



A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing

Reynolds Price

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Reynolds Price has long been one of America's most acclaimed and accomplished men of letters -- the author of novels, stories, poems, essays, plays, and a memoir. In *A Whole New Life*, however, he steps from behind that roster of achievements to present us with a more personal story, a narrative as intimate and compelling as any work of the imagination.

In 1984, a large cancer was discovered in his spinal cord ("The tumor was pencil-thick and gray-colored, ten inches long from my neck-hair downward"). Here, for the first time, Price recounts without self-pity what became a long struggle to withstand and recover from this appalling, if all too common, affliction (one American in three will experience some form of cancer). He charts the first puzzling symptoms; the urgent surgery that fails to remove the growth and the radiation that temporarily arrests it (but hurries his loss of control of his lower body); the occasionally comic trials of rehab; the steady rise of severe pain and reliance on drugs; two further radical surgeries; the sustaining force of a certain religious vision; an eventual discovery of help from biofeedback and hypnosis; and the miraculous return of his powers as a writer in a new, active life.

Beyond the particulars of pain and mortal illness, larger concerns surface here -- a determination to get on with the human interaction that is so much a part of this writer's much-loved work, the gratitude he feels toward kin and friends and some (though by no means *all*) doctors, the return to his prolific work, and the "now appalling, now astonishing grace of God."

A Whole New Life offers more than the portrait of one brave person in tribulation; it offers honest insight, realistic encouragement and inspiration to others who suffer the bafflement of catastrophic illness or who know someone who does or will.

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