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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Almost a Princess: My Life as a Two Time Cancer Survivor
Jane Loeb Rubin
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Four Stars (out of Five)

People who have endured life-threatening illnesses often say the suffering they experienced taught them to cherish life more fully. Jane Loeb Rubin faced two separate diagnoses of cancer that led her to this life-enhancing truth.

The essays included in *Almost a Princess: My Life as a Two-Time Cancer Survivor* detail Rubin's family history, her past and present personal relationships, and the emotional nuances she experienced while ill. She admits to being in denial about the seriousness of her initial breast cancer. Blood tests showed that she carried a gene mutation that made her vulnerable to cancers of the reproductive system, so she underwent removal of both breasts, reconstructive surgery, and a full hysterectomy. Almost ten years later, during a second course of treatment for peritoneal cancer, she more fully confronted her own mortality.

Currently director of neuroscience for Atlantic Health System, Rubin relied on her professional background when facing her own health crisis. A week before the peritoneal surgery, she decided to enliven a routine work day by wearing the diamond earrings she usually kept secure in a home safe. Midway through the day, she discovered that one of the expensive studs was about to fall out. A wave of fear overtook her, just as it did when she was first confronted with a diagnosis of cancer. Rubin explains, "The thought of losing a precious stone evoked the exact same reaction."

Rubin also explores discrimination, which she first experienced when her fourth-grade teacher singled her out as a Jew and, as a result, she was the target of teasing from her classmates. Years later she would come to realize the broader implications of discrimination as it relates to health. The genetic mutation that causes reproductive system cancers afflicts a large number of Jewish women, she writes, perhaps because "many centuries of forced clans or shtetls that Jews lived in would also define our heritage through the slow evolution of fragile cells carrying a heightened risk of cancer."

While still in the hospital after peritoneal surgery, Rubin often lost patience with well-

meaning family members who crowded around her bed each evening to share the meal with her. Recognizing that her outbursts were evidence of the emotional ups and downs common in post-surgery patients, she says, “The emotional side of healing can never be underestimated.”

These essays reveal a survivor who cherishes her connections with people and searches deeply for the meaning of suffering, while trying to maintain the normal patterns of her life. Rubin’s practical sensibility allows her to write cogently about the medical complexities of her situation while also remaining attuned to the needs of those around her. On occasion, her convoluted sentences tend to confuse her intended meaning.

This book serves as an inspiring memoir that many will appreciate. The author conveys valuable information for readers who face serious illness, as well as those wanting to support family and friends through life-threatening health challenges.

Half of the book’s royalties will be donated to the Mathilda Fund, supporting ovarian cancer research. The fund honors the author’s paternal great grandmother who died from an unknown “woman’s disease.”

Margaret Cullison