



## Losing Lola: A Memoir of Reckless Behavior in a Time of Tragedy

**Shannon Eilers**

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A brain tumor is one of the modern world's most frightening monsters: It is a silent, dangerous predator whose victims are often caught unaware and unprepared. But however terrifying brain cancer is for its prey, it may be even more alarming for those who must helplessly witness a loved one's suffering from the side of a hospital bed. It is this latter terror that Shannon Eilers describes in her memoir, *Losing Lola*.

On August 30, 2000, Shannon, a former school teacher, began her day as she had begun nearly every day of her life—with her mother, Lola. But later that day, Shannon unexpectedly finds herself in the hospital when her mother suffers a seizure while teaching. This is the beginning of Lola's diagnosis with brain cancer, and in the months that follow, Shannon watches as her beloved mother rapidly succumbs to terminal cancer. To cope, Shannon turns to drugs. Her illicit behavior begins somewhat harmlessly and then quickly spirals out of control. When her mother dies, Shannon's drug addiction only worsens, and she finds herself struggling to save her own life.

The memoir is written in journal entries that reflect the turmoil the author experiences in the months of her mother's illness and in the equally tragic years that follow her death. Eilers' prose in these entries is short, terse, and fragmented: "I am not dealing with my mother's situation or my husband very well. Need more drugs, Prescription or illegal." This straight-forward, simple style quickens the pace, and the urgency of the composition emphasizes the immediacy of the story. But even in tender, sensitive moments, the writing's simplicity pairs well with the levity of the moment; for example, when her mother dies, Eilers writes, "It is nothing spectacular. She quietly slips away."

While drug addiction, troubled marriage, and mental illness seem like clichéd, over-wrought subjects for memoir these days, what sets this book apart is the raw intensity of a daughter struggling with the loss of her mother. Eilers' no-nonsense, Texas swagger looks directly into the eye of the fearsome cancer beast and unrelentingly describes the horror of witnessing not just her mother's decay, but her own as well. At times, the prose is halting and unnatural with its short, simple sentences, and while the book begins with daily accounts of the author's life, the latter half of the memoir skips first months and then years; the result is a bit discontinuous. However, those shortcomings aside, the story is engrossing and so fast-paced that readers will find themselves devouring the short volume in only a few sittings.

JESSICA HIGGINS (June 28, 2010)

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