and emotional milestones that are present in a patient's road to recovery or loss, and the effect is both calming and reassuring.

In these real stories told by real people, the writing is prosaic more often than not; it contains an excess of exposition. Still, the messages that the chapters contain are informative and uplifting. Christian faith is a reigning theme: advice about daily prayer and trusting God is present in each of the stories. Debi, who was diagnosed with a brain tumor, affirms that God chooses a Christian's journey, and, as long as a person isn't living in sin and is listening to God, says the journeys can be great. There is untold wisdom in each point of view, including in Jennifer's story, which recalls how her German Shepherd would sniff her mother's armpit when she had cancer, and would later sniff Jennifer's chest prior to her diagnosis. If she had paid attention to that unusual but pertinent sign, she says, she would have detected the cancer earlier.

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