

of the resulting changes they made in their lives; and she identifies the “ultrafeminine theme of the breast cancer marketplace” (23) in which endless items are sold to promote the positive thinking that will help women retain or regain their cancer-free status. Unfortunately, as she notes, this focus on seeing only the positive can be quite damaging. It denies women the right to express their anger or their fear; it makes them responsible for unsuccessful treatment; and it removes the focus from external factors that have an impact on their health. And, as she so poignantly notes, “Breast cancer, I can now report, did not make me prettier or stronger, more feminine or spiritual. What it gave me, if you want to call this a ‘gift,’ was a very personal, agonizing encounter with an ideological force in American culture that I had not been aware of before—one that encourages us to deny reality, submit cheerfully to misfortune, and to blame only ourselves for our fate” (43/4).

As Ehrenreich claims in *Bright-Sided*, she is not advocating that we forego happiness or joy in our lives; rather, she challenges an ideology which posits a doctrine of self-reliance and responsibility for all of our personal difficulties, to the extent that external factors become seemingly insignificant. This, she claims, limits individuals’ pursuit of higher education and/or technical training; it removes the responsibility of those in political office to meet the needs of constituents; and it increasingly isolates individuals as they increase their inward focus while following the “cult of positivity.” Arguably, the basic premise of this book may not be new to critical thinkers; however, Ehrenreich presents a timely argument in an accessible manner to a mainstream audience who may not have been exposed to discussions of colonialism, capitalism, and the need for political activism, but who will certainly have been overexposed to the plethora of self-help literature in which, often, the main directive is to

‘think on the bright side.’ Thankfully, Ehrenreich provides a viable and politically astute alternative to the promise of positive thinking.

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HEARING THE STREAM: A SURVIVOR’S JOURNEY INTO THE SISTERHOOD OF BREAST CANCER

Diane Lane Chambers
Conifer, CO: Ellexa Press.

REVIEWED BY ALLAN BURNS

Like everyone else who receives a cancer diagnosis, Diane Chambers was initially shocked and scared. She knew only two people who had battled breast cancer: her grandmother and a judge in whose court she had worked as a sign language interpreter. Both had died. Despite daily flashbacks to her grandmother’s tragic experience with disfiguring surgery, horrendous lymphedema in both arms, and burns from radiation, Diane accepted her diagnosis and began making decisions about what route to take with a competent team of doctors. She chose the only treatment that made sense for her: a mastectomy and reconstruction.

Six months later, as treatment and recovery began to fade like a bad dream, Diane began recovering her life. She had worked as a sign language interpreter since 1977 and published an acclaimed account of her experiences, *Words in My Hands* (Ellexa Press, 2005). But she soon learned that after cancer there was no going back to “life before cancer.”

There was only “life after cancer,” and she quickly discovered it is not such a bad thing. She forged powerful bonds with a sisterhood of survivors—all people who had been through emotions and physical changes similar to her own. From Kim she learned the issues facing young single women with breast cancer. From Pat she learned how older women cope with diagnosis and treatment and from Sue how the mother of a baby struggled to save her own life. From Charlie she came to appreciate what men have to go through when diagnosed with a “female disease.”

Above all, from the extraordinary Harriette Grober, who had been on chemotherapy for an unprecedented nine years, she learned about a determination she had never imagined and how to be thankful and happy in each moment. She also learned to take Harriette’s advocacy as a model and became involved herself in raising levels of political and social awareness about the disease. Currently, Diane is an active member of the National Breast Cancer Coalition and the Association of Breast Cancer survivors and regularly participates in workshops, symposiums, and webcasts on cancer.

Hearing the Stream, the fruit of all she has experienced and learned as a cancer survivor, is an inspiring book that weaves together her own story and those of five others, thereby providing multiple perspectives on a complex disease that can be as different as the individual people who acquire it. As Dr. Tim Byers of the University of Colorado Comprehensive Cancer Center says, “Accounts such as this of the human toll of breast cancer motivate me as a researcher—and should motivate us all—to redouble our many efforts to reduce further and someday eradicate this disease.”

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