

# Promise Me



How a Sister's Love Launched  
the Global Movement to End Breast Cancer



**NANCY G. BRINKER**

*Founder of SUSAN G. KOMEN FOR THE CURE®*

with Joni Rodgers

## Promise Me: How a Sister's Love Launched the Global Movement to End Breast Cancer

*Nancy G. Brinker*

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Suzy and Nancy Goodman were more than sisters. They were best friends, confidantes, and partners in the grand adventure of life. For three decades, nothing could separate them. Not college, not marriage, not miles. Then Suzy got sick. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1977; three agonizing years later, at thirty-six, she died.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The Goodman girls were raised in postwar Peoria, Illinois, by parents who believed that small acts of charity could change the world. Suzy was the big sister—the homecoming queen with an infectious enthusiasm and a generous heart. Nancy was the little sister—the tomboy with an outsized sense of justice who wanted to right all wrongs. The sisters shared makeup tips, dating secrets, plans for glamorous fantasy careers. They spent one memorable summer in Europe discovering a big world far from Peoria. They imagined a long life together—one in which they'd grow old together surrounded by children and grandchildren.

Suzy's diagnosis shattered that dream.

In 1977, breast cancer was still shrouded in stigma and shame. Nobody talked about early detection and mammograms. Nobody could even say the words "breast" and "cancer" together in polite company, let alone on television news broadcasts. With Nancy at her side, Suzy endured the many indignities of cancer treatment, from the grim, soul-killing waiting rooms to the mistakes of well-meaning but misinformed doctors. That's when Suzy began to ask Nancy to promise. To promise to end the silence. To promise to raise money for scientific research. To promise to one day cure breast cancer for good. Big, shoot-for-the-moon promises that Nancy never dreamed she could fulfill. But she promised because this was her beloved sister.

*I promise, Suzy. . . . Even if it takes the rest of my life.*

Suzy's death—both shocking and senseless—created a deep pain in Nancy that never fully went away. But she soon found a useful outlet for her grief and outrage. Armed only with a shoebox filled with the names of potential donors, Nancy put her formidable fund-raising talents to work and quickly discovered a groundswell of grassroots support. She was aided in her mission by the loving tutelage of her husband, restaurant magnate Norman Brinker, whose dynamic approach to entrepreneurship became Nancy's model for running her foundation. Her account of how she and Norman met, fell in love, and managed to achieve the elusive "true marriage of equals" is one of the great grown-up love stories among recent memoirs.

Nancy's mission to change the way the world talked about and treated breast cancer took on added urgency when she was herself diagnosed with the disease in 1984, a terrifying chapter in her life that she had long feared. Unlike her sister, Nancy survived and went on to make Susan G. Komen for the Cure into the most influential health charity in the country and arguably the world. A pioneering force in cause-related marketing, SGK turned the pink ribbon into a symbol of hope everywhere. Each year, millions of people worldwide take part in SGK Race for the Cure events. And thanks to the more than \$1.5 billion spent by SGK for cutting-edge research and community programs, a breast cancer diagnosis today is no longer a death sentence. In fact, in the time since Suzy's death, the five-year survival rate for breast cancer has risen from 74 percent to 98 percent.

*Promise Me* is a deeply moving story of family and sisterhood, the dramatic “30,000-foot view” of the democratization of a disease, and a soaring affirmative to the question: Can one person truly make a difference?

*From the Hardcover edition.*

## **Promise Me: How a Sister's Love Launched the Global Movement to End Breast Cancer Details**

Date : Published September 14th 2010 by Crown Archetype (first published January 1st 2010)

ISBN : 9780307718129

Author : Nancy G. Brinker

Format : Hardcover 368 pages

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## **From Reader Review Promise Me: How a Sister's Love Launched the Global Movement to End Breast Cancer for online ebook**

### **Pussy & Awesome says**

I don't read much non-fiction, but my mother died of breast cancer so I felt a personal connection to the story. It is a three-part book, one being the autobiography of the author, two being the history of the disease and treatment of breast cancer, and three being anecdotes of what the foundation does. All three are interspersed and told at the same time.

At first it was hard to connect to the personal story, because I didn't grow up like the author and her sister did. Then it was sort of inspiring and made me think of what I could do to further the cause. In the end I put it down because I felt I was being sold to. The book feels like it was put together by a marketing department. The backstory of the disease and treatment is written in an interesting way, it didn't feel too wordy.

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### **Scorchy Barrington says**

I read this as part of some broader research that I am doing. Self-serving and egomaniacal, Brinker got caught up in her own cause marketing. Well written if you like young adult novels. Pffft.

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### **Julia says**

This was a very informative book that got me thinking about breast cancer and sisterhood. Fortunately it doesn't run in my family but the book was a compelling read and I liked it.

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### **Chocolate & Croissants says**

The first week of the year has just ended and I would have to say that Promise Me is the most inspirational book I have read this year and in a long time. If you live in North America I am sure you must be familiar with the Susan Komen Foundation and Race for the Cure. While Susan succumbed to breast cancer many years ago, Promise Me is her sister's story of who Susan was and how the foundation came about.

I found the book to be utterly amazing. For me it falls into the category of books that I could not put down once I started reading it. The book is part memoir, part the history of documented cases of breast cancer, the story of Nancy Brinker's promise to her sister to bring awareness to breast cancer along with the stories of various women who have been afflicted by breast cancer.

Race for the Cure is the largest foot race in the United States in terms of participants. Once you start reading the book you get an understanding for who Nancy Brinker is and how she came to create the Susan Komen Foundation. Born to a mother who believed in helping those less fortunate, Nancy and her sister put on a talent show with neighborhood children in their effort to raise money for the fight against polio. They also spent time dropping off food to families afflicted by polio.

As a college graduate, Nancy worked for Neimen Marcus in Dallas, learning what customer service was all about. It is these life experiences that I believe gave Nancy the ability to create such a successful foundation. While her sister underwent treatment, Nancy or other family members were always along her side. After her death, Nancy spoke to the same doctors to find out what could be done to bring awareness to breast cancer and help other individuals (Breast cancer is not unique to women).

Nancy had me laughing when she detailed a French doctor's oncology research. Only a French doctor would cook a sample of a breast with cancer alongside with beef to detail how cooking it changed the sample. He also tasted the sample.

With fondness she recounts growing up as the younger sister of Susan and the adventures they had together. Little did she know when they toured Europe as young women that her sister's life was already half over.

Most importantly, as a breast cancer survivor author Brinker, emphasizes the importance of regular mammograms and self breast exams. The book is truly remarkable. I have run in the local Race for the Cure race and watched from the sidelines. The event is truly something to watch. For those who have never been or seen the races, hundreds of people turn out. But what is more amazing are the various teams of families who are supporting a breast cancer survivor or running in memory of someone that science and medicine could not save.

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### **Janet says**

I did not finish this book.

I have to say this book was written the very best intentions. To raise money for the cure of breast cancer. I applaud them for that. I found the book very boring. It was not my cup of tea.

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### **Patrick says**

This is a good book but it is more about Nancy Brinker than it is about breast cancer. The historical references and descriptions of this hideous disease are worth the read.

Amazon review:

In this compelling memoir, the 64-year-old founder of Susan G. Komen for the Cure mixes details from her soap opera-like life with facts about breast cancer. Nancy Goodman of Peoria, Illinois, morphs from a chubby Jewish girl (in second grade, she tips the scale at more than 100 pounds) to a nearly six-foot glamazon. After breast cancer kills her beautiful 36-year-old sister, Suzy, Nancy starts the world's largest breast-cancer charity in her memory. At age 37, she discovers a lump in her own chest. Nancy gets by with a little help from her second husband, Norman Brinker, the casual-dining gazillionaire and a member of the Susan G. Komen board from its inception in 1982 until his death last year. Cowritten with Joni Rodgers (author of the cancer memoir *Bald in the Land of Big Hair*, 2001), the book does take some liberties, and Nancy drops names (she spent time with Betty Ford and was a U.S. ambassador for George H. W. Bush and chief of protocol for George W.) and settles some scores. But readers will find much to admire.

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## Beverly says

I received an ARC of this book through Amazon Vine.

Product Description from Amazon:

Suzy and Nancy Goodman were more than sisters. They were best friends, confidantes, and partners in the grand adventure of life. For three decades, nothing could separate them. Not college, not marriage, not miles. Then Suzy got sick. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1977; three agonizing years later, at thirty-six, she died.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The Goodman girls were raised in postwar Peoria, Illinois, by parents who believed that small acts of charity could change the world. Suzy was the big sister—the homecoming queen with an infectious enthusiasm and a generous heart. Nancy was the little sister—the tomboy with an outsized sense of justice who wanted to right all wrongs. The sisters shared makeup tips, dating secrets, plans for glamorous fantasy careers. They spent one memorable summer in Europe discovering a big world far from Peoria. They imagined a long life together—one in which they'd grow old together surrounded by children and grandchildren.

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Nancy's mission to change the way the world talked about and treated breast cancer took on added urgency when she was herself diagnosed with the disease in 1984, a terrifying chapter in her life that she had long feared. Unlike her sister, Nancy survived and went on to make Susan G. Komen for the Cure into the most influential health charity in the country and arguably the world. A pioneering force in cause-related marketing, SGK turned the pink ribbon into a symbol of hope everywhere. Each year, millions of people worldwide take part in SGK Race for the Cure events. And thanks to the more than \$1.5 billion spent by SGK for cutting-edge research and community programs, a breast cancer diagnosis today is no longer a death sentence. In fact, in the time since Suzy's death, the five-year survival rate for breast cancer has risen from 74 percent to 98 percent.

I had three reasons for reading this book.

1. I'm currently going through treatment for breast cancer. I have another blog (In The Pink) about my experience and I'm reading as much material related to breast cancer as I can.
2. I'm a Zeta Alum. The Susan G. Koman Race for the Cure is very important to our women's fraternity.
3. I received an ARC from the Amazon Vine review program – however this book was already on my to read list. Receiving it for review just moved it up to the top of the list.

One thing to keep in mind: if you are looking for an actual history of the Susan G. Koman Race For The Cure, then you should look elsewhere. This book is about Nancy Brinker and what motivated her to launch an all out global movement to end breast cancer. To understand the motivation and love behind the movement, you have to understand Nancy. This book does an excellent job in detailing what makes Nancy who she is and why finding an end to breast cancer is so paramount to her.

I found the book to be very inspirational, well written and hard to put down. It's not an easy read. You might want to keep a box of tissues handy. Even though I knew that her sister Susan died from breast cancer, I still found myself crying when I reached that point in the book. I also found myself moved by the vignettes scattered throughout the book that detailed the battles others have fought. The vignettes also included information on the history of breast cancer treatment. I found them to be both horrifying and enlightening.

There is a great deal of information included in this book. It is presented in an easily read manner with interesting details and insights into the main players. If you enjoy memoirs or if you have any connection to breast cancer I highly recommend this book.

On a more personal note: Until I was diagnosed with it, breast cancer was always something that I was vaguely aware of – I supported the awareness campaigns. I did my monthly self exams. Yet, it was something that was just slightly outside my own life. My diagnoses made it a big part of my life. I always thought that the Susan G. Koman Race for the Cure was a worthwhile organization. After reading this book, I now realize that I may very well owe my life to Nancy Brinker and SGK. I'm a benefactor of early detection. Their dedication over the years have pulled breast cancer from the far recesses of a dark closet, shown a light own on it and brought the fight out into the open.

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### **Kaliki says**

Because I have a personal connection to this cause and this organization, I may like this more than most. I think Nancy Brinker is an exceptional woman, who did an even more exceptional thing in creating SGK for the Cure. I thought that I had an idea of what this foundation, and this person, had done in the world, but my knowledge barely scratched the surface of what has truly been involved.

I don't know that I would necessarily call her a 'likeable' woman, but definitely one to be held in a high regard and respected for her loyalty, drive, single-minded focus, and courage. This books is both a personal memoir and a lesson in local, national, and global change.

Another thing I took away from reading this, is a great deal of admiration for the author's 'middle-ground'

stance. This is no example of being undecided or unsure. Rather, she is the supreme example of looking openly at both sides of an issue and appreciating EVERYTHING that's there .. including the extreme opinions .. for what they provide to us. A lesson I believe our country, and probably the world, needs desperately to learn right now.

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### **Jenny says**

This was different than I expected. I thought it would be more about Susan G. Komen, her battle with cancer and the affect it had on her family, mainly her sister, Nancy. Instead, it was a Nancy Brinker autobiography. Of course, Nancy's life's work is breast cancer as a result of her sisters' illness, but there is a lot of other stuff included as well. It didn't always keep my interest and honestly, one of the most emotionally-wrenching events in the book didn't even have to do with breast cancer. I felt so sad when Nancy's marriage to Norman Brinker fell apart after his traumatic brain injury so altered his personality. They seemed to have a great love story and probably would have grown old together except for a terrible accident.

On the positive side, this book definitely increased my awareness of breast cancer. The numbers are pretty shocking and the primitive/early treatments are horrific to think about.

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### **Jezebel Parks says**

This story is heart-wrenching to say the least. Unfortunately, I was only able to get through half of it. I got up to where Susan loses her battle with breast cancer, but even then I had to push myself. Of course, you know what the outcome will be before you even turn the first page.

I tried to connect to both Nancy and Susan, but found that I couldn't. They both make silly decisions that had me almost screaming at the book. Nancy marries a man who, just before their wedding, shows her that the marriage would not be emotionally healthy at all, and said husband was more of a patriarch than a partner. Still, because of how lavish the ceremony is and Susan's encouragement (her reason for her going through with it is also shallow), she marries him and is pretty miserable.

While I hate to say it, Susan annoyed me as well. When she finds out she has the early stages of cancer, instead of going to a doctor who specializes in treating the disease, she goes to a "handsome" doctor from a clinic she's familiar with. This insistence really annoyed me, especially since the cancer comes back because of the doctor's inexperience in treating cancer. Even when it comes back, Nancy tells her to go to an actual cancer practice, and it takes her a while to finally give in. By then, it's too late. I feel bad speaking ill of the dead, but better decisions could have been life-saving ones. Hopefully this will teach others who read this book not to ignore symptoms and such.

There are informational sub chapters between each biographical chapter. They start with the early stages of breast cancer treatment, then go on to cover breast cancer survivors and participants in charity activities. The early segments are especially gruesome, and had me nearly clutching my own breasts in fear. Just be glad we have the technology we do now, ladies.

I wish I could have finished this book, but the players, the pace, and other factors left me bored. Even my interest in the subject (breast cancer runs in my family) couldn't keep me going. Maybe I'll pick it up at a

later date. For now, it will sit on my self.

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### **Al says**

Inspirational and moving is only part of what made this a great book - and fyi, when you read it, have a few kleenex boxes handy. This book incorporated the science of breast cancer incredibly well, was an amazing autobiography of Nancy Brinker and captured the life and essence of Susan G. Komen so perfectly. I feel I am a better and more informed person after reading the book. Highly recommend it.

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### **Annie says**

#### **More than pink ...**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book on so many levels (except for the graphic description of surgery from 1881).

I bought this book because I signed up for my second Race for the Cure on July 21, 2018. Although I hear the name often, I didn't know who Susan G. Komen was. Now I know.

This book makes me laugh and makes me cry. I will keep it to read again, share it and recommend it to anyone who will listen.

I am TOTALLY in awe - in a bad way - of the barbaric and medieval, treatment of women up until the early 80s.

Although Nancy never requests readers to do this, I will walk, I will run, I will snowshoe for the Cure!! I will pester friends and family at least twice yearly for donations.

I will do whatever I can to help SGK get closer to their goal of a world without breast cancer.

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### **Nancy says**

I'm shocked how much I enjoyed this book. This memoir is an impressive and entertaining combination of Brinker's personal history, the history of breast cancer, and the building of a nonprofit empire. They are webbed together with themes, which is rarely done successfully in this genre. Scattered between those elements are both charming and painful anecdotes, in addition to a handful of short stories about other women affected by the disease.

The book is mostly seamless, although I am left a tad confused over her failed marriage with Norman Brinker. While most of the story appears to be honest, there are holes here. She is obviously protecting him or herself or both, even after his death.

Brinker comes across as a likable, unique and motivated woman. I'm impressed by her panache, straight-forward attitude and commitment to her sister's memory, which ultimately evolved into helping women across the world. She also brings grace and pride to being a fundraiser, something I did not expect.

While most wouldn't say it out loud, anyone who reads or knows this story would come to this conclusion: Although the loss of Susan G. Komen is felt immeasurably in her community, family, and beyond, the fact is that, if Nancy Goodman Brinker had been the sister who had passed away at 36 from breast cancer instead, this horrid disease would not be nearly as close to being solved as it is today.

p.s. "Nan" or "Nanny" are never acceptable nicknames for Nancy. Ever.

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### **Tara Chevrestt says**

DNF for me and before everyone gets all upset, let me explain why. First, I do NOT regret buying this book because I support breast cancer awareness 100%, but it was boring beyond belief.

I made it past the sisters' trip to Europe where they run around and spend lots of money and I passed out about three times. As cruel as this is going to sound, their lives, their travels were just interesting enough for me. There was also too much detail about stuff and people that I would forget upon turning the page.

Just not for me.

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### **Christine says**

I cannot say enough about this book. It is a must-read if you are a sister or a friend or a wife or believe in any cause. In trying to be objective, since I am a devoted fan of the Susan G. Komen 3 Day for the Cure, I still believe it is an unbelievable and inspiring story of two sisters and how a promise fulfilled spawned a worldwide organization. Bravo, Nancy Brinker.

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