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Health & Fitness

Stand by Her: A Breast Cancer Guide for Men
John W. Anderson
AMACOM Books
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This is essentially a how-to book for men—more specifically, a what-to-do, how-to-do-it, and why-it's-important book, with a lot of emphasis on the importance of empathy and understanding. The author, John W. Anderson, a writer and director, is well suited for the role he chose to fill as a caregiver for his mother, wife, sister, and a close friend in their individual struggles with breast cancer. His experience has made him particularly sensitive to the attendant fears and insecurities unique to this disease, and to the pressures of being counted on for support.

An important element in fighting breast cancer is the "will to win," even when the odds seem overwhelm-ing. Anderson's sister Mary, a devout Catholic who prayed to the Virgin Mary, credits faith for getting her through her battle with breast cancer. His mother prayed to St. John Neumann, whose shrine was a short drive from her home. His wife, however, found the help she needed in Reiki, a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation that is also said to promote healing through spiritually guided life-force energy.

Caregivers should consider ways of reducing their own stress, a point Anderson makes in a startling confession related to a Canadian getaway at a time when his wife felt up to the trip. Writing of his unexpected breakdown, he says, "I couldn't take it any longer. I had flat-lined."

Among the post-op challenges for couples, one of the biggest is the sexual standoff. She wants him to make the first move because it will make her feel that she is still desirable. He, on the other hand, doesn't want to seem pushy. Talking to each other would seem to be a step in the right direction, but who starts the conversation?

Such candor as one finds here, along with page after page of sound practical advice and empathic counsel for every stage of this fearsome disease, make Anderson's book an undisputable choice for a place on the shortlist of guides for caregivers.

Harold Cordry