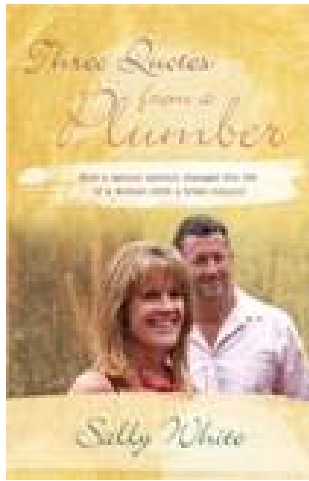


Three quotes from a plumber: how a second opinion changed the life of a woman with a brain tumour. Sally White. Michelle Anderson Publishing Pty Ltd. 2009. 216 pps. ISBN 9780855723958. Recommended retail price \$24.95 AUD. www.michelleandersonpublishing.com



Sally White is a social worker with two young children whose own mother developed a brain tumour when she was 61 and died, whose uncle also died from a brain tumour, and Sally herself was diagnosed with an oligoastrocytoma brain tumour in 2007.

That's quite a lot for one person to handle but Sally has handled it well, with the support of her husband David, her children, her extended family and many friends.

The unique value of this book is that it conveys both the experience of a daughter grieving for her mother and a young woman coping with her own diagnosis of one of the most challenging of all cancers. Readers will pick up clues from these dual experiences as to how they might cope or act in their own situation.

The title revolves around the concept of obtaining a second opinion about your diagnosis. Second opinions are fairly common in the United States but less so in Australia and the United Kingdom and some other countries.

Among some clinicians and surgeons second opinions are regarded as a loss of confidence in their abilities and not something to be encouraged.

The second opinion Sally obtained was from controversial Sydney neurosurgeon Dr Charlie Teo who re-operated and removed more of her tumour.

This is where the title of the book comes in. Her sister Kate had told her: "You always get three quotes from a plumber. This is more important than that!" Sally added: "I myself had sought a number of quotes when renovating our bathroom and I certainly sought three quotes before getting my car repaired when I had a minor accident. Why then, had I not actively pursued quotes when it came to my cancer diagnosis over the past fourteen months?"

Travelling the brain tumour journey Sally becomes more pro-active in her own interests. She writes: "I myself was starting to learn that being assertive is not the same as being aggressive, and being inquisitive is not the same as being difficult. By reframing my behaviour, I was learning to let go of the guilt I felt from being what I'd always thought of as 'demanding', and growing my sense of self".

Very often when I answer an inquiry on the BTAA Freecall number I say to caregivers and family members that they need to "develop sharp elbows" by what I mean is that they need to be assertive on behalf of their loved one. I guess that a peer-support person can recommend that, based on their own

experience, but some health professionals might feel inhibited in giving the same advice, which is one of the points in favour of a telephone contact service being run by peer supporters.

As she reaches out to try and identify therapies and activities that might help her Sally gravitates towards some self-healing strategies, such as Ian Gawler's approach, and nutritional programs but these are essentially complementary approaches and, unlike some other patients who go down that path, she does not repudiate orthodox medical treatment from her GP, oncologist and neurosurgeon.

The book is well written and will be useful to men and women, particularly parents who are trying to work out how to inform and guide young children as they respond to a parent's illness.

It is good to see an increase in the number of books written by people who have a brain tumour and others written by practitioners. There is no universal guide which everyone can follow. Like personalised medicine you will have to develop your own personalised response to the roller coaster ride you are travelling. Books such as Sally White's can give you some clues but each response will be unique, depending on your personality, attitude to life, and the resources and support available to you.

Denis Strangman
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