



BRONZE MAN BOOKS

A MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Author's Motivation for Oops! Did I Say That?

Shock, uncertainty, stress, fear, and anxiety are all emotions that I experienced when hearing the words, “You have cancer.” To be more specific, a rare type called Philadelphia Positive Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, which gave me only a 30% survival rate with conventional chemotherapy. Not good enough odds for my family, or me.

In order to receive treatment at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, I had to move to Memphis, Tennessee. My mother quit her job in order to move with me, while my father remained in Peoria, Illinois, to take care of the house, bills, and my sister.

Even at only 14 years of age, I was old enough to comprehend what I needed to go through in order to beat my battle with cancer. I knew that it was a life or death situation where chemotherapy, radiation, and a bone marrow transplant were my only hopes. I also understood that my life would instantly change from the stress of exams and homework to the constant plague of nausea, vomiting, weakness, exhaustion, and doctor’s appointments. I spent the next nine and a half months fighting for my life.

Throughout treatment, I recognized a gap in communication between pediatric cancer patients and their caregivers, whether family, friends, doctors, or nurses. Unaware of where this gap spurred from, I decided to make it my mission to find out. Participating in a Research Fellowship at my Alma Mater, Millikin University, under Professor Matthew Tucker, I studied Health Communication with a focus on pediatric cancer patients. Not to my surprise, I discovered



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numerous research studies paralleled with the way I felt during my own treatment. I also conducted multiple interviews with over 30 cancer patients that I knew first-hand; I discovered that parents and other patients expressed similar frustrations with hurtful communication. In some instances these communications were between doctors/nurses and a pediatric cancer patient, doctors/nurses and a parent of a pediatric cancer patient, or even family/friends and a pediatric cancer patient.

During my own treatment, I experienced hurtful communication with friends, family members, doctors, and nurses, of which I believe the sources to be: location/distance; lack of knowledge about cancer treatment; human need to empathize and actively participate in supporting a family whose son/daughter is going through treatment; fear of making interpersonal ties with a patient due to his/her current circumstances.

Hurtful communication is bound to occur at some point during pediatric cancer treatment; however, I created this book in hopes that it serve as an educational tool to encourage caregivers to pause before they speak—to realize the effects that their verbal/nonverbal communications may have on a patient and to consider the circumstances and emotions that surround their communication. I hope that this book will spread awareness about the hurtful communication that exists between caregivers and pediatric cancer patients and that it will assist in narrowing this gap.