

Mosaic Heart: Pieces of an Unfinished Life

Donna Mazzitelli

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Donna Mazzitelli's memoir *Mosaic Heart* is about how facing cancer transformed her life.

Mazzitelli was encouraged to undertake an art project (creating mosaics to represent both her feelings of brokenness and her healing) right before she left for Florence—a trip meant to celebrate her being declared cancer free, provide stress relief, and allow her to reconnect with her Italian roots. Wandering fabled streets and visiting ancient churches, she explored pieces of the mosaic of her life—including her lapsed Catholic faith and her once-strong connection with Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The narrative's tension rises as the additional reasons behind Mazzitelli's stress are revealed: there are memories of relatives who suffered and died from cancer; there are accounts of her own struggle with the disease; there is concern over her troubled family relationships. The book is sensitive in describing emotions like grief, fear, and anger, which arose when Mazzitelli dealt with such issues. And its accounts of her solo forays in Florence, bolstered by the sense that Mary was bringing her hope, are a counterbalance and a source of release. Moving between Mazzitelli expressing resistance to self expression and yielding to her sense of self, the book's emotions are palpable.

Written as a series of poignant vignettes, the text shares Mazzitelli's intimate thoughts about facing cancer, her sense that her body had betrayed her, and her fear that she would never again feel whole, beautiful, or "perfect." But the narrative, while explicit in expressing Mazzitelli's dismay at the possibility that she would not live to see her children grow into adulthood and her rage over what she felt to be a loss of control over her life, also includes satisfying examples of growth.

A powerful analysis of how Mazzitelli's early childhood conditioning led her to assume responsibility for everyone else, to the detriment of her own growth and self-care, complements these examples of growth. Through its focus on her inner world, the text reveals how Mazzitelli's inability to speak her innermost thoughts aloud left her feeling alone and voiceless. Examples of life events that made her hide her thoughts and feelings from others are given, contributing to the raw and troubling question of whether her inability to express her inner truth led to ill health. But the book also recouches illness as a wake-up call, and suggests that inner turmoil is a given when one is making profound personal changes.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (January 17, 2022)

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