



# **Let Me Get This Off My Chest: A Breast Cancer Survivor Over-Shares**

*Margaret Lesh*

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## **Let Me Get This Off My Chest: A Breast Cancer Survivor Over-Shares** Margaret Lesh

Tamoxifen hot flashes, mastectomy, reconstruction, breast cancer etiquette, Frankenboobs, bras with special attachments—Margaret Lesh shares all in her funny, heartfelt collection of essays, anecdotes, and life lessons from the perspective of a two-time breast cancer survivor. She'll tell you when it's okay to play the cancer card, what you should take to the hospital, and gives suggestions on how to cope in those dark moments of the soul. With practical tips sprinkled throughout, *Let Me Get This Off My Chest* explores how breast cancer changed her outlook on life, offering honest insights, humor, and sensitivity as she looks for the silver lining in a not-so-great situation.

Whether you are a woman diagnosed with breast cancer or whether you know someone with breast cancer, this book was written for you.

## **Let Me Get This Off My Chest: A Breast Cancer Survivor Over-Shares Details**

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# From Reader Review *Let Me Get This Off My Chest: A Breast Cancer Survivor Over-Shares* for online ebook

## **Jeanne says**

This book does memoir right. Perfectly paced and deliciously readable, *Let Me Get This Off My Chest* combines self-help, education, humor, and reflection. The book is so beautifully human--personal without being over done, funny without being distracting. Have you read memoirs or non-fiction where you skip chunks because the author trails off into filler? Gunk that makes the book longer but not better? There is no gunk here, except the gunk left behind by surgical tape, no filler except the saline in the post-mastectomy Frankenboobs. The author chose to organize the book in a VERY useful, entertaining way and though you might \*have to\* finish the book in one sitting, if you do read a few pages and have to set it down, you'll be able to pick right back up as though you never left. That's a well-told story.

The book's themes are very universally applicable. Anyone whose life has been touched by illness, injury, loss can relate to it without that exhausting feeling of being emotionally dragged back through the hard time. The book's tone balances a difficult subject with lovely precision--never overly painful, never like opening a wound--this was like having a cup of coffee with a friend whose been there. The author is both a thoughtful person and a skilled writer--those qualities are reflected in the various scenarios she shares--the wig party (LOVED THIS!!) is a scene I will remember for years to come; the loss of women in her life going through the same thing when their paths diverge. Support groups, spouses, work, money--all the good stuff is there but told in a way that hasn't been done to death and I don't think has been done this well until now.

If you think reading a book about cancer will scare you or make you sad, don't be afraid. This book won't hurt, I promise, unless belly laughs cause you pain. But even then, it's worth it.

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## **Kimberly says**

I picked up this book after receiving my cancer diagnosis. It was a warm and funny account of the author's experience with breast cancer. To me, I found it a relief to know that I didn't need to be the perfect, brave cancer patient as often portrayed in TV and movies. The author humanizes the experience with a terrific sense of humor. Margaret Lesh's voice is the perfect companion as you start your own cancer experience.

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## **Beth Bowland says**

A very personal journey, told with humor, great insight & very informative. Ladies, share this with your girlfriends.

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## **Margaret Lesh says**

*Let Me Get This Off My Chest* is the book I wrote in the months following my bilateral mastectomy and reconstruction. During the months-long process, I noticed that some people, especially men, seemed

uncomfortable with the topic of mastectomy, which is one of the reasons I wrote this book, to hopefully remove some of the stigma and further the conversation. Also, when I first learned of my recurrence, I wrote a diary piece for the website Daily Kos, and it seemed to touch a nerve with people—many of whom were cancer survivors or had close friends and family fighting cancer. My "Cancer Diary" became a series of updates on my blog, which turned into this book when my good friend Laura innocently asked me one day: "So, are you going to write about your experiences?"

I learned so much during and after my first experience with breast cancer in 1999-2000 as a mother with a very young son, and then with my recurrence thirteen years later. It is my hope that other women may gain something from my experiences.

If I can help just one woman, then this book will have achieved my goal. Hopefully, it will be many more than one.

This book was made possible by the monetary and moral support of my Kickstarter backers who believed in me and in my project; by Ellen Brock, my excellent editor on my YA novel *Normalish* who lent her talents to this book; and, also, my husband Steve who is the most knowledgeable (and talented) graphic designer I've ever known. (And I'm totally not biased.)

So that is the story of how this book came to be.

PS: If anyone who reads this would like a copy but can't afford to pay, please send me a note and I will send you an e-copy when the book is ready, which should be towards the end of June 2013.

PPS: If anyone would like an ARC, please send me a message and I will send an e-copy when they are available.

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## **Kevin says**

What to say, what not to say; I'm baffled.  
It touched my heart!  
Yes, "People are precious, not things"

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## **Mary Herrera says**

I read this book in one setting, as I waited in an ER.

I felt so lucky after reading it. I think the diagnosis of breast cancer has to be something all women fear the most. This book is a light hearted guide to help get you through.

The author has given a gift for those that will follow her, and makes it just a little less scary.

I hope I never get breast cancer, but if I do, I am going to reread it, again and again.

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## Donnie Marsh says

I read this book in one sitting. You will, too. This not a literary memoir. There aren't many extravagant sentences, few flashy \$25 words. The author herself professes she uses profanity when no one else is around but abstains from using it in the memoir which I felt was oddly refreshing. The writing style isn't stuffy but very conversational. Chances are, if you've read this book, Margaret Lesh isn't in your circle of friends.

But you'll feel like she is.

This is the single most important memoir I've read in my life. It belongs on every woman's shelf. Period. It's a beautiful book for men too because no matter your sexual orientation, there's a chance you know--or will know--someone with cancer.

Lesh spares nothing. The book is beautiful, wrought with many important tips and anecdotes; links to websites and other books for better--no, further--understanding of The Big C. Want to know what it's like to hear you have cancer; the awful, sickening fate that may await you? It's in here. You want to know every detail of what you may go through including possible side-effects of every treatment? It's in here.

As a former science major, I've been through the hub-dub of the cancer research and cure debates. Ladies (and gents), the CURE is PREVENTION. If you feel a lump in your breasts (or testes) it isn't NOT something. Get it checked and yesterday. Read this book. Learn from this woman. You now have a book, a guide, a beautiful friend to learn from. There's no excuse.

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## Gabriella says

Margaret Lesh strikes the right note here in her account of the "floating year" she spent going through diagnosis, surgery for a bilateral mastectomy, implantation surgery, and recovery. This charming little book with the funny title could have been a lot of things, but the author, who's a Southern California novelist and freelance court reporter, *\*doesn't\** overshare--despite the subtitle!

Lesh writes that she was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 1999 when she was only 34, and had a lumpectomy. Then, in 2012, she made the alarming discovery of another lump in the same breast. "I'd been warned that if there was a recurrence, mastectomy was the only option--no more cutting," she writes. She then had to make the decision whether to have her noncancerous right breast removed as well, and she opted for that.

Lesh has also blogged about cancer, and the book is a sort of cancer journal of her year; it's made of of short chapters that are like little meditations. Skilfully formatted, with wonderful quotes beginning each chapter, Lesh dwells just enough on each physical ordeal she has to go through, and touches slightly on the emotional part as well, but not enough to overwhelm the reader. The tips that she ends each chapter with are super-informative. I would call it a sort of "Breast Reconstruction for Dummies" except that Lesh's sweet, sincere, funny, yet somehow quite private personality imbues the book with a real sense of intimacy, like she is telling secrets over the dinner table.

As one of her quotes, from Erma Bombeck, says: "There is a thin line that separates laughter and pain, comedy and tragedy, humor and hurt."

I felt myself rooting for the author and glad that she is in a happy marriage, which clearly sustains her and keeps her the balanced and kind person that she is, despite having to go through what some might consider a tragic ordeal. And in fact Lesh admits that the cancer has been life-changing, it's helped her appreciate life, she cries much more easily, she laughs more easily too.

She gives the reader permission to chuckle along too, with phrases like "Frankenboobs." A few years ago, reading this, I might have thought Lesh was too much in denial, not angry enough about what happened to her, and so on. Now I can feel her bravery and optimism shining through--and that's just what women who've been diagnosed with breast cancer and face scary choices need. Good job!

(Copy provided by author in exchange for an honest review.)

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### **Kirsten Jany says**

This book is a great read, not just for those going through cancer treatment, but also for their family members and loved ones. With honesty and humor Lesh guides us through the emotional rollercoaster after the initial diagnosis to the follow up care. I gifted this to a friend currently going through cancer treatment, but was a little concerned it could come across as commiseration (which I know she abhors!). So I downloaded a copy for myself and started reading. While the book does open your eyes to the emotional struggle, it will also help you see the light at the end of the tunnel. Whether you have gotten the dreaded diagnosis or someone close to you has, do yourself (and them!) a favor and pick up a copy of "Let me get this off my chest!"

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### **Mary says**

Let Me Get This Off My Chest, by Margaret Lesh

This is a good, straightforward account of one woman's breast cancer journey. Lesh had a lumpectomy and radiation in 2000, followed by a bilateral mastectomy when her cancer returned 12 years later. Having been on my own cancer journey several times, I was looking for a personal account and this accessible memoir is written in a very conversational style.

Recommended for all who want a quick, but complete synopsis of breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

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### **Liv says**

Overall: This is the account of one woman's fight with breast cancer and everything afterwards. To start off, this book's tone was so perfect. It was comical to break up such a serious topic, but also was informative. It was the perfect blend of serious and funny to make this a fantastic read. The book did an amazing job of getting it's information and tips across to the reader in an easy-to-understand way. Some books of this type can get way to medical or depressing, but this one wasn't at all. It explained everything without confusing someone with no medical knowledge. I also loved the fact that the author gave all of the options possible for someone in the same position. This book really opened my eyes to all of the possibilities and treatments for

breast cancer. Basically, I went in with no knowledge and came out with miles of it.

Characters: I loved the narrator. She was hilarious and kind and just perfect. She sounds like the kind of person I want to be or I want my kids to be, if I ever have kids. She was brave and strong, the perfect role model.

Quotes: I loved all of the little quotes before each chapter started. My favorite is:

"Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul-and sings the tunes without the words-and never stops at all."

Recommend?: Yes, every woman must read this book. 5/5 stars!

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## **So, I Read This Book Today says**

I only have one problem with this book. It wasn't published soon enough. I have, you see, gone through Breast Cancer myself. Not like Margaret's – hers was Stage IA, a very mild form of Breast Cancer, while mine was Stage IIIB, the last stage before becoming metastatic (spreading to other parts of the body, such as the liver, lungs, etc.).

This is not to say that I in any way am belittling Margaret's mild cancer. Rather, I applaud her for her strength. Other than a very few friends, I had no family. She, on the other hand, has a loving husband and, at the time of her first bout with cancer, a two-year old son. She had a lot more to lose than I. And that is what matters in all cases, isn't it? Our loss as it affects our families.

***It felt as if I were walking to the gas chamber or gallows.***

In December of 1999, when her son was two, Margaret had her first bout with breast cancer. The terror must have been horrific, even if she bore it well and doesn't make a big deal of it in her book. She had a lumpectomy and radiation, and then lived a normal life, enjoying her husband and child and life itself, until 2012, when a 'possible' lump showed up again in the same breast that had given her trouble before. Now, things were different. Now, some serious issues would have to be addressed, and things would be different. It was time for the breasts to vacate the premises. And so begins her story of her diagnosis, treatment, and reconstruction.

***Sometimes the only way to deal with horrific things in life is through a dark sense of humor. – Margaret Cho***

The thing I truly admire about Margaret's story is how she lays it out in a humourous manner. Oh, believe me, this story is not a funny one. The fear, pain and nausea, the surgeries and drains and pain, (oh, and did I mention pain?) is terrifying. At times, it is horrifying, and at others simply humiliating. I am right there with her on the nurse who looks at you like you are a bug to be squished on the floor for asking for a bedpan when you are too drugged and too agonized to make it to the bathroom. I was fortunate – I had the services of some of the best doctors and nurses in the world, at Littleton Adventist Hospital in Littleton Colorado, for my chemo treatments and multiple hospital visits (nothing like internal bleeding and constant vomiting and fainting to land you into a bed with multiple wires and tubes sticking out). I never had a single nurse or

doctor treat me with anything less than compassion and respect (well, except for one doctor, and I think he was just a jerk, no matter what. Well, he was the one sticking the tubes up my bum and down my throat to find the bleeds. I suppose if I worked with people's bums all day, I would be bad tempered too...)

***Sometimes I say the medication is even tougher than the illness. – Sanya Richards-Ross***

While some parts of cancer treatments can be different, interesting and 'cocktail party worthy' (take baldness, now I found that funny in and of itself, and never wore a wig. Hey, might as well laugh at yourself, right?) what isn't funny or fun or anything even remotely pleasant is the chemotherapy. Sitting in a lounge for hours at a time while poison was being pumped into my veins was sure to send me into a full-blown panic attack, even at my weakest. Bring out the knock-out drugs! I told you, I had the Best. Chemo. Nurse. EVER.) Chemo is not fun. It leaves you weak, sick, tired, unable to eat or drink without having it come right back up again. Margaret covers the issue with her usual kindness and panache, pointing out the problems, but refusing to let it drive her down into the dark lands of her psyche. I admire that. I mostly just slept. For days and days. . . And that whole "you are going to go into menopause at the speed of the Shinkansen (the Japanese High-Speed Train System)" complete with hot flashes and weight fluctuations? So not fun. Margaret didn't say how much weight she lost – I lost 60 lbs. Now, if I could have kept off about 30 of those! LOL

***One of her nipples was lying on the bathroom tile.***

The part that Margaret went through, that I didn't, was the reconstruction. I was 53 at the time, and hadn't had a lover for over 20 years – why did I care? (We could get all up in the childhood and later sexual abuse, etc. but that doesn't fit here.) The point is, I have to admit – the double mastectomy, in my case, was much easier than her reconstruction! I still had the pain, and the drains, but she went five months getting doses of saline injected to 'stretch out' her tissue, building new breasts. Nah, I will take my 'barely there' scar, the occasional odd look, and some ongoing tenderness across the chest. Hey, I can at least sleep on my stomach these days! When I was a D-cup, that was so not happening..... Her story of the reconstruction was sort of creepily fascinating to me, as I didn't have it done. And of course, hearing the story of her friend who had reconstruction, and then one of her nipples fell off when she was toweling after a shower? (You have to read the book just for that part of the story.)

Overall, if you have the slightest interest in what your friend, family member, coworker, etc. is going through, you have to read this book. If you have the possibility of Breast Cancer yourself, are going through treatment, or have had cancer previously, you have to read this book. It is by turns scary and funny, but always compassionate.

Highly recommended.

<http://www.breastcancer.org/symptoms/...> To learn about the stages of Breast Cancer

<http://www.breastcancer.org> The main site, this is the be-all and know-all site for Breast Cancer information

<http://www.cancer.gov/> The home site for the National Cancer Institute, a part of the National Institutes of Health. There is Breast Cancer information here, but also research and information regarding a large number of different types of cancer.

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/dr...> Another segment of the NCI website, you can find information about different chemotherapy medications. Margaret was on Tamoxifen. I, on the other hand, had ATC



therapy. A combination of Doxorubicin (Adriamycin), Taxol (paclitaxel) and Cyclophosphamide (Cytosan). You can find additional information on any of these drugs at:

<https://www.navigatingcancer.com> A great site for more info on cancer and cancer treatments

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### **Shari Larsen says**

In this memoir, Margaret Lesh, a breast cancer survivor, shares her experiences with hot flashes from Tamoxifen, mastectomy, reconstruction surgery, dealing with mastectomy bras and other things that go along with a breast cancer diagnosis.

Her style is funny and heartfelt, without resorting to platitudes, and also informative; I wish I would have had this book for my first diagnosis of breast cancer. I really related to the chapters on what it feels like to be told you have cancer, going through a bilateral mastectomy, (though unlike the author, I never had reconstructive surgery), what it was like going through radiation, and dealing with some of the stupid things people say to you when you have breast cancer. I love the section on "breast cancer etiquette"; what to say and what NOT to say to someone with breast cancer. I also really liked the chapter on when to play the "cancer card."

This book was a pretty quick read, but the information is right to the point without any superfluous "filler" authors sometimes use to stretch out their stories.

I would recommend this book to anyone newly diagnosed with breast cancer, or for loved ones of breast cancer patients who want to know the best way to support their loved ones. I would love to see a book like this written by someone with stage IV breast cancer, which is what I am living with.

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### **Martha says**

Ms. Lesh takes a sensitive subject and shares from her personal experience with sincerity and lots of humor. I appreciated her attitude which seeks the "silver linings" while dealing with the stark realities of diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

Ms. Lesh was only 34 in 1999, with a two year old son, when she felt a lump and they discovered cancer. She had a lumpectomy and radiation treatment. Because the cancer was stage 1A, chemotherapy was not recommended at that time. After the radiation treatments she was prescribed medication for five years and celebrated when she could throw those bottles away. Although many years passed successfully, Ms. Lesh was one of the unfortunates who had a recurrence after 11 years so her story continues with more aggressive treatment. The second time around she had to make more difficult decisions and treatment that included chemotherapy so she shares those experiences as well.

This book has wonderfully upbeat quotes at each chapter which I find encouraging. There are many good resources shared and specific tips that I have already used and know I will be referring to as my own treatment proceeds. The chapters are short and focus on specific events, decisions or treatments so it is easy to look up certain sections to refer back to. Cancer, like most diseases, impacts upon close family and friends as well as the individual. There are chapters in the book that give insight to friends and family on the fears

and emotions that are being experienced and shared.

This is a quick, informative and easy read. It is comforting even though there is anxiety and sadness shared. I think a big part of cancer treatment focuses on faith and hope which Ms. Lesh conveys throughout, even through the stumbles of fear and depression that are natural. The book confirms something I have quickly learned through friends and on-line cancer boards. The diagnosis and treatment are unique for each individual, but we all share a common bond and can be helpful and supportive to others as well as accepting help and support graciously for ourselves. I recommend this book to any woman facing their own cancer journey and to those who wish to be supportive and understand more clearly what the patient is going through.

I give a big THANK YOU to Ms. Lesh for responding to my daughter's frightened messages on Facebook and being so warm and gracious to gift this book to me!

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### **Linda says**

Margaret Lesh has done a fantastic job of writing about a subject so many people can barely bring themselves to talk about: Cancer. Yup - the big C word. And she has done so in a brilliant, down-to-earth, and yes, even funny way. Sharing her story will help so many people grapple with this difficult subject. But make no mistake, this is an enjoyable read in itself. It's a beautifully designed book and a pleasure to navigate. And Margaret Lesh, besides being a very brave woman, is a kick-ass author.

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