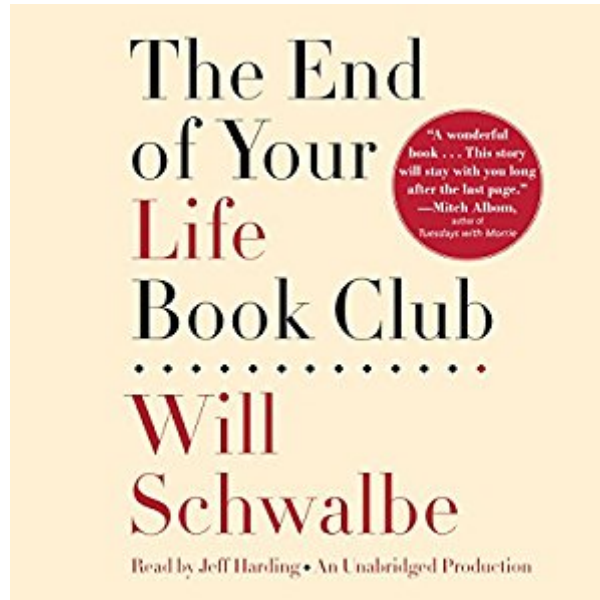


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The End Of Your Life Book Club



Synopsis

"What are you reading?" That's the question Will Schwalbe asks his mother, Mary Anne, as they sit in the waiting room of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. In 2007, Mary Anne returned from a humanitarian trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan suffering from what her doctors believed was a rare type of hepatitis. Months later she was diagnosed with a form of advanced pancreatic cancer, which is almost always fatal, often in six months or less. This is the inspiring true story of a son and his mother, who start a "book club" that brings them together as her life comes to a close. Over the next two years, Will and Mary Anne carry on conversations that are both wide-ranging and deeply personal, prompted by an eclectic array of books and a shared passion for reading. Their list jumps from classic to popular, from poetry to mysteries, from fantastic to spiritual. The issues they discuss include questions of faith and courage as well as everyday topics such as expressing gratitude and learning to listen. Throughout, they are constantly reminded of the power of books to comfort us, astonish us, teach us, and tell us what we need to do with our lives and in the world. Reading isn't the opposite of doing; it's the opposite of dying. Will and Mary Anne share their hopes and concerns with each other - and rediscover their lives - through their favorite books. When they read, they aren't a sick person and a well person, but a mother and a son taking a journey together. The result is a profoundly moving tale of loss that is also a joyful, and often humorous, celebration of life: Will's love letter to his mother, and theirs to the printed page.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

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Customer Reviews

I usually avoid sad books like the plague- I'm a fairly sensitive person so I try to read things that won't devastate me and I despise authors that use difficult situations to either "sell" a story or manipulate the reader. However, I'm a huge huge fan of "project" books, and I love reading, so I figured I'd give "The End of Your Life Book Club" a try and stop reading if it got to be too much. I honestly couldn't put it down- it's a really wonderful book. The backstory is this: Will Schwalbe's mom, Mary, is diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, which (as the doctor says) is "treatable but not curable". Will vows to be as supportive to his mom as he can. But Mary isn't your typical middle-aged woman- this is a woman who has been on the frontlines of some of the most volatile areas on the earth, championing human rights, education, and literacy. She's also a sort of buttoned-up and reserved soul, not one to expound much on her feelings or emotions. She faces her illness with sort of a brisk honesty. Will realizes that the best way he can support his mom, engage her, and open up the lines of communication is to share in one of Mary's passions- books. Will is an editor at a major publishing company, so he's quite a fan of books, as well. So he and Mary begin sharing books, and every time the two see each other, they discuss the books they read. In the process, Mary begins to reveal more and more about not only her vast experiences, but also her emotions and her fears. I've read quite a few "book project" books and many of them come across as an giant compiled Cliff's Notes of books that are read.

This book had me at the title: The End of Your Life Book Club by Will Schwalbe. Anything about reading books or about dying gets my attention - and this titled combined them! Be forewarned - this book is likely to cost you quite a bit of money. Not because of the price of the book but because you will pick up at least 8 to 10 "can't live without it" titles in it that you will HAVE to buy. Often books about lists of books disappoint me but this one was definitely worth it. The author works in publishing, media and writing, so he knows books and literature. His mother, whom he adores, is dying of pancreatic cancer. She too was a voracious reader. They always exchanged books but in her illness they form a secret book club of two to discuss what they are reading during the long chemo sessions (he goes to most with her). Rest assured, she is not just some little wimp of a woman with cancer - she has a powerful resume: well educated, a working mother all her married life, was dean of admissions for Harvard and Radcliff, directed a number of exclusive schools and did massive (and I mean massive) humanitarian work. She lived in many places (London, Paris) and travelled the world for her causes: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Africa - lived in dangerous places to do her work. She was part of the founding of the IRC - International Rescue Committee (a favorite charity of mine), was shot at, starved, got all sorts of diseases from her travels but she was a

survivor. Her final work was building a library with mobile units in Afghanistan. She travelled all over the US raising money and she worked on this project almost to her dying breath. And she raised a big family. And through all of this she read voraciously.

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