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*Shorter Notices*

**The Pink Ribbon Path: Prayers, Reflections and Meditations for women with breast cancer.** Mary Ussher. Dublin: The Columba Press. Pp. 156. Price: €19.99.

This is a fascinating book that will help and inspire very many women undergoing the trauma of breast cancer. It is a short book (156 pages) that can be read from cover to cover or dipped into for the nuggets of wisdom and beauty that appeal to the reader.

The path referred to in the title is a spiritual path to what Ussher describes as 'inner wholeness' which can be reclaimed during the treatment of breast cancer. It is a sort of spiritual guide through the four stages along that path; first of all through the turmoil of getting the diagnosis; secondly, through the fear and anxieties of the treatment phase; thirdly, to the thankfulness of the after treatment stage. And finally, on what she calls 'the after that stage', which I read as coping with one's ordinary life again.

One of the strengths of this book is the openness of the author that enables her to share many of the emotions she herself experienced as she went through her own journey along this path which for many of us is far from being an easy one.

She presents the reader with an eclectic selection of reflections and quotations, poems and prayers that may help the patient as she goes through the different stages of her cancer experience. Thus for stage one of the *Pink Ribbon Path*, Ussher presents us with quotations, for example, Isaiah 44:2 and the New Testament to calm one's nerves and strengthen faith, but I must confess that it was some of Ussher's own poems and prayers that moved me most, such as her short poem or prayer called 'Love':

*Husband, lover, partner, best friend  
Never has our oneness been so sacramental.  
In sickness now*

## THE FURROW

*Our union*

*Cover me with your love. (p21)*

And the wonderful prayer for her child at the diagnosis stage as she dreads telling him about her illness:

*Father thank you*

*For the precious gift*

*Of my son*

*May he know your love*

*Be strong as you are strong*

*Endure with courage and with faith*

*The news he heard today (p26).*

Likewise for stage two of the path: the treatment phase, there is a variety of helpful reflections, quotations and poems, and again some very moving ones from the author. My favourites are 'Sisters' (P39) a tribute for all they can do for their sick sibling. Also, 'You are here' (P50) reveals the caring and solidarity among the patients getting their chemotherapy, 'all around me people are hooked up to IV lines', and also her great faith, 'God is present in each one of us'.

I should not go on quoting Mary Ussher's poetry; if you think you like it, you much read it all for yourself! However, there is one last choice from the last phase of her journey that I cannot omit – 'Hearing the Flowers'(P89).

*Slow down*

*Don't move too fast*

*Want to make*

*Each moment last*

*Want to hear*

*The flowers grow*

*Feel their rhythm*

*In my soul.*

(With acknowledgment to Simon and Garfunkel).

The final section of the book is devoted to Christian Meditation. This the author discovered during her treatment and it helped her greatly through her illness and recovery. Meditation is a way of being that is difficult to learn but she argues that it is well worth the effort, as it can lead to a better acceptance of oneself and a deeper understanding of others and of God.

While writing this review, I asked myself if I had read it 13 years ago while going through my own breast cancer journey, would I have found it useful? The answer is a definitive *yes*. Though the layout is rather off-putting at first, for a woman with breast cancer or indeed for anyone interested in that field, this book with its insights and empathy would be an invaluable companion along that bumpy journey. But for me, the golden nuggets of this book are Mary Ussher's own poems and prayers.

*Dublin*

HELEN BURKE