

The Last Promise

Kristin M Mooney

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This intimate look at a family's ordeal with cancer and death will help others looking for guidance.

The Last Promise, by Kristin M Mooney, is a poignant memoir of her husband Paul's battle with an aggressive form of lymphoma, and the deathbed promise she made. The book is an intimate look at the family's ordeal, from the time Paul called home from military duty in Iraq with the news that he could possibly have cancer, through the long road of his chemotherapy and a failed stem cell transplant.

The details are harrowing, but the author's aim is to show how her family navigated these complicated medical treatments, and thereby to offer "a way to not dwell in the negative and find a way to direct your energy and love into something positive." She achieves these goals by sharing personal details about how she and Paul tackled these treatment decisions, and by relating their tragic conversations when his cancer moved into its terminal stage.

Sometimes the book veers off from this direction, however. The memoir is most compelling when the author shares passages about how the couple dealt with the shock of Paul's diagnosis, his course of cancer treatments, end-of-life decisions, and Kristin's fulfillment of her "last promise." Detracting from these powerful and inspiring themes are other mundane details that resemble journal entries or missives to be shared with a close circle of friends and family. For example, when Kristin resigned from working at her church, there was a disagreement with the pastor about some duties she wanted to continue, and there are several pages about this dispute. Other sections contain specifics about restaurants, family visits, the logistics of child care, and air travel; this extraneous detail bogs down the narrative and dilutes the central focus of the book.

The author does a good job of providing anecdotes about Paul and their pre-cancer life. However, most of these stories come later in the book. By page 20, for instance, only the most cursory details about Paul and Kristin have been revealed, whereas later paragraphs about Paul's sense of humor or the couple's courtship would be better served up front to invest readers in their story.

The book shares a great deal of helpful information about cancer treatments, types of stem cell transplants, and pre- and post-transplant procedures. There are valuable insights about how the couple dealt with their emotional upheaval during Paul's illness, such as how he preemptively shaved his head in advance of chemotherapy. The author also does an excellent job of explaining complicated medical terms to a lay audience, though the addition of a short glossary in the back would be helpful.

With tighter editing and elimination of some of the superfluous details described above, *The Last Promise* would be even more riveting. The memoir should attract readers who have experienced similar illnesses and are looking for guidance and information about how to prepare for a long and complicated medical ordeal. Others will find comfort in the author's inspirational and hopeful account.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (July 21, 2014)

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