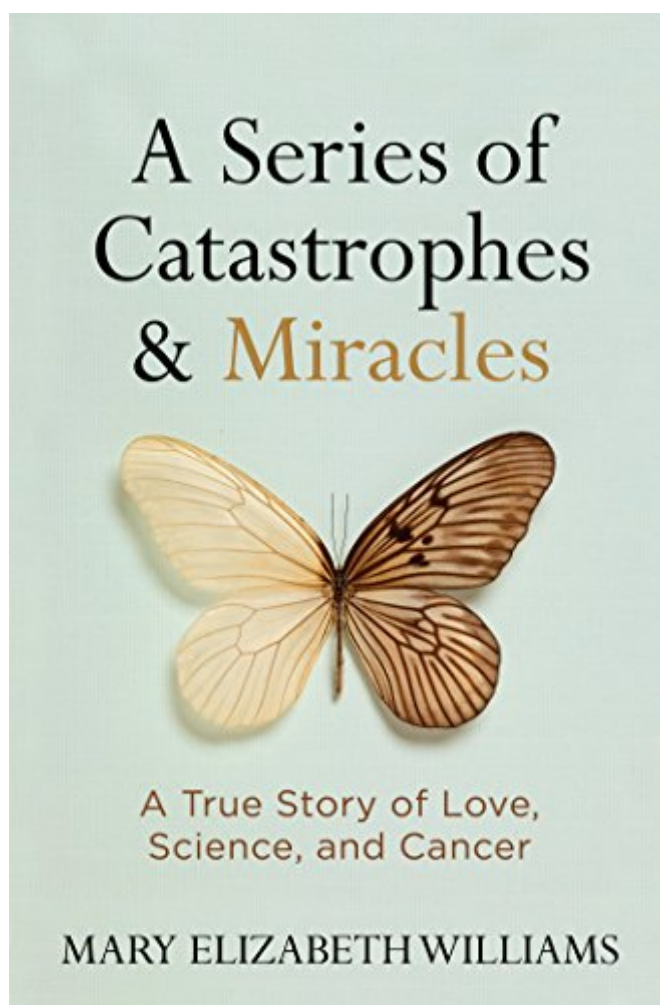


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A Series Of Catastrophes And Miracles: A True Story Of Love, Science, And Cancer



Synopsis

A wry, witty account of what it is like to face death and be restored to life. After being diagnosed in her early 40s with metastatic melanoma—a "rapidly fatal" form of cancer—a journalist and mother of two Mary Elizabeth Williams finds herself in a race against the clock. She takes a once-in-a-lifetime chance and joins a clinical trial for immunotherapy, a revolutionary drug regimen that trains the body to vanquish malignant cells. Astonishingly, her cancer disappears entirely in just a few weeks. But at the same time, her best friend embarks on a cancer journey of her own—with very different results. Williams's experiences as a patient and a medical test subject reveal with stark honesty what it takes to weather disease, the extraordinary new developments that are rewriting the rules of science—and the healing power of human connection.

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Customer Reviews

Author and Salon.com senior staff writer Mary Elizabeth Williams has just released a most amazing

book. It tells the story of her diagnosis and treatment of stage four malignant melanoma over the course of two years. Cancer memoirs today are unfortunately as common as a dime a dozen, but this book is about as far from the "I-fought-my-courageous-battle-with cancer-and-heroically-beat-it" formula as you can get. Instead, we readers get a superbly written and very human view of what maintaining a life and a family in the face of probable death looks like. It contains a wealth of medical information around the emerging use of immunotherapy as the first truly new treatment for cancer in a hundred years, presented in easy to understand plain English. Her story takes us through the traumas of surgery, recovery, and recurrence, and relates the loss of friends and the difficulty of holding a family together, but it is the author's deft and frequent use of humor that got this reader through this troubling tale. Her humor is as natural and insightful as it is pervasive throughout. It should be noted that this book is for everyone, whether or not cancer has touched your life. As a person who has so far survived a cancer diagnosis whose preliminary prediction was for a 5% chance of three-year survival, I feel a unique bond as she shares the cringe worthy details of the cancer experience from both a physical as well as emotional point of view. As I read through this book, the word that kept popping up in my head was "honest." We are presented with a brand of honesty that is so direct, unassuming, and shameless as to be almost painful. Those of you who are already familiar with Ms. Williams writing will know that she is particularly adept at writing pithy endings to her articles, and without spoiling, let me just say she knocks this ending out of the park. Finally, I have two pieces of advice: buy this wonderful book, and go with the jumbo box of tissues.

I've long enjoyed Mary Elizabeth's columns on Salon. This book manages to be upbeat and informative, poignant but not depressing. A candid look at the capriciousness of this horrible disease. MEW avoids all the cliches and adds a dash of humor and humility to her grueling story. What we all need is a model of how to behave when tragedy strikes, and this Ms. Williams provides in spades. For me, the second half of the book went off track just a tad with page after page of praise for the doctors and treatment and paeans to the friends she's lost to cancer. Not quite as authentic as the first half--but still, worth reading.

Fair haired little redhead girl struck down by aggressive and invasive melanoma in the prime of her life. Mary Elizabeth takes us into her life so that we can truly understand her plight, her massive amount of times she's been stuck with needles for check her blood, all the while she makes this

gruesome journey I am pulling for her to stomp out this nasty vicious bitch. Thank you for participating and walking with faith into that treatment room time and again. One does this for themselves and their families but for those they don't know and will never know. As one redhead to another, thanks for contributing to science to the rest of us pale gingers. Read this in good health~ And thanks.

With humor, humility, and grace, Mary Elizabeth Williams takes us inside her home, her family, her treatment, and her friendships to show us what living with Stage 4 cancer is really like. Williams is lucky; a medical trial cures her cancer and saves her life. But as the author makes clear, this book isn't a victory lap. In it she recounts the painful loss of her close friend to the disease, as well as many others around her. She eviscerates the victim-blaming culture that characterizes dying of cancer as "losing the battle" as well as the survivor-celebrating culture. Among the scars this disease leaves behind is the painful awareness that how a diagnosis with cancer turns out is not up to you.

Mary Elizabeth Williams writes about her cancer in deeply personal terms, from her diagnosis through the clinical trial which, against the odds, made her deadly melanoma disappear. Using targeted therapies that allow the immune system to identify and kill cancer cells is seen as a critical development in cancer treatment. Ms Williams educates readers about this new world of cancer treatment while she entertains with her sharp wit. This book is funny, sad, informative, moving and a must read for anyone who has cancer or anyone who knows someone who has ever had cancer. Basically, everyone should read this book.

I first fell in love with Mary Elizabeth Williams reading her articles on Salon. Cancer isn't my first go-to novel genre but Mary Elizabeth makes cancer seem, you know, as messed up as it is, but relatable. While I appreciated her layman's explanation of immunotherapy, I was more intrigued by the relationships that cancer parses in real life. Wheat from the chaff, as it were. It's a beautiful love letter to friendship and support without all the cancer pinkwash. You might come for the cancer, but you'll stay for the way she writes, which is incandescent.

I love this book for helping me breathe in the company of cancer. The prose is lovely and interesting and paced just right. I feel the sadness and the fear that's part of the terrain, but at the same time I am delighted by the insightful, funny and accurate observations Mary Elizabeth makes about how

she endured it and what it all meant to her. I so appreciate the idea that we don't beat cancer by being good, but sometimes good science happens and then cancer loses! It's a story and an outcome that we all need to know is possible. Kristin Keefe

I have cancer, but shied away from reading 'cancer books' until I read a review in the NYTimes of this book. It 'shows' humor, honesty, relationships, science, and hope, but doesn't 'tell' it. My whole family is reading it, from mom to sisters and wife.

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