



It's All In Your Head

Eva Hagberg

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In 2008, after recovering from a few years of hard drinking and harder drug use, after building back up a life as a successful and happy New York writer, Eva Hagberg woke up dizzy. She spent the next five years searching for a diagnosis, a treatment, and most of all an answer. It was a journey that took her from a career as a New York City architecture critic to a bicycle-riding year in Portland, Oregon to graduate school in Berkeley, California. She saw internists, vestibular specialists, and endocrinologists. They all told her she was normal; that the way she felt was all in her head. When everything she thought she could try failed, she began to believe them, trying to heal through yoga, acupuncture, talk therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and long walks in the woods.

In February 2013, an MRI revealed a mass in her brain. A blood test revealed an elevated tumor marker: a sign of cancer. And that's when the second journey started - one grounded in physiology, in steadily rising marker numbers, and in the brutal invasion of a brain biopsy. And yet, there was uncertainty. And yet, there was the insistent voice that told her she was making this all up. It was definitely all in her head. But how?

An amazing personal narrative of the nightmare of medical care for women, the terror of early-onset brain disease, and the power of love. A haunting, beautiful memoir.

It's All In Your Head Details

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Kali says

from kalireads.com:

For five years, I have been sick and I have been trying to will myself to be better. To think harder about being better, to improve more. To become a better breather, reactor, meditator, hoping that if I just try hard enough, the symptoms will go away and I'll feel like myself again, like a self I remember as if out of a rearview mirror except with this one, the objects are smaller than they appear. I have tried to force myself to be more clearheaded, energetic, grounded. Tried yoga, acupuncture, cognitive behavioral therapy, talk therapy, and long walks in the woods. And every few months, when I finally felt I'd reached a zenith of my abilities with yoga, CBT, or talk therapy, I would give it another shot: go to another doctor, a Western doctor, one with an M.D. and a white coat, and I would tell him or her my symptoms (for the gender of the doctor does not matter only, it would seem, my gender), and hope that once again, the doctor would pay attention, would take my case, would try to help me so that I didn't have to so deeply and fervently try to help myself.

—Eva Hagberg, *It's All In Your Head*

It's All In Your Head, Eva Hagberg's thirty-six page Kindle Single, can be consumed in one sitting, like a tale told round a campfire, or a sad dinner with an old friend in which the conversation turns unexpectedly real. Her words have a desperate pace, a history of illness so short but so complicated that explanation of everything is necessary and almost compulsive. Because there's so much to explain, when you're sick and no one knows why. When you're sick, and the doctors tell you you're stressed. Or maybe you're not stressed, maybe you have cancer. Or no, not cancer at all. How's your stress?

As a young woman who has struggled with health issues myself, I think all young women who have seen doctors, or doubted their instincts to trust what their bodies are telling them, or been to see doctors who make them doubt their instincts to trust what their bodies are telling them, can identify with this book. There is such a fine line between trusting yourself and telling yourself to do better and push harder in our world. People who are sick live on this line. We make our homes there.

Eva has handled living on this tightrope masterfully, and I was so moved by her story, and her strength to share it, that I stalked her a bit. I think she's okay with it (we can only hope). We have similar circles of friends, and after reading the book I reached out to her about how much it blew me away, how similar it was to my own although our illnesses are so wildly different. We're now Facebook friends, and I'm thankful to have her as an inspirational ally in the often weary, sometimes triumphant world of the ill.

Simply being honest about being sick is much more challenging than it sounds, take it from me, and with director Jamison Wiggins Eva filmed seven days leading up to her heart surgery in February of 2014, a project entitled *How to Heart*. They also made a short film, *How to Magnetically Resonate*, about getting an MRI scan.

There are many solutions presented in *It's All In Your Head*, but (spoiler alert) there isn't any medical

miracle revealed. This isn't life written into a story arc, with a climax leading to a clear resolution. This is a memoir of life as it comes, in messy starts and stops, riddled with mistakes and maybes, with no promises or cures.

Ruth says

Quick read - could have ended better

Bea says

The problem I had with this book isn't that it wasn't interesting. It's a memoir about a woman who had great difficulty in getting a correct diagnosis for a brain tumor or growth. The writing rambled on and on, lots of times with no punctuation (which actually did make it seem like she was near screaming with frustration, so maybe that's not all bad), and it ended leaving us up in the air. I felt sorry for her, but felt like I was reading a letter from a ranting emotionally disturbed person.

Rachel says

This book was intriguing and disturbing... a quick read, which really draws you in, but borders on stream-of-consciousness style writing at times, which can be frustrating (long sentences, wordiness). Still, the author has quite a tale to tell, anyone who has struggled with unusual health challenges will empathize with her.

Tanya Marlow says

This was a Kindle Single (a very short e-book, c. 10,000 words) that I bought for something like £0.99. It's written by someone who had a serious illness dismissed by doctors as being a somatisation disorder (ie she was creating the symptoms subconsciously because of the 'illness benefits'). As this is something that is often said by doctors to ME patients, I was immediately interested.

She tells the story of how they discover that it really is 'all in her head' – ie a tumour in her skull, and the fight to get doctors to take her seriously. It's quite an angry book (understandably) and it has lots of insightful quotes in it that I found myself underlining. At one point it looks like she has cancer, and she initially is elated (at last! proof I'm not making it up) but as reality sets in she realises "it's never good news when it's cancer". This turn of phrase, in particular, resonated with me:

"I had, up until this point, known that I was imagining my cancer to be small, treatable, manageable. I hadn't known that I was imagining it to be imaginary."

There's lots of quotes like that I found myself underlining. The best thing for me was her articulation of the emotional battle of experiencing a mysterious illness, because it was so reminiscent of my experience. I wished it had been divided into chapters, even though it's so short, but other than that, it's a great read

Kelly says

Read this, you won't regret it

this book was amazing. It really makes a person think about things that don't typically come to mind on a day to day basis, and some for good reason. This situation that the author finds herself in seems surreal, scary, and fascinating. It's hard to wrap your mind around the possibility, and plausibility of the entire situation, but that's one off the things that makes the book so excellent.

Yuliya says

A quick and easy read. I know it's a memoir so perhaps it's unreasonable to expect a happy ending, or any kind of ending for that matter since the author is still alive, but the book is about her struggle to be diagnosed, so I would expect for her to GET diagnosed at the end of the book, not end with "so there's more tests to follow".

Julie says

A quick read

Erin says

Recommended to me, but I'm a little afraid to read it.

I definitely understand why this was suggested to me: "For five years, I have been sick - and I have been trying to will myself to be better.....I have been trying to get better because I have known that something is wrong." I've been there. I'm there now, but not for five years. I've been very ill for a number of months following two back-to-back surgeries that started as minor issues then became major, and I just can't seem to get better. I don't get dramatically WORSE, but no better. And, like Hagberg, I have all kinds of objective symptoms (some even the same as hers), but don't yet have a firm diagnosis. Unlike Hagberg I've only been dealing with this for months, not for years, but I understand her frustration.

The first quarter of her book talks at length about the process - the scores of doctor appointments, tests and the awful waiting. I was totally with her here. Then the book became an exploration of her yoga practice (interesting, but long-winded), her relationships and what this illness has "taught her", which is....nothing. And while I understand that last part I just didn't relate so much to these sections.

Overall, worth reading for me, but not sure how much others would enjoy it.

Dante says

I downloaded this in my current mission to read things related to surviving cancer, specifically memoir. What I got was something honest, beautiful, poignant, and something that left me feeling like I knew the writer personally. It was a great read. Like sitting down with an old friend and catching up over a cup of coffee while she laid it all out from me from day one. The writer was honest and the words were beautiful and I believe could be read by anyone who isn't family with the most basic cancer-related terms.

To those that complain that the piece ends abruptly- perhaps note that Eva Hagberg is true to finding a diagnosis for herself. Sometimes life, as cancer has a way of doing, leaves you with loose ends.

Jenn says

I borrowed this several months ago from Amazon Prime, and just now read it. It's a Kindle Single, so it was a fast read, which I was actually thankful for. It's the story of a woman's journey to a diagnosis of cancer. Or is it? Hard to say since the story ends abruptly when she's 2 weeks away from getting more tests from the neuro-oncologist. The never-ending stream of lengthy stream-of-consciousness sentences with little to no punctuation made the whole thing difficult to read.

Pam S says

Anyone with any long-term, chronic “invisible” illness that took years to diagnose will probably be affected by this brutally beautiful and honest memoir. Full disclosure: I am one of them. Author Eva Hagberg describes here in both intimate physical and emotional detail her journey from being told she was “just tired, anxious, or depressed” to learning that she did, in fact, have a serious illness. The current, potentially precarious state of medical care in the United States makes Hagberg’s story resonate even more; as we scramble to navigate the seemingly ever changing landscape of health care as women, often considered second class citizens in our own homes, instances like the one she describes here become much more than the sum of their respective parts. My reading of this memoir is also undoubtedly colored by my own, decades-long experience with chronic illness, and I was painfully aware of this as Hagberg describes, in vivid detail, using a perfect balance of technical, medical terminology and alarmingly appropriate profanity, her struggle and relentless search for resolution. Spoiler alert: there is no real resolution, which is an honest portrayal of what this experience can be like. As I read her descriptions of each new symptom or the continuation of others that had lurked at the periphery, it was like looking in a slightly hazy mirror, like an almost-reflection of me but not a true mirror image. Each account of MRI tests and blood work, new medications and old biases, was like listening to an old friend; someone who had always been there but I had just never actually spoken to before. Like Hagberg, I too went through years of being told things that were wrong (some more wrong than others) before finally getting the appropriate tests that confirmed my diagnosis. This happened more than once; more than twice, over the course of my entire adult life. Rinse, lather, repeat. When one doctor tells Hagberg that it often takes “five to eight years to resolve” issues like hers, it sounded like a song I’d heard many times before. Today, many decades and many surgeries later, I am still living with my demons, but at least they all have names.

Carlee says

The only place that everything — the terror, the loneliness, the pain, and the love — can exist is in my head.

Eva Hagberg shares her story of dealing with an illness that left her constantly dizzy for close to 5 years. Trying treatment after treatment including anti-anxiety medications after being told that her dizziness was a result of post-graduate studies and stress, Hagberg learns to live with being dizzy. For years she is told that her illness is all in her head, that it is stress-induced, and that it will all just go away, but her bloodwork shows abnormal levels of a tumor marker and then an MRI reveals a mass.

A quick Kindle single to fit into your day, Hagberg's story has readers wondering, "What if that happened to me?"

This story was a bit of a flop for me for 1 main reason: the never-ending sentences.

The story of recovering from a drug addiction and alcoholism was interesting. It was strange that for years doctors dismissed her symptoms as being related to stress. I was mad for her that she was mistreated, in a way, & I was truly engaged in her personal story. I could not, however, get through the exceedingly long sentences without cringing. Some of the "sentences" took up a half a page on my Kindle when I was reading.

Commas galore, but no periods to be found. For me, it was too distracting. I felt like I was reading the thoughts of someone that was manic.

For more of my thoughts on *It's All in Your Head* visit my blog [Under Literary Construction](#)

Lacey says

I'm not sure how to rate this one. I really liked it when I was reading it but then it just ended. Literally. Just when I was getting to the end and thought I would find out what was going on with this girl medically it just tells about her falling in love, she needs more tests, still has no idea what is wrong with her, then ends. I would have liked to have some sort of ending. I was curious as to what happened and never found out which I really wasn't thrilled about.

Gracie says

Purely Eva

I couldn't help but read this in one sitting. Wow. After mere sentences I was hooked! I found myself reading hungrily, glad to have found something to satisfy my deep desire for honesty and openness. Where other authors might sweep under the rug, Eva whips back the rug and exposes every hidden dustbunny of raw human emotion. What a gift -- to have peeked into a corner of Eva's soul. I consider this book to be a first chapter in a powerful lifelong story, and the ending might as well have been "to be continued..."

Thank you for being shamelessly vulnerable and quirkily wonderful, Eva :)
