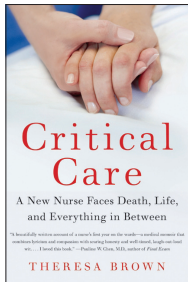


BOOKS

**Critical Care: A New Nurse Faces Death, Life, and Everything in Between.** Theresa Brown. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010, hardcover, 208 pages, \$20.



Brown, an English professor, turned to nursing to discover her passion for people, richness in life, and love for a profession. She shares her journey through her first year as a nurse on an inpatient medical oncology unit with honesty, humor, and literary flair. “Getting My Feet Wet” offers insight for new oncology nurses, with thoughtful lessons on helping patients and others to embrace life amid the chaos of the daily grind. The book also gives experienced nurses the opportunity to remember the early challenges of their nursing careers and the powerful positive or negative effect senior nurses can have on novices. *Critical Care* has lessons for any reader who wants a better understanding of health care, the reality of the hospital setting, and the need everyone has for critical care in life-and-death situations.

Brown uses specific chapters to describe common and memorable milestones in the first year of her nursing career, such as the first death of a patient, a condition A (an arrest or code situation), and a typical day on the floor. The chapters are truthful but do not reveal identities. The stories are reality checks told with humor, compassion, love, and exasperation. Brown also shares her personal struggles. In “Benched,” she describes a time when she was injured and off work. “Openings” has a double meaning as the care of a difficult wound or deciding to open up to patients and one’s own family. Finally, “Switch” shows that changing environments is sometimes necessary to better take care of oneself and, ultimately, others.

“Doctors Don’t Do Poop” chronicles the lighter side of critical care. Humor is instilled in some of the trials and tribulations in dealing with bodily excretions, even as readers are reminded of the differences between medical and nursing practice. The time spent with

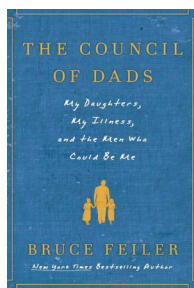
patients, respect for human dignity, and the simple things that are done by nurses emphasize the heart and art of nursing. A nurse making it her mission to find a patient a bible when he needed one is just one example.

The inpatient hospital setting, where necessities include telephones (hand-held and portable), papers (for charting, electronic records, and prescriptions), and alcohol wipes (for everything else—IV, blood products, and other physical “stuff”), is challenging. Nurses may easily become task oriented, doing only the things on a list. Learning how and when to integrate people skills, patient advocacy, and genuineness truly shows the maturity of a nurse. Receiving a smile from a patient or hearing a statement such as, “I needed a dose of you tonight” are the rewards that keep nurses going when they witness what patients go through to live and die.

Final and lasting messages are the need to care for oneself, listen, say “I love you” to family and friends, and “buy the piano”—in other words, surround oneself with things that bring joy, as life can change in an instant. Oncology nursing is hard work, but it can be the most fulfilling experience. Theresa Brown reminds readers of that.

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**The Council of Dads: My Daughters, My Illness, and the Men Who Could Be Me.** Bruce Feiler. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010, softcover, 238 pages, \$22.99.



Oncology nurses and lay readers alike will find wisdom in *The Council of Dads*. While revealing his reasons for choosing a council, Feiler introduces readers to men that shaped the person he has become. This book is Feiler’s memoir and legacy.

Feiler was 44 years old when he was diagnosed with osteogenic sarcoma of his left femur. On routine blood work, he was found to have an elevated alkaline phosphatase that had been normal the previous year. A subsequent bone scan

detected an abnormality that led to his diagnosis and subsequent treatment. At the time of his diagnosis, Feiler was married and had twin three-year-old daughters. Feiler’s goal was to make sure his daughters would know “his voice” should he succumb to his disease.

To reach his goal, Feiler chose six men from different phases of his life to be his “council of dads.” He expected that the men would be a part of his daughters’ lives, ensure they knew the person their father was, and teach them important life lessons as he would if he could. The dad council also would be available for sporting events, dances, or fatherly advice, when needed. Until then, Feiler had to defeat “the monster in the house” for his daughters.

In describing the men that he chose, Feiler reveals details about his life and uncovers some painful memories, such as his grandfather’s suicide. The council members play an important role in helping Feiler learn valuable lessons to discover himself and not be afraid to step into the unknown during his cancer journey.

Feiler, an accomplished author, wrote the book in a readable, nonlinear style. Readers will be intrigued as he blends stories from his personal life, letters of invitation to prospective council members, explanations of why these men were chosen, and family letters of his progress. The chapter “Jeff: Approach the Cow” tells of a cow-tipping experience Feiler had in Holland. His mentor, Jeff, taught him to be a traveler, not a tourist, or to seek out not what is familiar, but what is different.

Cancer was a very different experience for Feiler, and one he had not chosen. His support system of family and friends, although key to his endurance, was not alone in keeping him optimistic. He describes his surgeon as a monument of hope. His mantra during their first consultation was, “This is a war and I intend to win it.” The war theme continues throughout the chemotherapy and surgery as each phase is likened to a battle—Feiler’s own war on cancer.

Feiler completed his treatment plan of neoadjuvant chemotherapy, surgery, and adjuvant chemotherapy, and he is in complete remission to date. As a long-time walker and author of *Walking the Bible*, Feiler likely has returned to his stride. His book paints a picture of a man