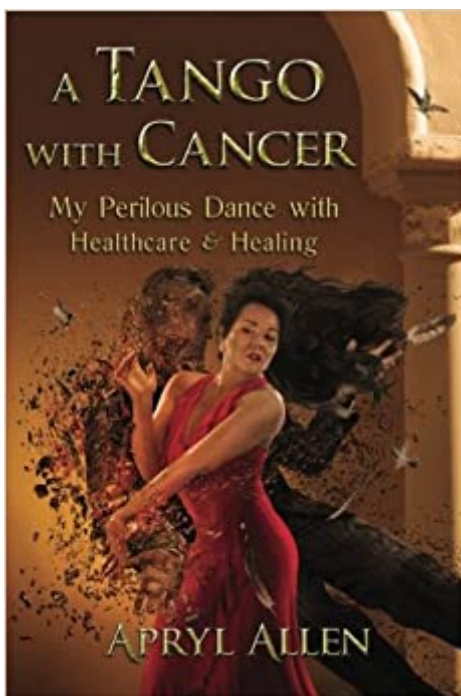


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A Tango With Cancer: My Perilous Dance With Healthcare & Healing



Synopsis

“The fight against cancer isn’t necessarily limited to eradicating it from your body; too often it continues with the very system that’s supposed to heal us.” Apryl Allen Apryl Allen was desperate to learn what her future would hold after a diagnosis of breast cancer. What she didn’t anticipate was an underlying factor no one talked about . . . healthcare. Depicting the poignant complexities patients encounter, Apryl takes us deep into the realities of the human side of the disease: the nerve-wracking undertakings of her quest to find multiple health specialists through the aftermath of medical bills. *A Tango with Cancer* reminds us compassion is a vital element to the healing process. It also reveals how, in today’s medical world, many health professionals have abandoned the practice of altruism.

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Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Medical

Customer Reviews

"Prepare to fall in love with the heroine of this gripping tale. If you like Jodi Picoult, you'll love Apryl Allen. Brave and vulnerable, funny and sad, heart-achingly honest - this illuminating story is an astonishing debut for a major new writing talent. But this is not fiction. Apryl Allen is telling her own heart-rending tale of a battle against cancer and the inhumanity of a medical system that so often doesn't see the person in the patient. This book should be a compulsory text for every health professional and is a riveting read for everyone else." -Dr Robin Youngson (New Zealand) Founder of Hearts in Healthcare Author of: 'Time to Care' "This is one of those stories none of us envision ourselves being the heroine (or the hero), but the sad reality of our times is that we most likely we

will be. Apryl Allen's well-written and riveting memoir of her battle, not just with a dreaded and frightening disease, but with our insensitive, uncaring, and inhumane healthcare system, is compelling, engrossing and alarmingly accurate. A Tango with Cancer is one of those vital books that should sit on every American's nightstand, because even if you escape cancer yourself, it's a good bet one of your family members or a close friend won't. As a cancer survivor myself and, as of six months ago, having endured sarcasm, duplicitousness and disdain during the care of my husband who died of leukemia, I know of wherefore I speak. The torture of this painful disease was ungodly, but because he was an "un-healthy" patient, translate that to "terminal," he was only valuable to the hospital as long as his insurance held out. Shockingly, we have devolved in our efforts to help our fellow human beings. This spot light that Apryl Allen illuminates, is not centered on herself. This selfless, passionate and courageous woman has spent two years of her life bringing this book to the public domain-her only wish is to help others through this maze of insanity." - Catherine Lanigan Cancer Survivor & Spouse of Cancer Victim Bestselling Author of 'Romancing the Stone' "A Tango should be required reading for all those who deliver care to patients with cancer or any life threatening health concern. Compelling and provocative. A triumphant assertion of personal courage and individual rights within an increasingly impersonal health care system." -William B Miller, Jr, MD Author of The Microcosm Within "Apryl Allen takes us through her healing journey with breast cancer using candor, humor and grace. Navigating the medical industry after a diagnosis can be daunting, but as Apryl shows us, there are always those individuals and new genomic tests which make the process easier." -Cari Grundman, Patient Advocate Agendia, Inc. (a Molecular Diagnostics Company) Breast Cancer Survivor "Cancer is a team event you have many Doctors and professionals on the medical side of things as you can imagine. But you also better prepare and set up your own team for support and help as you fight your battle. Cancer is all consuming to the one inflicted and it also creates collateral damage to those around you. Your caregivers and family need to know what is ahead of them and be prepared. Cancer can be defeated with all the new treatments available but if you as a patient or caregiver are not leading that charge and have the mind set to do that it will be a long battle. I unfortunately had to learn that from 22 years watching the strongest woman I have ever known deal with cancer head on and with Grace. This book is a great look into just what to expect when confronting Cancer. I wish a book like this was available to me 22 years ago, we might have prepared differently for my families battle with the disease. Thank you Apryl for sharing your experience." - Scott McPherson Husband & Caregiver to Spouse with Cancer

APRYL ALLEN has written and recorded two award-winning albums, 'Morningstar' and 'Shape Shifter'. As a member of the Comanche Nation she is actively involved to preserve her tribe's dying language and stories handed down. Her current project, 'Shape Shifter', takes these narratives and weaves them into a fictional Native American trilogy based on historical fantasy. The Comanche Nation has acknowledged her efforts by proclamation on November 7, 2008 naming it 'Apryl Allen Day'. As a survivor of breast cancer and child abuse, Apryl views life as sacred "a gift we should all cherish. Her dream, as a survivor and member of a dying culture, is to be a voice that echoes throughout time. She lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

I highly recommend this book to healthcare providers first and foremost, as a reminder that what we do on a daily basis and how we interact with patients can either enhance healing or create additional trauma. The healthcare system has lost its way, it operates like a giant processing plant without a thought of the restoration that patients seek after finding out they have a potentially life-threatening illness. "Is nobody thoughtful?" she asks. The book was easy to read from the standpoint of page-turning, but it was heartbreaking to read the callousness she and her husband endured, and the caring that was omitted from their shared experience. Unfortunately their experience was not unusual and our industrial approach to healthcare continues to ensure that more patients will suffer. Patients come into the healthcare system unprepared for this, and we do not educate the public on how to navigate the healthcare system, not even a few helpful initial tips on self-advocacy. We need to change this, and Apryl Allen makes the case for many of these changes, which she suggests at the end of the book. The whole time I was reading it, I alternated emotions between anger and shock at how the system operates, and I kept asking how she could possibly stand to recount all of this, it must have been extraordinarily painful to relive these experiences. I'm glad she did, though. The voices in healthcare who are screaming for change and the patients who are screaming for change must join forces as allies to fix a system that is neither health nor care.

Beautifully written from the heart, this truthful journey through the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer by sometimes callous healthcare professionals is a must read for patients, caregivers and friends. Brutally honest with humor thrown in for relief, the style fits the bill. Cancer is a serious matter. The attitude with which it is approached is critical. So forewarned is forearmed. Thank you Apryl..

Phenomenal writing and a true story. For anyone personally going through cancer or as the advocate for a loved one, this book is a must. Even if you don't need this book, chances are you will. If you know of anyone going through the torture of cancer, don't hesitate to recommend Apryl Allen's absorbing and informative book

My Hope Is That You Sit This Dance Out! was attracted to this book for two reasons: First, I am a cancer survivor and second, I always wished I could dance, but never really mastered it. I hoped Apryl Allen's book would help me to better understand how much more so many others suffer when they first hear the dreaded "you have cancer" diagnosis. I'm also glad that my own dancing skills were so poor that the Cancer dude decided not to spend a lot of time with me. Sometimes it pays to be a wallflower. This author was anything but. She believes in fate playing a role in everyone's life, but unfortunately she never gives us a good handle on exactly what fate is or how it works. For her, it just seems to be what happens. The book is full of what I call "gems" partly because they are so true and partly because they are so obvious. One example is "Happiness is the best medicine when you're sick." Another is "No doctor calls with good news." With each one, a reader can relate to some of his/her own experience. For me, this latter one reminded me of the day I had met my son for lunch and we were sitting in the patio of a Greek restaurant on Avenue Road in Toronto when my doctor called with the news that I had cancer. There is much to learn from a book like this as well. For example, I learned MRI's are sometimes undertaken when they can't find the problematic nodule through a mammogram. Or, that some doctors say having had breast implants is not a cause of breast cancer based on the fact that those are the very things they insert after a woman has had a mastectomy and wants reconstruction surgery. [Whether you buy that argument or not is up to you, but it reminds me of what much of the medical community says about abortions, i.e., "it's a very simple and safe procedure." Just ask many of the women that will tell you otherwise.] She provides us with solid information on specific tests that study the genes and behavior of a cancerous tumor to predict the risk factor of its return by uncovering its hidden biology. And much more. We identify with Apryl's search for a way to ask a doctor which option of treatment he/she would pursue if the patient were his wife or his daughter, without making them liable for any choice they give you. Good luck on that. We realize with the author (partly because she keeps reminding us) that cancer is indeed as individual as the person themselves. We also have to content ourselves with the fact that even practitioners tell us, "there's no

such thing as "the best doctor in a field" but rather it's all about who you feel more comfortable with. Add to that the fact that so many good doctors in the same field can disagree so readily with each other on not only the diagnosis but also the treatment even when the diagnosis is the same. How alarming.

Allen communicates her story as a narrative in the present tense giving us sometimes moment by moment, other times day by day or month by month accounts of what she experienced and how she felt. With that, she is able to convey the high demands that are imposed on a cancer patient (or their advocate) if they are to beat the disease. There's an excellent "sidebar" on how difficult it is to tell various people about what you're going through as a cancer patient. She has a wonderful handle of the different type of listeners (or non-listeners) that one encounters when embarking on such communication. Throughout the book, the author praises her husband for his commitment to her and his willingness to be there for her whenever and wherever. There is no doubt that one's chance of victory here is greatly enhanced by the presence of such a partner and/or close friend. Her accounts of what irritates her (and sometimes her husband) when under this kind of stress is most honest and serves to point out how we change under such circumstances. She saves a good deal of her disgust with the medical system as a whole, for incompetent administrative staff, inconsiderate professionals, uncaring insurance companies, and processes that are designed with anything but the patient in mind. She wonders, as I have for years, how on earth those who don't speak the language, or have no one to advocate for them, ever have a chance of navigating the troublesome waters of our medical system. The very thought of what can go wrong and often does is enough to give one cancer!

Time and time again she comes to grips with the fact that although we have taken all the measures we possibly can to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, we ultimately can only resort to praying for the impossible. Perhaps because she is a Native American (Comanche) she resorts to more than prayer as we normally think of it and involves herself somewhat with the occult, where she attempts to be, and actually believes she is, in contact with her deceased mother. In conclusion, she wrote the book because nothing she had read when she was a cancer patient, ever came close to describing how one actually feels and what one actually thinks throughout the whole process. This book accomplished that with great success.

Ken B. Godevenos, President, Accord Resolutions Services Inc., Toronto, Ontario, December 7, 2016.

[...]

Apryl Allen's journey through the healthcare system when she is diagnosed with breast cancer is both heartbreaking and disturbing. She encounters too few compassionate individuals as she

struggles to regain her composure and her good health, and far too many robots and bean counters just going through the motions in a system that is badly in need of reform. Allen's experiences may hopefully inspire others to become their own best patient advocate and search for alternative therapies that are far more effective and humane than hospitalization, testing and chemotherapy.

Allen has penned a frightening, yet honest and insightful memoir of her experience in the Kafkaesque reality of a healthcare system more interested in profit and bureaucracy than patient-centred, healing care. Through her experience with serious illness, Allen reveals the harm caused by a system that has forgotten that patients are people, and that healing starts when healthcare providers listen, acknowledge, and address patient suffering. Unfortunately, Allen is not alone in her experience. By forgetting its twin mandate to relieve patient suffering, healthcare has lost its humanity. We need a curriculum that enhances compassion and awareness for everyone who works in this field. And for those who do, they would benefit from reading Allen's cautionary tale. As Anatole Broyard said, "A hospital is full of wonderful and terrible stories, and if I were a doctor I would read them as one reads good fiction and let them educate me."

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