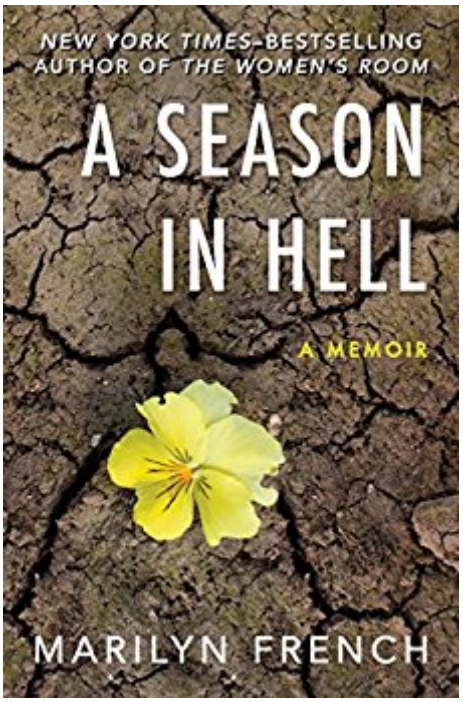
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A Season In Hell: A Memoir



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Synopsis

An extraordinary memoir on facing death . . . and choosing lifeWhere thereÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a will . . .Given a death sentence after being diagnosed with cancer, Marilyn French fought back . . . and won.Ã Â A Season in HellÃ Â is the story of her battle to survive against overwhelming odds.A smoker for almost half a century, French was diagnosed with esophageal cancer in the summer of 1992. She was given a year to live, but five years later, she was, incredibly, cancer free. In this inspiring account, French chronicles her journey, from her reaction to the devastating news, to the chemotherapy that almost killed her, to her miraculous return to life following a two-week coma. She shares her feelings on apathetic doctors, the vital importance of a support network of friends and family, and how her near-death experience forever altered her perspective and priorities.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I would recommend this book to people who have had a hard time through recovery from cancer. This woman had several other trouble through the cancer

As a Cancer survivor myself, I was interested in her experience. She is a good writer, but sometimes the writing prose interferes with the story.

Boy, was this a good book! It is very well written, with good insight. It details what happens in serious illness (or injury) and shows mileposts one reaches, although previously one didn't expect them. She had cancer in 1992, had chemo and radiation, and it destroyed her health, her spine, her heart, and her kidneys, but got rid of the cancer. She went from a wonderful life to a most difficult life, aiming only for small pleasures, expecting nothing from the future. In a way, it was a lesson in mindfulness. She learned from the experience, and I appreciated reading what she learned.She lived 17 years after the cancer and had not been expected to live for one year, if that. In addition to the medical protocols of that time, this book gives a glimpse into the feminist movement and what an author's life is like.

I admire Marilyn French's fiction, so I was intrigued when I saw this book about her struggle with esophogeal cancer. Granted, cancer of any kind is horrific and causes much physical and psychological pain. However, Ms. French is an exception in that most cancer patients (especially thanks to Obamacare) do not have access to round-the-clock nurses; the best doctors (or friends like Gloria Steinem who can recommend them) or a luxurious apartment overlooking Central Park as well as homes in Florida and the Berkshires to convalesce in. I empathized with her frustration with the doctors, but one particular section made me livid. She had been dismissed from the hospital and had three nurses to stay with her at night. She began a feminist diatribe about these nurses--they were studying for their RN's and had husbands who wouldn't help around the house or help take care of children. How these women live their personal lives is not Ms. French's concern and certainly telling them how to 'improve' themselves is not her place. Why can't she be grateful without being so freaking judgemental? Other than that, the book was a detailed look into the struggle against cancer and how she eventually overcame it. Sadly, she died in 2009. She will be missed. Recommended--but not highly.

Buyers remorse for sure....as much as I admired Ms. French's writing in the Womens Room, this account of the devastating diagnosis and treatment of esophageal cancer was disappointing. If you are personally dealing with this deadly cancer in your life, as I am, save yourself from thinking this book can offer you any hope or comfort. It is the diary of an angry person who never seemed to

realize or appreciate the immense support of friends and family in her life. I can't delete it from my library fast enough.....

This is a wonderful memoir and very very eye-opening. It scared me to death. I will have to definitely think twice before I choose to "fight" if the cancer is bad enough. She made me realize that some things are worse than death. I personally would not want to live with the damaged heart, kidneys, brain, bones, etc. that she has now to live with thanks to the poison put into her body to rid her of the cancer. This is one brave woman and I applaud her. I do think she had it easier because she is wealthy. Those of us common folk would probably die and not be able to fight like her anyway due to lack of funds. All in all, this is a great book and everyone should read it. It is reality and admittedly reality sucks, but that's life. Again, I applaud this author, great book !!

Marilyn French's "A Season in Hell" is a disarmingly honest account of her life/death battle with Esophageal Cancer, but just as importantly her memoir is a testimony to her honesty and unfailing conviction that life under any circumstances is worth living, if mostly in terms of what the heightened powers of the intellect can bestow on the human condition. Make no mistake about it, this intelligent woman analyzes life while in the deepest of physical and emotional pain. This is a woman one can imagine standing at the pearly gates, discussing with St. Peter what she learned on a gurney in the Emergency Room. One has to hand it to her for the courage she displayed facing the unknown and the terrible scourge of cancer. This book is a testimony to what it takes to live and think under the worst circumstances known to man. French wants us to celebrate life with all the curiosity and analytic powers we possess, even as she suffers without respite. Life is affirmed for both reader and writer by this serious, grim account of one woman's audacity in the face of death.Told by her doctors and friends over the years that she should quit smoking, she held onto the habit until it was too late. This reveals her own stubbornness and perhaps anxiety that she would persist in the self-destructive behavior that brought her to her terminal condition. We can imagine the hubris that prompted her disregard of common sense. This is a woman whose intellect is more lofty than most, but alas perhaps it was too self-absorbed, too analytical and intellectually self-indulgent to weigh the consequences of her denial. Yet with heartfelt feeling in the face of despair and hopelessness, French depicts the power of the existential approach to human suffering. Without concern for her image or fate, she wills her vision of what her final life chapter is to be: a fight like hell to assert her right to live and express herself. Whatever obstacles the medical profession places in her way, no matter the negativity and incompetence of various practitioners, she will march unflaggingly to her

own tune and on her own terms. For that we must regard her journey as heroic; she is indeed a trailblazer in the sense that Farah Fawcett was or Susan Sontag, other icons of authenticity.That is not to say that French didn't exercise her own blatant denial in the face of her illness as well as her continued smoking habit. She admits herself that while she had always been motivated by the search for truth and secretly despised those who feared it and glossed over dark possibilities, she herself manipulated her grasp of the facts of her disease, internalizing a magical version of it so as to preserve her will to live. Although she did not mind confrontation, she simply could not accept the obvious truth of her condition without "lying to myself." She admits doing so made the ordeal more bearable and granted her some optimism in the process. Her doctors were not positive about her prognosis, but she earnestly persisted in her hope, probably enjoying the assertion of her own authority over those who had control over her. Even dying, she was a feminist to the core, insisting in the face of opposition, that she had a right to her own choices. Although she was told she had a year to live, she insisted on the fact that she had a chance, and she would pursue it. Simultaneously she resisted the indignity of measures that would prolong her life at the expense of her faculties. She would hold onto life as long as there was hope. Period.The painful process of healing was interminable, but its joys were many as well. Her family took her to the Berkshires to rest. Friends from all over humored and supported her. Their constant attention and support provided the nourishing blanket her fear required. She doggedly continued her writing, as if that allowed her to preserve her identity intact as it had been before her treatment for a terminal illness. During her suffering, French takes some consolation from the fact that she no longer has hard feelings about her past. She observes in other terminal patients the conflicted passions of childhood and marvels that they have held onto such negativity for so long; at the same time, she harbors the same toward doctors and other seemingly uncaring professionals. Sixty-one, she felt she'd had a satisfying life. At ten she knew she wanted to be a writer; she had the ambition and discipline to achieve her goal, and did. Her satisfaction at that fulfillment speaks to the strength she was able to martial to deal with her disease. In recognizing the blessings of her life, she acknowledges her own "fierceness", "intensity" and "volatility," but she realizes those very qualities helped her to overcome her own feelings of being unloved as a child. Moreover, she takes pride in the fact that while derailed for the two decades of her life that she submitted to that sentiment, she now focuses on the fact that she grew beyond that stage and is happy with the years after that. She "craved knowledge" and sought it out even when the sky was dimmed by her own despair. Her curiosity and search for truth were the instruments by which she made her life meaningful, and she is proud of that throughout her ordeal. It is indeed her red badge of courage. She saw knowledge as a vehicle for "living on a

higher plane" of good taste and aesthetics, all part of the elite life she sought and finally gained. And she admits that despite the fact that eventually she had it all: travel, excitement, a beautiful home in Manhattan, intellectually stimulating dinner parties with informed conversation, she never thought about the moral imperatives much, about the decency or lack thereof of her associates. Not caring whether she had a conventional life, she nevertheless acquired it by marrying and having children, a quirk of nature, but satisfying and fulfilling.What was particularly interesting in French's description of her ordeal, is that she never expresses self-pity or regret. Disease is what it is, something to be endured and overcome but not a cause for others' or her own despair. While she is in constant pain, and while she is often angry at the dismissive nature of certain professionals, she does not allow herself to dwell on the pain or misery of her situation. Instead she focuses on the meaning of her plight, the turns and twists of the pathology itself, drawing from the symptoms and her own reactions some meaning in the process of physical suffering. She observes the people around her and their sorry fates as part of the grand dimension of life: That which is worth clinging to and savoring for its meaning, however that meaning is blurred by the temporary aspects of pain and limitation. For this stoicism, we have to applaud her. Her coven, her friends, her family are all part of the elaborate support system that has helped to endow her life and her suffering with transcendent meaning.For, as French reminds us, "When we die, all we are possessed of is our experience." And in that sense we are in control of what we make of life. She does not subscribe to determinism or a monotheistic god, but she does acknowledge the significance of "coming to terms with the inexorable conditions of our lives." Yet it is the individual who chooses the route to that and who determines the quality of his own life. "Richness" in life is determined by the quality of the "experience," and "the wider and richer our interactions and connections, the richer our life." She asserts that "When we are old and look back, it is only this that matters. The rest is all props." Moreover, French acknowledges at the end that although we all cling to life, death is a "calm far deeper than any I felt in life." In fact, to French, "Death is a friend." Finally, French is grateful for her sickness that allowed her to affirm both life and death and to be grateful for the experiences she forged with tenacity borne of her belief in the existential notion that our will defines our being. Thus, "A Season in Hell" is ultimately affirming of life and death and as such is well worth reading for all seekers out there.Marjorie MeyerleAuthor Bread of Shame, a literary novel

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