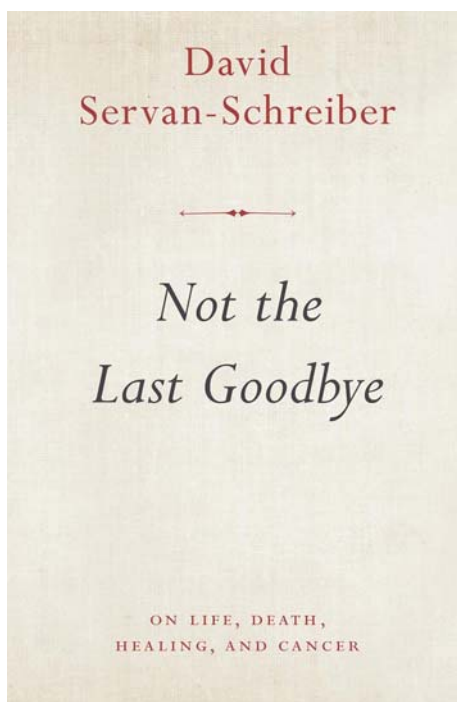


Not the Last Goodbye



Not the Last Goodbye: on life, death, healing and cancer

David Servan-Schreiber

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As it turns out, this book *is* the last goodbye from author David Servan-Schreiber. He wrote it during his tussle with brain cancer which had returned after many years. Servan-Schreiber was author of the book *Anticancer: a new way of life* (Viking, 2009) and was spokesperson for the Anticancer program; this played an important role in his approach to dealing with his illness.

The author was clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh and co-founder of the Center for Integrative Medicine.

Servan-Schreiber's attitude to the recurrence of the cancer, is indicated in chapter 16, 'No Regrets', in which he says that, if four years earlier he had been told that the hectic pace of his life

would lead to the relapse, he would not have lived differently. His account of his life after learning that the cancer had reasserted itself and may well kill him is remarkable. There is a sense of the clinician's dispassionate observation of a patient. I felt some disappointment with his style, because there are places in the book where I would have liked to learn more of his feelings, especially in the context of his relationship with his wife. She is there in the story, but the author writes about her – and their relationship – with some of the same clinical dispassion.

All that aside, the book grips the reader and entices the reader to take the rollercoaster ride of diagnosis, prognosis, despair, hope and sadness. The author struggles with the question of whether to stick strictly to his philosophy as expressed in *Anticancer* or to veer off the path to use orthodox approaches such as surgery, chemo- and radio-therapies. He veers. The overriding motivation seems to be his wish to be there for his children as they grow up – he dedicates the book, in part, to them, saying, "It would grieve me deeply if I were unable to accompany them in their journey through lie." This book will have to suffice – it should serve as an inspiration to them.

There are not many people who have the training and will to give an account of their journey with cancer as David Servan-Schreiber has done. Most accounts of such journeys are from a third-person perspective, as is the case in *A Mother's Final Gift* (reviewed by me recently), or they are from survivors, looking back on the journey. If not a blueprint for surviving cancer, this book does give a map for one way of living life to the full while dealing with it. Whether the author made a wise choice on the way is not for us to judge.