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Clarion Review ★★★★½ AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Semper Avanti

Nancy Bucceri
iUniverse (Jan 4, 2017)
Softcover $13.95 (130pp)
978-1-5320-0381-3

This work successfully blends elements of a memoir with advice for dealing with a complicated health care system.

Nancy Bucceri's *Semper Avanti* is a brief but powerful book that articulates the difficulties of dealing with the catastrophic illness of a loved one.

Presented in diary form, the book borrows from the blog its author began when her husband had a stroke. Information, such as a doctor's advice to expect progress to come in weeks, rather than days, is sometimes repeated as Bucceri struggles to cope with her new reality. The challenge of coping with the unexpected becomes a theme.

The book includes urgent advice, like "own your happiness," alongside realizations like the fact that a person can sometimes only control their response to the unexpected. Prose emphasizes the support Bucceri received from medical professionals, co-workers, and especially friends and family.

Bucceri also takes time to wonder about what the events all are like for her husband; she expresses worry for her children. Empathetic passages come across as genuine. Bucceri notes that, although Bob is in a nursing home and in a wheelchair, the family finds a way to be happy.

Humor permeates the narrative. Bob becomes "Heisenberg" when his shaved head makes him resemble Walter White from *Breaking Bad*. Later, at the command of his speech therapist, Bob shouts, "Wait for your pitch!", but substitutes a "b" for the "p."

Survival, the text shows, requires more than optimism; it requires persistence. This is most clear with passages on the challenges of dealing with the health care system and insurance companies, where the tone becomes frustrated: "The system really is designed to destroy families, drive them into poverty, and then make them dependent on the government."

Health care facilities and providers who make errors are also subject to criticism. The hospital with the "new brain center" does not have a neurosurgeon on staff; Bob is transported to receive an angiogram, but an unnecessary CAT scan is administered.

Information related to the long battle with an insurance company raises questions beyond the personal concerns that are elsewhere the focus of the narrative. Bucceri draws from her knowledge of how the health care system is supposed to work for such sections. An epilogue with strategies for coping provides directly stated advice. Though their struggles continue, Bucceri writes that the family continues to *semper avanti*, move forward.

Semper Avanti is a successful blend of memoir and advice. Those directly responsible for dealing with the serious illnesses of loved ones will find comfort and support in this slim but potent book.

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GERALDINE RICHARDS (May 10, 2017)

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