

## One man's optimism and spirit

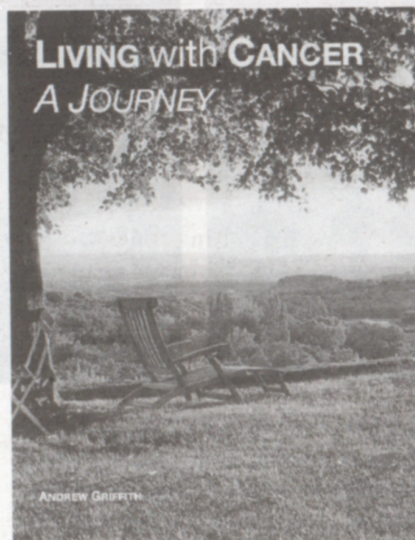
### *Living with Cancer: A Journey*

by Andrew Griffith

REVIEWED BY  
GILLIAN CAMPBELL

When Glebe resident Andrew Griffith was diagnosed with mantle cell lymphoma in 2009, he began a physically and psychologically intense journey that would bring him through many ups and downs over the course of the next three years. His book, *Living with Cancer: A Journey*, not only records his day-to-day experience with his treatment – the tentative ups of a successful treatment and the devastating downs of relapse – but it also provides a blueprint for handling all aspects of the disease. *Living with Cancer: A Journey* is a unique book – part guide to managing cancer and part memoir of Griffith's very personal experiences. The resulting book is highly recommended for anyone who has cancer or who is supporting someone with cancer, or for anyone who is interested in learning more about the disease.

Although the subject, going through cancer, makes this book a serious one, Griffith's positive attitude, his graceful writing style and his love of life lighten the book's tone considerably. Griffith is upfront about how devastating the news of his diagnosis was



to himself, his family, friends and co-workers. At the same time, he quickly realized that he needed to exercise control over whatever aspect of his illness was within his power. This positive, take-charge attitude stood him in good stead in handling the vicissitudes of the next few years.

*Living with Cancer: A Journey* has two facets, the personal and the practical, that work together to form a picture of Griffith's journey. On the one hand, the book offers valuable advice about many aspects of dealing with the disease – from how to manage your medical team to ways of telling those around you about your diagnosis. It also provides suggestions for updating friends and co-workers about the progress of treatment, lists useful resources for finding information on the web, and gives detailed information about treatment at all stages of the disease. There is even a comprehensive glossary at the back of the book, which lists and describes many cancer-related terms. The practical part

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of the book would be extremely useful for anyone motivated by personal circumstances to find out more details about cancer.

However, I have to admit that it was the personal journal aspect that I liked best. Griffiths, who was an executive with the federal government, chose to keep a weekly blog of his experiences to update his friends and co-workers about his treatment. He includes blog entries in journal format as part of the book. Not only do the entries capture his symptoms and experiences with treatment – how he is feeling – but also his coming to terms with an illness that can be managed but will never go away. His blogs include both routine information such as weekly hospital visits and daily walks, and more introspective travels plumbing the depths of his feelings as he suffers a relapse and realizes that he must undergo an allogenic stem cell transplant.

What comes across from his blog entries is the joy and appreciation for daily life that make his life meaningful. At one point, he wants to be able to take his son to university and is thrilled to get the OK from his medical team. Similarly, he is able to enjoy a cross-country trip by train and other travels. Using his recovery time to read a wide range of books and watch movies, he learns to appreciate

the smaller pleasures in life. By providing his reading and viewing lists, Griffiths gives the reader a full picture not only of his recovery, but also of his ownership of the journey in coping with the disease.

In the preface to his book, Griffith says that he hopes “that sharing my journey will help others, whatever their connection to cancer, reflect on how to provide support to those who need it, including their families. I also hope that my journey provides you with an enhanced appreciation of the fragility of life, and the need to live life fully, with compassion, empathy and purpose.” This book does exactly what it intends and more. Griffith's optimism and fighting spirit shine through his writing. *Living with Cancer: A Journey* is about one man's journey with cancer, but it is also a reflection of everyone's life journey and life's meaning as a whole.

You can buy *Living with Cancer: A Journey* (Anar Press, 2012) through Amazon.ca, as a print or e-book. Griffiths has also written *Policy Arrogance or Innocent Bias: Resetting Citizenship and Multiculturalism*.

*Editor Gillian Campbell has been proofreading and writing book reviews for the Glebe Report since early 2013.*