

Tara and the Place of Irish Kings

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Vanessa Davis Griggs

Sunshine Publishing (June 2008)

Softcover \$17.95 (192pp)

978-0-9798213-0-1

Tara Owen dreamed of writing a book about her life and experiences living with cystic fibrosis but she died at the age of twenty-eight before she could fulfill that dream. Her book based on her writings and journal entries was written instead by her mother with the skillful aid of Vanessa Davis Griggs an award-winning author and motivational speaker.

One might expect a book about someone with a debilitating incurable illness to provoke depression and morbidity but quite the opposite is true here; although Tara knew her prognosis and the loss of the friends she had made among other young people who also had CF was a constant reminder that death was coming for her too she was able to say that “Dealing with CF I’ve learned not only to be ready for death but not to fear it” and “As strange as it may seem I wouldn’t trade or change my life for anything.”

Beginning with stories of her Irish-Lebanese ancestors Tara traced her family’s past on their Alabama farm lovingly built by their own hands and called by Tara “the place of Irish kings” since she was a small child. She grew up on the farm and it was the place she chose to come home to just before her death. Engagingly written Tara’s story tells of her growth from a tiny frail child whose survival was uncertain to her life as a beautiful accomplished and adventurous young woman who did all the things young women aspire to and more. Her illness could not keep her from living on her own at college traveling to Europe with friends holding a job falling in love several times and managing her condition with the help and care of doctors and medical staff who treated her with compassion and skill from her birth. Personal milestones and events in the community on the farm and in the hospital are recalled with sparkle zest and a good dose of fun to offset the difficulties of living with serious illness.

That the death of such a strong and courageous woman should have come so early is indeed saddening; that it should have been hastened by an unwanted change in medical care facilities and staff that resulted in the administration of the wrong medication at a time of crisis evokes not just sadness but anger. Tara’s futile attempts to be heard by those who might have done something for her and the other patients whose care was transferred to the new facility are heartbreaking. Even so her grace love and courage in facing death and her joyful and exuberant life offer a gift to those who knew her and to all who will know her through reading this beautifully crafted and inspiring book.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May 28, 2008)

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