

Book Review

Allison's Brain by Allison Wojiwada & Robert McMechanAmy Clements-Cortés¹¹Music and Health Research Collaboratory, Faculty of Music, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada**Hardcover:** 432 pages | **Publisher:** FriesenPress (September 8, 2014) | **Language:** English | **ISBN-10:** 1460251776 | **ISBN-13:** 978-1460251775.**Summary:** Allison, a retired music teacher and lifelong musician, was advised in 2011 that she had a “giant” brain aneurysm, after experiencing olfactory hallucinations. In a twelve hour operation the aneurysm was “clipped”. Following surgery Allison had severe cognitive and physical deficits. This is the story of Allison's remarkable recovery.

“*Allison's Brain*” is a compelling true story of a young woman with a brain aneurysm and her journey from diagnosis to recovery. Told from the personal perspective of Allison and her husband Robert, the significance of the title of the book is poignant, referring to the named email group that provided Allison and Robert's family and friends with updates that often sheltered them from fear and worry. The book weaves Allison's illness narrative with compelling personal texts. The letters she wrote to her family and friends, along with Allison's diary entries and results of various medical tests; provided the reader with a true inside view to this most personal journey. The authors convey their challenging experience in a manner that opens the readers' hearts and minds into emotional, complex and difficult truths about our healthcare system.

While the story is one of courage, resilience, strength and recovery, there is a warm consoling undercurrent of Robert's love for Allison which is evident from the beginning of the book in his pursuit of the highest quality care for Allison. His unconditional love is evidenced in his voice as an advocate. His search for evidence based medical treatments and the most qualified medical professionals to treat Allison were endless. Allison's spirit and positive attitude are threads that present throughout this “hard to put down” story.

The writing style of the book is genuine, moving and captivating. I think my favorite part was the *Epilogue* written by Allison in May 2014. Humor is also present in the stories providing a light hearted side to a very tough journey that Allison and Robert faced with bravery and potency.

As a music therapist and University educator, I was particularly inspired to read about how music played a significant role in Allison's life from childhood through recovery. *Appendix 1-The Power of Music Therapy* written by Cheryl Jones, a neurologic music therapist, provides scholarly detail on the role of music therapy in rehabilitation and describes the treatment plan initiated with Allison, focusing on using music for remediation to encourage a neuroplastic response for speech. Music therapy also focused on word retrieval, and the use of vocal music and sight-reading of piano music in order to reach Allison's goals. On a personal note the book also speaks deeply to me as my father died of a brain aneurysm at the young age of 37.

I highly recommend this book to allied health care professionals, doctors, nurses, students and anyone who has endured loss and grief. It is a masterfully written narrative that gives readers both personal and professional accounts of surviving a challenging diagnosis. It will likely leave you inspired, motivated and moved.

Biographical Statement

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