



Where Is the Mango Princess?: A Journey Back from Brain Injury

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Humorist Cathy Crimmins has written a deeply personal, wrenching, and often hilarious account of the effects of traumatic brain injury, not only on the victim, in this case her husband, but on the family.

When her husband Alan is injured in a speedboat accident, Cathy Crimmins reluctantly assumes the role of caregiver and learns to cope with the person he has become. No longer the man who loved obscure Japanese cinema and wry humor, Crimmins' husband has emerged from the accident a childlike and unpredictable replica of his former self with a short attention span and a penchant for inane cartoons. *Where Is the Mango Princess?* is a breathtaking account that explores the very nature of personality-and the complexities of the heart.

Where Is the Mango Princess?: A Journey Back from Brain Injury Details

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From Reader Review Where Is the Mango Princess?: A Journey Back from Brain Injury for online ebook

John says

Very well-written account of the author's first year as caregiver to her brain-damaged husband. However, perhaps it's my background working in the civil court system, but I had a hard time accepting Crimmins' implication that there wasn't money for medical treatment aside from what their HMO would authorize. Granted she wasn't present at the accident, but beyond stating that "a woman driving a boat hit him", there's no further mention of the circumstances thereafter by her ... with one exception: she finds the claims adjuster for the woman's insurance company in Alan's hospital room shortly after the accident, and throws him out immediately. That said to me that there was a settlement, if not litigation (she does mention threatening to sue the HMO at one point), involved which she cannot discuss; presumably, there's treatment money forthcoming which she downplays here. The way she handles that aspect I found clumsily disingenuous; she's explicit - to the point of TMI for me at times - with the rest of the details.

That aside, I recommend the book for the caregiver aspect.

Liralen says

[she and her husband div

Liliana says

Horrible. Hopeful. Heartbreaking.

Cathy Crimmins writes a painful account of a moment when her life changed completely. In a matter of minutes Cathy loses the husband she knew and loved to a stranger with Traumatic Brain Injury. She speaks about how difficult it is to be a caregiver, especially when it does not come naturally to you. In one of the most shocking scenes she describes a moment when she finally can't take it anymore and screams at her husband "I will kill you" in front of their 7 year old daughter. Later that night as she steps out of the shower she discovers that her husband has left her a note on the mirror "Help me. I have TBI."

That's the hard part about this book. Cathy loves her husband, but that person is gone. The new Al is verbally abusive, spends money recklessly, and is not above kicking their dog and child. However, Cathy knows that these irrational moments are caused by the brain injury and in some excruciating and longed for moments she sees the old Alan she was married to in the new Al. Most saddening of all is that Al knows that he has changed and it is affecting his family, but he doesn't know how much.

Cathy describes how for all intents and purposes Al is a success. He's alive and he's highly functional. She knows she should feel lucky, and she does, but she also doesn't. Definitely a fascinating and honest read, but not for those looking for something with an easy resolution.

Kristen Spangler says

I am the daughter of a TBI survivor. My father was gravely injured in a car crash during my freshman year of college, and like Ms Crimmins' husband, failed to receive adequate rehabilitation due to the restrictions of his HMO. In an even greater parallel, my father was also let go from his job, and my mother was forced to take on the role of advocate in addition to those of caregiver, mother, counsellor and, of course, makeshift father. I strongly identify with Cathy Crimmins' story as it more than dredges up memories of those first painful years following "the accident." It is true that no one can truly understand the TBI-affected family unless from one themselves, but this work comes closest to telling others what it feels like, looks like, sounds like and acts like. To this day, my father can't make it through the day without several prolonged naps, and the slightest little irritation leads to a vitriolic, profanity-laced tirade. But do I love him any less? On the contrary: like Cathy and Kelly, I love him more.

Jenna (Bookiemoji) says

I cannot rate this book higher than a two.

Having a spouse w/ a newly acquired TBI (two months prior to reading this) and (ironically) a 7 year old daughter, I can relate to the accident and the rehabilitation and the family make up, but I cannot relate to the author and her family's lifestyle. I found myself amazed in the similarities to her spouse's early recovery and my own husband's, though the later half of the book had me rolling my eyes far too often at the obvious privileged lifestyle these people led. I also cannot feel any hope coming out of this book. Only martyrdom and unhappiness.

...And to find out that their marriage ultimately fell into the "75% of all couples after TBI" (which occurred after this book was published and so is not part of the memoir) I wonder what the point was...

Not a book AT ALL for new caregivers of spouses w/ TBI.

Chance Lee says

I hated this book. It's badly written, and focuses more on whining about health care than it does on TBI and its effects. The author lacks any sympathy for anyone else, yet she expects readers to feel sorry for her plight. I only feel sorry for her daughter, having to live with a TBI father and a horrible mother incapable of dealing with anything with level-headedness and grace.

Sarah says

It is crass to call a personal account like this and call it a "page-turner" but it was truly that: a page turner. The author's retelling of her husband's journey through TBI and the toll it took on her family is about so much more than brain injury: it's about the heartlessness of healthcare providers, the experience of sudden downward turns in fortune, how the best parents can inadvertently create a terrible home environment for their child, what it is like to have caregiving thrust upon you, and what life is for a newly disabled and their families.

Amazingly, Crimmins conveys all of this without taking herself too seriously. (And can anyone in a situation like this be accused of taking it too seriously?) The person who recommended this book to me said it was "hilarious." I don't think it was close to that but the humorous quips in this were perfect--not too dark, just a way to show how ludicrous and surreal it can be to lose someone to a condition like this.

Read this book--it will give you a reality check and convey how life can change on you without making you recoil from its bite. If you are curious about TBI itself—the research must have come a long way since it was first published, but the experiential and human side of it is still more than worth the read.

Joanne Clarke Gunter says

I have a fascination with books that document how people cope with tragedy and awful events in their lives. This is one of those books. The synopsis of the book and other reviews here provide the details of the awful events in this book that occurred in 1996, so I won't dwell on that. TBI is some bad stuff to deal with, certainly for the person who has it, but perhaps even more so for the caregiver. And when the person with TBI is your husband, as it is in this book, you realize that the person you are caring for really isn't the person you married. Even though Alan Forman, an attorney and highly intelligent and educated person, recovers much function after intensive therapy, he is never the same in so many ways. After all the work and progress, he can function, but never really independently. He is a different person and one who is difficult to deal with year after year. It is a tragedy that never ends.

This book is well-written and informative and sad. And made sadder for me because after finishing the book, I did a search on the author to see if I could find out what happened since she wrote this book in 2000. I found out that the author and her husband divorced (very common in TBI cases) and the author died in 2009 from infection resulting from routine ankle surgery. This was almost the saddest part of all. An ignoble end to this family tragedy.

Amber says

Honest caregiver perspective of a recovery from serious brain injury. This was an important read for me working in intensive neurorehabilitation.

Ray says

Where is the Mango Princess? is a truly touching but tragic account of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and its impact on a family. As much as I respect Anne Lamont, I wonder at her comment, at least as it appears on the book cover blurb, that this is a story of 'recovery.' What exactly has been recovered? And how redemptive has this been in the lives of Cathy Crimmins and her husband Alan? Surely Cathy has had to address her once 'hands-off' approach to marriage and has chosen to become a truly sacrificial wife, in the process shedding much of the enlightened independence she had so highly prized. In this way, she has somehow backed into a richer 'covenantal' attitude to her husband (reflected in the traditional vows she, no doubt, took). She is living much more for him, even when he does not appreciate it, realize it, or have as much to offer in return. The picture is sad but beautiful, and highly instructive. Her world is a far more blessed place as a result of her response to this tragedy.

And yet, has she `recovered?' What exactly did she `lose' and what does she have back now? Her `wellness?' Her `humanity?' Maybe it is his that is recovered? I am not sure. Because her beautiful story remains largely fruitless for her life. After much struggle, she has learned to `cope.' Her story, filled with potential power, is ultimately a lovely tragedy.

This is instructive to anyone who might seek to care for someone who has suffered TBI and to their family. I have ministered to a few, and wish I had read in advance the Mango Princess (particularly through the lens of chapter 5 of Edward Welch's Blame it on the Brain). I think of one person in particular. Looking back I realize neither he nor I coped with the results of his injury adequately. I did not really understand the ways his injury legitimately impacted her, because it was clear that he was being so willfully selfish and hurtful. And he in turn wanted to blame his sin completely on his injury. The big issue I wish I had seen better in the past: his TBI did create some very significant hidden weaknesses that needed to be recognized and accounted for in trying to help his deal with his struggles.

Families in these circumstances face special heart obstacles, as Crimmins so thoughtfully illustrates. Like Alan, the victims very often heal outwardly in a short time, causing the families frustration at not seeing a similar recovery in their mental, emotional and behavioral issues. He is walking again; he is talking again; his wound is healed up; he looks all better; so why can't he start acting more like he used to? He's not a vegetable, and he can seem like his `old self' sometimes, so why does he have to act so impulsive or socially inappropriate? Why is his sense of humor so `weird?' Why doesn't he respond to things the way we used to (reasoning, prayer)? And if so, why can't they just do some surgery or give him a pill that will `fix' him?

The real physical impact of the injury needs to be understood if the mundane duties of living are to be carried forward, and if the heart of the person and his family and friends are to be challenged to greater spiritual maturity. Perhaps the hardest thing to grapple with (something Crimmins seems to miss) is the truth that the best explanation of post-injury behavior is pre-injury character (See Ed Welch, p. 90). Welch suggests the difficult but potentially liberating truth that the injury can act as `truth serum' to its victims. It can be deeply discouraging, but it also can be redemptively potent as people gain more open access to what was truly in the person's heart all along.

TBI calls for special care and love. A superficial attitude by loved ones can unwittingly contribute to the complex problems.

Crimmins provides a very thoughtful, sensitive, moving (if somewhat unsatisfying) account of her own deep experience.

Margaret says

I started out liking this book but soon grew tired of the author's whiny attitude and the excessive use of offensive language. Yes I get it that people with brain injuries sometimes lose their ability to control the obscenities that spew out of their mouths. My dad swore like a sailor after his stroke, but really...I think I get the point without having to read the profanities over and over and over and over. The author also includes too much information about she and her husband's intimate life after his traumatic brain injury (TBI). I would say there is TMI in this account of TBI. I do not recommend this book.

Lorie Kleiner Eckert says

This is the nonfictional story of a boating accident that left a man named Alan in a deep coma with severe damage to the frontal lobes of his brain. It is written by his wife, Cathy. The book's dedication is, "For Alan - Past, present, and future." Knowing a little bit about traumatic brain injury (TBI) I found these words to be chilling. Clearly he will survive the injury, but clearly he will no longer be who he was. Another chilling, though funny line in the book, is the description of the wife, Cathy, who does NOT claim to be a good nursemaid. Not only is she NOT Florence Nightingale, but Alan used to joke and call her Florence Kevorkian instead. I identified with Cathy because caregiving is not one of my strong points and I shuddered for their family's horrific situation. As it turns out, Alan has a miraculous recovery which gives the book a happy ending even though it is tainted with reality. Yes, Alan comes much further than anyone dreamed he could, BUT he is never going to be 100% recovered, nor will he ever again be the man Cathy fell in love with and married.

Kristin says

While Crimmins goes into great detail about her husband's condition in the days and weeks immediately following his getting hit on the head by an out of control boat, this book is a very educational account of the effects of traumatic brain injury on the patient plus those around him. Crimmins' husband, Alan, is fortunate, as many people with the type of injury he received remain mildly functional and live in nursing homes, and he lives at home, drives, and returns to work. That said, Crimmins makes sure to note that although she is grateful to have her husband back, he isn't the same Alan and still experiences major effects from the injury, such as little short-term memory and a tendency towards foul-mouth outbursts at trivial aggravations, especially when tired.

A book like this is necessary so that outsiders realize what these families endure. Alan looks normal on the outside, and Crimmins finds that people treat him as if nothing happened but have expectations that are well beyond Alan's capabilities at varying steps in his recovery.

At first, I thought it would also be a constant dig at the healthcare system in the U.S. Alan's accident happened in Canada in the mid-1990s, so he was covered by Canada's government healthcare, but when Crimmins wanted to move him closer to their Philadelphia home, their private insurance made it a nightmare to get him transferred. His recovery regressed because of the difficult transfer, and the lost time became critically valuable when the insurance mandated that Alan's therapy progress on their set schedule, based solely on duration of treatment and not the degree to which he was ready to move on. Crimmins did a lot of research on brain injuries and fought hard for Alan's recovery. She had some successes, particularly when it came time for Alan to re-enter the work force, but also many failures related to insurance. Overall though, Crimmins' rants about American healthcare were isolated and mostly occurred in the early days of Alan's recovery. Still, it made me think, especially since healthcare reform is still a big topic almost 20 years later. Overall, I enjoyed this book and liked that Crimmins didn't end it once Alan returned home, since it is actually the post-hospital period that gets little attention for TBI patients and is where the public needs the most education. It's easy to recognize and adapt to people who are patients on a hospital ward, but intermixed with the general public, TBI patients tend to be misunderstood and prone to exacerbation of their lingering symptoms which in turn are misunderstood. Definitely a worthwhile read, and it will give hope to those families looking for a miracle with their own TBI patient and support to those families for whom the miracle doesn't come or is incomplete.

jennifer says

tip: however cleverly written, do not read a memoir about caring for someone rehabilitating from traumatic brain injury when you are going to sleep, if you want to sleep and not panic all night about losing everyone

you love and impermanency in general.

this might win for book most intertwined with my life, in geography, characters, and theme. cameos from dmitri of dmitri's restaurant, the lombard swim club, philadelphia school, penn law school, magee and magee riverfront, west philly indian restaurants, presumably the riverview movie theater, former city paper editor bruce schimmel making crude comments, cape may, montgomery mccracken, and first union bank (who really should have been sued mercilessly for that pretextual layoff). i won't lay out the thematic connections. sigh.

Joanie says

I loved this book. It's the story of a man who suffers a traumatic brain injury, as told from his wife's point of view. The book does such a great job of telling the family's story, what it's like to live with someone who has become a completely different person.

I think a lot of times the focus is on the person coming out of the coma but people often don't realize that the person doesn't just wake up fine and back to normal. This book does a really good job of describing the rehab process and the impact of brain injury on the whole family.
