

## Waging War on Cancer: Dr. Pettit's Lifelong Quest to Find Cures

**Robert S. Byars**

**G. Robert Pettit**

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*This engaging memoir sparkles with anecdotes about a scientist's quest to find cures for cancer.*

A prominent cancer researcher shares the trials and tribulations of his productive career in this engaging biography. Told to Robert S. Byars, *Waging War on Cancer* is the story of Dr. G. Robert Pettit. Dedicated to the development of lifesaving drugs, his anticancer quest has led to advancements in medicine, and his knowledge has inspired the work of countless students. He is known for his discovery of numerous compounds—bryostatins, auristatins, and dolastatins.

Written in the candid first person from Pettit's perspective, this engaging memoir sparkles with anecdotes and asides—fascinating details that expose background, motivation, and character. This incredible book is based on countless hours of interview transcripts edited by Byars. Early in his studies, Pettit focused on natural sources to combat cancer—in particular, marine life. The ocean may hold the secret to longevity. Time-consuming, expensive, and challenging, perhaps even dangerous, this pursuit requires participants to be in top-notch physical and mental health.

Dark humor enhances the text and adds an appealing touch of adventure. This harrowing description is an example of what he endured while in the ocean: "I didn't like the looks of things from what I knew about shark psychology. When they hunch their backs, like they were doing, that's a signal you are probably on the menu. A couple of them were doing this, and getting closer and closer."

Still active at age eighty-five, Pettit will not give up his endless search for a cure for cancer. He considers himself an environmentalist and conservationist, so he has always exercised caution: "Generally, even if a marine animal, insect, or plant was abundant, we would only collect about a kilogram of the specimens—two pounds at most. We would not collect any more until we proved in the laboratory that it contained an active anticancer agent."

Despite devastating setbacks, including the loss of a complex laboratory needed to conduct his work, he forges ahead at Arizona State University in Tempe. His dedication and passion remain the controlling force. He chooses to ignore the conflict typical in competitive fields for the sake of a higher good.

Byars has engaged in meticulous behind-the-scenes work—writing and editing—allowing an insider's look at Pettit. He presents his material in an orderly manner, yet loses nothing in dramatic flair. This stylistic technique augments the quality, making the book an interesting read even for an audience not inclined to pursue the subject matter. Its one flaw is a tendency to repeat bits of information, although this does not detract from the overall value.

Pettit is witty and honest, displaying an analytical mind few possess. He strives to educate as well as to entertain anyone who takes an interest in his experiences, elaborating on a mixture of negative and positive events that reveal an ambitious winner who refuses to give up.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (March 30, 2015)

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