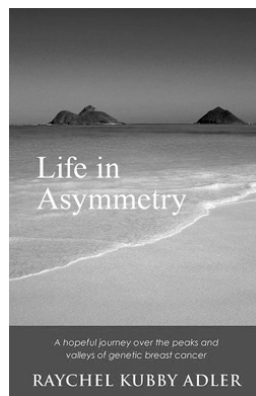


Book Review

Life in Asymmetry: A Hopeful Journey over the Peaks and Valleys of Genetic Breast Cancer - Raychel Kubby Adler

-By Pat Battaglia



Raychel Kubby Adler, a Certified Wellness Coach from Davis, California who holds an advanced degree in Public Health, has written a memoir about her life experiences as a breast cancer “previvor”. A poignant and honest book, the full title offers the first clue about what lies ahead in its pages. *Life in Asymmetry: A Hopeful Journey Over the Peaks and Valleys of Genetic Breast Cancer* is warmly human and often irreverently funny as Raychel recounts the many dilemmas she and her family faced – and continue to face – as carriers of the BRCA2 genetic mutation. When this gene is mutated, it results in a substantially increased lifetime risk for developing breast and ovarian cancers.

While some celebrities have famously made surgical decisions based on a similar genetic testing result, their private struggles have remained just that - private. Consequently, the full impact of living with a high-risk genetic mutation has remained largely unknown to the general public.

This book fills in many of those blanks. Raychel’s compelling and sometimes heartbreaking story begins with childhood memories of the open dressing rooms she visited while shopping with her mother. Comparing the many body types she saw there to her own flat chest, she imagined herself as a mermaid in a seashell brassiere. Before long, she was full of pride at the first development of her “mosquito bites” – her budding breasts.

As the youngest child in her family, Raychel was separated by sixteen years from her next oldest sibling, Lisa, who was “...at times my big sister and at other times my ‘cool mom.’” Lisa eventually married and moved to Rochester, but the sisters shared a close bond that endured through their separation.

Raychel was in college when her mother, and a few months later, Lisa, were diagnosed with breast cancer. Both women responded well to treatment, although her mother eventually succumbed to lung cancer that was not related to her breast cancer. Raychel keenly felt her mother’s absence when she married and began her own family. While she was pregnant with her second child, the news came that Lisa’s cancer had metastasized. By this time, genetic testing was available. Lisa opted for the test and learned she carried the mutation. She urged her sister to be tested, and Raychel eventually complied; she was found to have the same mutation.

Sadly, Lisa, who was a program participant and friend of the Coalition, died in 2009. But before she passed, Raychel promised Lisa she would undergo surgery – a bilateral mastectomy – to reduce her risk of developing breast cancer.

The last part of the book details the surgery, including reconstructive procedures that didn’t go as planned. Although her road had some unexpected detours, Raychel’s healing happened on all levels - physical, emotional, and spiritual. She ends by expressing her hope for her daughters: that they will “...grow not to see their breasts as enemies, but rather view them with the same dream-filled, starry-eyed wonder that I once had as a child...”

Life in Asymmetry had me alternately laughing out loud and wiping tears from my eyes. The title of each chapter is a nickname for breasts, and reading through the table of contents is a “Hoot”. This is one woman’s story, and Raychel recalls her journey thus far in an engaging manner that highlights her abiding and complex love for her family, and for life in general. I highly recommend it for anyone affected by a genetic predisposition to cancer and those who care about them. ☺

A Discussion with the Author

On Sunday, November 12, at 11am, Raychel Kubby Adler will appear at the Louis J. Wolk Jewish Community Center of Greater Rochester, 1200 Edgewood Avenue, Rochester, NY 14618. Kubby will describe her personal journey as related in her book, *Life in Asymmetry, A Hopeful Journey over the Peaks and Valleys of Genetic Breast Cancer*. Dr. Rachel Farkas, a local surgical oncologist, will be on hand to share her insight. Our Director, Holly Anderson, will also be there to moderate a discussion on genetic counseling, testing, and other actions that can be taken by women with a genetic predisposition to breast cancer.

Tickets: \$8 JCC members; \$10 non-members Available at the JCC, online at www.rjbf.org, or call 585-461-2000. *Advance ticket purchases are recommended.*

This event is part of the 25th annual JCC Lane Dworkin Jewish Book Festival, that runs from November 5th through the 19th. For more information, visit the rjbf website listed above.