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Hospice Palliative Care Book Reviews & The Palliative Care Book of the Month

Dr. Woodruff, MD (Australia)

Book of the Month

ARMED WITH CHOCOLATE FROGS: Living With Advanced Breast Cancer

Kate Carey Productions, 2006 190 pp ISBN 0-9775529-1-8

Available at www.overthefencepress.com.au/katecarey

RRP \$AUS 24.95

I welcomed a new class of palliative care volunteers yesterday. I told them they needed to read this book. Today, the next rotation of medical students has arrived. They didn't get a choice—I told them they had to read this book. Under the auspices of Breast Cancer Network Australia and with the assistance of a professional writer, Christine Gillespie, twenty brave women with advanced breast cancer have written down what is in their heads and in their hearts.

It's all here. The agony of waiting, waiting, waiting for results; sometimes losing it altogether, real dummy-spits. The pain caused by doctors' arrogant or inept communication. The joy of getting home, being with loved ones, savouring family milestones they thought they might never see. Husbands for whom nothing is too much, others who leave. Coping with physical disfigurement or your hair coming back white. Problems with bras and wigs and artificial boobs. The benefits of support groups. Dealing with children.

*'Strained and hesitant, my son asks
"Mum, are you dying?"
And I am undone.'*

But there is also a lot of warmth and humour in this book. Your adult son trying to explain his way through Australian Customs with a year's supply of oestrogen-free vaginal moisturizer. And what happened with the marijuana cookies.

This priceless collection of anecdotes is an invaluable tool for helping health care professionals (including my medical students and the volunteers) think about what is going on in the hearts and minds of patients with advanced cancer. Fearing dying, yes; but loving living more. You cannot help but be impressed by the resilience and the personal growth of these women with advancing metastatic disease. For anyone suffering the disease and those close to them, this book would be a great comfort. And the chocolate frogs? Well, you'll have to read it.

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