



Until Further Notice, I Am Alive

Tom Lubbock , Marion Coutts (Introduction)

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In 2008, Tom Lubbock was diagnosed with a brain tumour, and told he had only one or two years to live. In this remarkable record of those years, lived out in three-month intervals between scans, he examines the question of how to live with death in sight.

As the tumour progressed, Tom engaged intensely and imaginatively with work, art, friends, and his wife and their young son, while trying to remain focused on the fact of his impending death. His tumour was located in the area of the brain associated with language, and he describes losing control over the spoken and written word and the resources he drew on to keep communicating; a struggle which brought him ever closer to the mysteries of the origin of speech. As the Independent's chief art critic, he was renowned for the clarity and unconventionality of his writing, and the same fierce intelligence permeates this extraordinary memoir. This is a book written by a man wholly engaged with life even as it ends.

Until Further Notice, I Am Alive Details

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Sally says

Tom Lubbock's journal is an insightful and intriguing view of living and dieing from a terminal illness. It's written as a journal that is obviously, largely unedited, and of course that's the point. It does highlight Tom's character and priorities, and his career as a writer is obviously his priority. It's not a sentimental dialogue. he consistently repeats and rephrases his problems with communication, occassionally touching on the young family he is forced to leave behind.

Kirsty says

Beautifully honest and heartrending, this is an exquisite illness narrative, and the parallel to Coutts' wonderful *The Iceberg*.

Joana Dias says

Very 'heavy' testimony. Author describes in depth how a tumour in his brain slowly deteriorates his capacity to use language or communicate with others. Sadly but understandable, all the book is mainly about the disease, the doctors, the symptoms, etc. Very little is mentioned about his family and how he actually feels in terms of emotions. I'm curious to read his wife's book now.

Paul says

Outstanding but not one if you are facing this situation

Lisa says

Although deceivingly short with lots of white space, this account of a man's experience dying is not an easy read. He probes the meaning of life, what it means to love and live, knowing his life expectancy is truly eminent. His quality of life might be better than ever knowing this is one of his final 450 or so days on earth. He remains positive knowing this is the life he has and it's his choice how to live these final days. I've read it through and will now savor one entry at a time. Then I'll pull it out from time to time as a manual on how to live.

Sarah says

Fascinating book sharing a human experience in which the majority of us try to avoid talking about.

Heartbreaking read, but enjoyable. The style in which Tom Lubbock writes is a bit difficult to digest/interpret at times, but most likely simply due to the fact that he had spent his whole life dedicated to the written word.

Nina McIlwain says

Interesting thoughts on the loss of perception and disconnect from life. I'd never thought of the fear of sitting in darkness, knowing you are at death's door.

Julie Reed says

Thought provoking memoir capturing the author's, an accomplished writer, years post brain cancer diagnosis.

Wendy Greenberg says

Not sure how to judge this book...It is a journey to death by brain tumour. I have read his wife's account of this journey in *The Iceberg*, which for me was more powerful, insightful, challenging and moving than the "inside" story, which inevitably is factual and written with declining health. Hard to "judge" the writing in these circumstances. A writer writing about his own decline is a tough one.

Martin Wood says

It was OK . There were a few insightful comments but I was expecting something unrealistic I think; some how thinking approaching death would reveal some deep insight but death like life is just odd!

Evelyn says

This short book provides one with a window into the author's battle with a brain tumor, from diagnosis through his eventual loss of the ability to communicate shortly before his death. It complements "The Iceberg" written by his wife, Marion Coutts, which offers a window into the world of the caretaker, the loving family member or friend, who assumes responsibility for the care of a terminally ill person from the time of his/her diagnosis until the day that the disease takes its final toll and the person dies. In fact, It is well worth reading the two books in conjunction with one another because together they offer the reader a better understanding of the events that occurred during the progression of the disease by providing insights into both the author's feelings and what his wife and caretaker was experiencing as they sought to do battle with the tumor and have a good quality of life while bringing up their young son who would not know his father beyond infancy, until the tumor eventually left the author without the ability to communicate and resulted in his death.

Julie says

This small journal is written by author and art critic Tom Lubbock, who in 2008 was diagnosed with a brain tumour. With a wife and young son, he writes for the following two years about his journey, his medical and surgical experiences, his sense of loss and concern for his young family.

I had earlier read the memoir written by his wife Marion Coutts - *The Iceberg*, and was touched by the poetic beauty of her writing, how in such a stressful time she was still able to be eloquent and graceful. How even though they were struggling as Tom's battle with brain cancer was continuing, they were so open and welcoming to friends and family.

It is humbling to read such memoirs, putting our petty worries in perspective.

? says

'Objectively, from the outside you might say, my life is terrible, unbelievable. And it's true, I hate this. I hate the way I am at the moment. But there is no objective view, I am here, in it, and there's nothing else and this fact brings with it many things that make it if course easier. And beyond that there are many other things to think about.'

Sophy H says

As someone who relishes words, sentences and written structure, I was saddened and humbled by this book. I was humbled by Tom Lubbock's refreshing attitude towards his dire circumstances, his ceaseless attempts to remain neutral about his brain tumour; seeing it neither as the enemy nor the evil, and his gradual disheartening as words seemed to fly out of his grasp. As humans, we are essentially a vocal species. The word is a useful tool and when harboured by masters of the language, can be the most beautiful works of art. What a shame that the time of this talented young man was cut short. It is always saddening to read of someone facing their own mortality with dignity and poise; even more so when they're able to document it so eloquently, even through the loss of their craft.

Jim says

I found this meditation on living and dying pretty heavy going, in terms of both the subject matter and the style it was written in. To be fair, the author was losing his power of speech and his intellectual capacity to write as his brain tumour grew, and the overall tone tries to look on the bright side as much as possible. It can't hide the sadness, however, of a life being cut short in an untimely way. Tom Lubbock works his way through the ups and downs of his treatment, knowing that at some point the news will inevitably turn bad and terminal. How will he accept this when it comes? How will his wife and young son?

So it's quite a sad book, but it's not bitter nor angry. I feel he reached the acceptance of his fate he sought as the curtain came down, and that he died in peace. Which is all that any of us can hope for in the end.

