

Let Me Go When the Banter Stops: A Doctor's Fight for the Love of Her Life

Linda Gromko

CreateSpace (May 6, 2012)

Softcover \$24.95 (504pp)

978-1-4701-1818-1

Let Me Go When the Banter Stops is Dr. Linda Gromko's memoir about her husband's illness and death. It is deeply entrenched in her personal loss and enriched by her professional knowledge—and it highlights the vital role of humor.

Gromko and Steve Williams found mid-life love though Match.com. Not long into their marriage, Williams's health problems—from diabetes to heart disease—took over their daily lives. The memoir follows the family's journey through Williams's end-stage renal failure. Gromko masterfully balances her dual role of "physician and consumer advocate" to offer encouragement and wisdom to caretakers and people suffering from kidney failure.

Readers follow as Gromko walks step by step through the dark, desperate world of dialysis and transplants while she is also coping with the tumultuous task of being a stepmother to Williams's young teen daughter, Brita. While acknowledging the medical limitations of receiving dialysis at home, Gromko advocates for its personal benefits. This is a topic her dual voice is particularly well suited for. Readers feel they're working alongside Gromko when conflict with Brita leads to renewal, dependence, and love as they both struggle through heartrending loss.

Through it all, Gromko keeps a healthy sense of humor that shines through her life and resonates in the book. The same humor that kept the author afloat keeps readers buoyed up page after page. The audience will be moved by the depth of heart, vulnerability, and courage that Gromko and Williams portray. The title signals the importance of humor and closeness in their relationship.

The text has many practical elements as well, derived primarily from Gromko's medical knowledge. The effects of lifestyle-related diseases, such as some types of diabetes, are evident and will encourage readers to think about the potential impact of these illnesses sooner rather than later. Readers also learn the good, bad, and ugly of medicine through the three types of doctors the family encounters, as Gromko explains: the passionate, the placeholders, and the problem makers.

The narrative is chronological but is divided into two segments: "Kidney World" examines the earlier parts of the medical fight, and "The Heart Part" shows the family coming to grips with the ultimate failing of Williams's health. This structure provides a suitable arc to the book.

Gromko's clean, detailed storytelling is filled with the wisdom and understandability that come from years of patient care. She tells her raw story with the heart of a wife and caretaker and the mind of a physician. *Let Me Go When the Banter Stops* is a compelling yet painful read that will be of particular interest to those with ailing loved ones. MELISSA WUSKE (August 20, 2012)

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