ForeWord Reviews

COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

Mom's Cancer
Brian Fies
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Graphic novels span a broad range of subjects, from superheroes' quests to conquer deadly enemies to the basic struggle for survival. In this entry, readers will find both. The author relates, in direct and eloquent drawings, the story of his own mother's battle with cancer, and how his family sought to cope with everything that struggle entailed. This book may be small, but it packs a huge impact—and won a richly deserved Eisner Award.

Fies, a journalist and cartoonist, relates in his preface that he began this book (his first graphic novel) as a serial on the Internet, described as "dispatches from the front lines of a battle into which my family stumbled unprepared." When his mother was diagnosed with metastasized lung cancer, the whole family swung into action—and the results were not always pretty, as Fies shows. His family, he says, supports the book even though it does not always depict them in the best of lights. This too is common in the fight for cancer survival; it's an impassioned war, and everyone involved feels very strongly about how best to proceed. His family's graciousness in allowing their very private trials to become public has already provided much help to both patients and physicians.

From its Internet beginning, the power of this story was evident to readers, who forwarded links to yet more readers, and soon "people who needed it found it." Readers accompany Mom, the author, and his two sisters (Nurse Sis and Kid Sis) as they progress from the frightening first awareness that something is wrong all the way through the battery of tests, the dreadful diagnosis, the chemo, the radiation, the denial, the loss of hair, and the family arguments over the best course of action and which family member contributes more to the drive to keep Mom alive.

There are tears aplenty here, and small miracles, and frustrations familiar to the family members of a cancer patient. Family history, shared at last, reveals memories that explain patterns of family behavior. "The Kindness of Strangers" details the importance of chance as sharing the news of Mom's illness leads to a chain of people who offer information about an appointment with the right doctor. The siblings struggle with Mom's apparent inability to comprehend what's happening to her, or how deadly serious it is. Nurse Sis takes on the medical

establishment to try to ensure Mom's care; the rest of the family try to soothe the feathers she's ruffled for the same reason. And when the treatments seem to be as bad as the disease, they give Mom a small puppy, whom she names Hero because "he's going to save my life!"

This book is a superb distillation of the struggles faced by families fighting cancer, and offers compassionate understanding and wisdom to help them along the way.

Marlene Satter