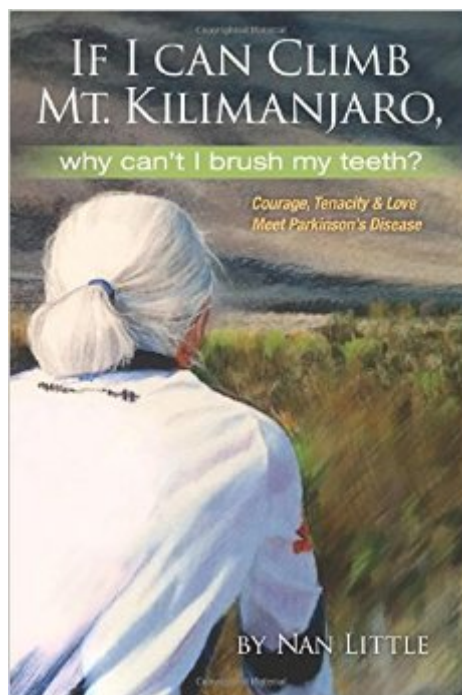


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# If I Can Climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, Why Can't I Brush My Teeth?: Courage, Tenacity And Love Meet Parkinson's Disease



## Synopsis

“You have Parkinson’s disease” transformed Nan Little from a Person into a Person with Parkinson’s, setting her squarely on a life path leading inexorably to physical and mental deterioration marked by increasing disability and a painful, possibly demented, end. Although never considered an athlete, upon hearing this diagnosis in 2008 at age 62, she became physically and mentally stronger by setting, and meeting, unexpected goals. Mitigating her symptoms through fast cadence cycling, she has climbed mountains and cycled thousands of miles. One doesn’t heal from Parkinson’s; one chooses how to live with it. Unlike most “athlete overcomes adversity” books, *IF I CAN CLIMB MOUNT KILIMANJARO, WHY CAN’T I BRUSH MY TEETH? COURAGE, TENACITY AND LOVE MEET PARKINSON’S DISEASE* chronicles an older woman’s unorthodox approach to managing PD. She tells stories, encouraging patients to draw from her experiences points that are relevant to their own lives. She doesn’t hide. Hallucinations, constipation, compulsive behaviors, and loss are all part of the picture. So is the emotion of standing on the roof of Africa, dipping her bike wheel in the Mississippi after cycling across Iowa for seven days and paying careful attention as her two year old granddaughter explains how to stop her “dancing hand”. Each story is laced with courage, tenacity and love. “Nan shows how even the most challenging obstacles life puts in front of us can be stepping stones to something greater than we ever dreamed!” Linna Dossett Patient efficacy, having some control over her personal Parkinson’s path, distinguishes this book from other medical memoirs. Nan encourages patients to take action based on scientific research with measurable outcomes. “You have Parkinson’s disease.” Those few words throw a person on an ice sheet with no ice axe to arrest the slide. Nan’s story can be an ice axe. An estimated 1-1.5 million Americans live with Parkinson’s with an additional 50,000-60,000 diagnosed each year, numbers growing as the population ages. Globally, this chronic neurodegenerative disease currently affects about 5 million. Although this book is about her experiences with Parkinson’s, it is appropriate for any person who endures a neurodegenerative disease, and those who work with them or care about them. “Nan gives honest and raw insight into the process one goes through after being diagnosed with a neurodegenerative disease and how our biggest trial can give us our greatest life lessons.”

Brandis Gunderson

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## Customer Reviews

Nan Little writes a compelling story about dealing with the diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease (PD), and her attempt to "make lemonade" out of the lemon she was dealt. After some months of knowing something is wrong, the truth becomes evident when she is diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2008. She immediately tries to learn everything she can about PD and more important, she tries to learn anything she can do to help her fight the symptoms. After discovering research that showed that high cadence cycling could help, she found a real improvement in her symptoms, and she made it a priority to incorporate this exercise in her daily life. And she not only did it herself, but helped many others have access to the good results by facilitating classes through a collaboration with the YWCA. In an effort to improve her health, as well as prove, to herself and others, her ability to face physical challenges, she embarks on immense efforts of physical strength and endurance by climbing Kilimanjaro, hiking the Inca Trail, and participating annually in the tough long distance multi day bike ride across Iowa (RAIGBRAI). She is diligent in maintaining her physical regimen, pushing past what would ordinarily be defined as huge obstacles, and this response is just one of her ways of dealing with her disease. She has found a voice and presence in advocating for funding and research for PD through national organizations such as the Michael J Fox Foundation, and the National Parkinson Foundation. Her writing style is casual and engaging, making it easy to read on and on. I am sure anyone with this disease, or who has loved ones or family members with Parkinson's, would find Nan's story inspiring and full of courage in her search for a life full of activity and advocacy in living with Parkinson's Disease.

Nan Little tells it like it is! A gifted story teller, she shares her journey as a person with Parkinson's with honesty and conviction in [I Can Climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, Why Can't I Brush](#)

My Teeth?...â • She writes of her disbelief and despair upon learning her diagnosis of Parkinsonâ™s. She tells of her determination to take hold of her life and be known for what she could do rather than for what she could not do. With honesty and humor, Nan tells the readers of her bumpy journey to make lemonade from the lemons of life, sharing details of her âœdownsâ •, her encouraging discoveries and her embracing of âœnew ideasâ •. She tells of friendships made along the way and the joy of being an advocate for others facing similar challenges. Certainly, sheâ™s a great role model for many. Itâ™s an excellent read for those with Parkinsonâ™s and for those who care.

The informal conversational tone in Nan Littleâ™s book allows the readers to imagine they might be sitting across from the author at the local Starbucks while she describes her recent life as an upbeat sixty-something Person with Parkinsonâ™s. No âœwoe is me.â • No âœIâ™m being punished by some Ethereal Being.â • No time to play the victim. Instead, the dogged will to not be defined by the disease. As she explains, sheâ™s not ill; she just has this baffling disease and wants others to know what sheâ™s discovered about keeping Parkinsonâ™s from otherwise defining who she is and what she and others can still accomplish using the latest information about ameliorating the impacts beyond fistfuls of pills. No sugar coating. Her demons are palpable, and she shares the normally discomfiting experiences very candidly. Not everyone who has or will be visited by this designer disorder will be able to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, particularly later in life; but, Little provides enough information about science and grit to prove that such a journey is possible. Those with Parkinsonâ™s and their caregivers, and those like me who do not fall directly in these categories, but who may benefit from a dose of honest inspiration, will want to give Nan Little yet another hug after reading her book.

Nan Little describes herself as leading an active life before she had problems with her arm. Biking, hiking in the Pacific Northwest, lots of social activity, and excellent health, with all these things combined, she couldnâ™t understand why her arm became rigid. Unlike most books about Parkinsonâ™s Disease, this one doesnâ™t focus on the disease itself, but the person coping with it. She first notices her symptoms while fly fishing; whereas once she could bring in the fish with graceful dexterity, now it took longer. She describes going through different diagnoses, then different medications, some work, some do not. All the while she continues to enjoy her physical activities, but has to adapt with one arm being unavailable, or one hand having uncontrolled movement. One of the main themes of this book is that despite having uncontrolled tics and spasms,

the personality doesn't need to change. Not being able to do the things you did before doesn't mean that the essential you is gone for good. She quotes a speaker at a conference as saying that it was a change from what he was used to; people in his community had once looked up to him, and that all changed when he fell off a letter, got a head injury, and woke up with Parkinson's. Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's, and other degenerative illnesses are going to be a greater problem in this country in the next decades. People are living longer than ever before, and someone with Parkinson's, especially if they live alone, may require more care than others. This means that long-term health insurance is more important now than ever before, along with disabled-accessible housing, adaptive technology.

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