Desiree Stewart

Extra Credit Book Review: *Bald in the Land of Big Hair* by Joni Rodgers

*Bald in the Land of Big Hair* is a poignant first-person account of one woman’s experiences as she struggles to survive non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system. By turns funny, touching, and starkly realistic, Rodgers captures the difficulties of cancer from all angles. You see that children have their own unique way of dealing with their mother being sick—sometimes hopeful and optimistic as when Malachi comes to the rescue when she can’t stand up in the checkout line at the grocery store; sometimes infuriatingly selfish as they cope with the fact that an uncontrollable force has altered their lives for the worse. Joni and her husband also deal with these emotions in a way that mirrors the actions of their children at times. For those who have experience with a loved one who had cancer, this book should be an essential read. It can open your eyes to the issues facing one with cancer in a way that medical advice cannot. For the same reason, anyone planning to enter the medical field should read this book to ground oneself in the reality his or her patients face and to realize that these issues can be far more complex than those related to medical aspects of cancer at times.

This book can be related to issues discussed in class when you see the struggles faced by Joni and her husband Gary with receiving adequate care through their HMO plan. Because non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma advances very rapidly, it is essential that symptoms be diagnosed swiftly so that life-saving measures can be taken. As Joni and Gary went from one primary care physician to the next, she illustrates the frustrations of those with very real symptoms who receive lip service from their doctors. It is a scary thought that had Gary not persevered in seeking adequate care for his wife, she probably would have succumbed to the cancer for lack of aggressive and fast treatment. Other patients may not be so lucky. Perhaps if she had had a traditional insurance plan, she would have been referred more quickly to an oncologist who could have recognized her symptoms for what they were. Another interesting issue in the book that has not been discussed in class is the role of alternative and homeopathic medicine in mainstream health insurance plans. For those who believe in these remedies, being forced to be treated by traditional methods may be unacceptable; this issue highlights the growing role that health insurance companies are playing in patient care decisions.

In conclusion, *Bald in the Land of Big Hair* is an easy-to-read, entertaining book that also touches on very important issues in health care and health insurance in America. I highly recommend this book.