

Incurable: A Life After Diagnosis

Charles Harris

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“No man ever committed suicide with an unraced two-year-old in the barn”: so Charles Harris cites an old horse-racing aphorism in his blog-turned-memoir. Diagnosed with colon cancer in March of 2009, Harris began blogging to keep his family and friends informed of the progression of his disease. His posts were eventually compiled and adapted to become *Incurable: A Life After Diagnosis*.

When Harris first receives notice of his cancer, doctors tell him that they will not be able to defeat it. After the tumors begin to dissipate from chemotherapy, they then suggest that there is a small chance they can cure him if he undergoes two complicated surgical procedures. Finally, when surgery fails to eliminate the cancer, Harris is again informed that he is incurable. Though his doctor refuses to speculate on how much time remains for him, Harris guesses that he has, at most, a year or two left.

Harris accepts his diagnosis and adheres to his determination to maximize the quality—rather than quantity—of his remaining time. His writings reflect this commitment to enjoying life, and though he provides updates on his physical condition, he also spends time on the topics that bring him pleasure. A retired venture capitalist and racehorse owner, Harris writes about travel, food, family, races, and the progress of his thoroughbreds. Of racing, he writes, “The triumphant feeling generated by a long-awaited victory by a beautiful animal, the owner’s competitive spirit incarnate, is singular.” Reading his thoughts on his horses and races like the Belmont Stakes and the Triple Crown, one can’t help but notice the parallel between his passion for racing and his ability to embrace life’s unknowns and play its odds with optimism.

Because the book is a compilation of blog posts (Harris did not have to time to write a memoir from scratch), it doesn’t read like a standard memoirist narrative, but rather like an epistolary account or a diary. In the face of his growing cancer and increasing medical travails, Harris remains calm and poised, his tone curious and objective, almost to the point of stoicism. Though perhaps a bit too controlled, considering the circumstances, his writing is incredibly lucid. All in all, Harris’ memoir is the perfect read for those who would like a measured but honest view of what it is like to live with incurable cancer.

LIA SKALKOS (August 2, 2011)

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