

Nearly everyone has been affected by cancer one way or the other. It's a deadly killer, with most of its victims experiencing a slow and painful decline that reduces their courage and energy, however, it offers them time to bid their goodbye and live a bizarre half-life.

After Julie Yip-Williams who is the author of this book was diagnosed with colon cancer at the age of 37 and she fought through this nightmare. However, that's not all. Julie's life created a long list of amazing events which is enough to contain three lifetimes. Put together, they produced a strong and unforgettable life story that could affect even the most hard-hearted person.

Julie Yip-Williams grandmother attempted to kill Julie because she was born blind.

Julie Yip-Williams was born into a tumultuous world and a noticeable deep disturbance. The Cold War was intense, and her native Vietnam was the focus of its deadliest proxy war.

Julie was living in southern Vietnam and Julie's ethnically Chinese family ultimately was on the losing side of Vietnam's civil war. As the war increased, they ran from their house in Tam Ky to go and hide in the southern capital of Saigon.

During the year 1975, the war ended when Saigon fell to the northern communist forces. Julie's family went back to Tam Ky. Eight months after, which was on the 6th of January 1976, Diep Ly Thanh was born. She'd later be recognized by her Americanized, married name: Julie Yip-Williams.

However, things weren't right with baby Julie.

When she was four weeks old, her grandmother held her for the first time. Her grandmother, a powerful, dominant woman who wanted authority and infused fear. Eyes narrowing, her grandmother saw a strange whiteness in the pupils of Julie's. She waved one hand over Julie's face; however, Julie didn't follow her hand movement. Julie had congenital cataracts, and she was blind.

Her grandmother called Julie's parents as she jumped into a fierce outburst. Julie would experience a sad and wretched life, unmarriageable and unable to cater for herself. She wouldn't add anything to her family either financially or domestically, and even after their death, she'd have to beg on the streets. So, what about her family's reputation? Gossip would go round that the family was cursed. There was just a reasonable decision which is to give her a potion that would make her die.

For three weeks, Julie's grandmother continued with these verbal attacks. Finally, bowing to her stubbornness and authority, Julie's parents gave in.

While on a bus to Da Nang to see an herbalist that was suggested by the grandmother, Julie's mother held to her infant tightly and cried bitterly. Why did she have to do this? Julie was her beautiful baby; this was immoral.

Her parents got to the herbalist's house and murmured their request with their eyes fixed on the floor. The herbalist withdrew. He didn't believe in killing infants and there was no way he would do such or cooperate. Unexpectedly, Julie's mother sprang up. She started crying and she hugged the herbalist while she kept repeating, "Thank you; thank you." She couldn't contain her happiness.

Upon their return, Julie's great-grandmother got to know about the attempted infanticide. She was irritated and she said that Julie was not to be harmed, stating, "How she was born is how she will be." As the vital matriarch of the family, the great-grandmother's word was the final decision. Julie was to live.

Julie got a surgery that gave her some vision at the age of three when she moved to the US.

For a lot of us, attempted infanticide would be the most dramatic phase of our lives. However, for Julie, it was only the start of an extraordinary life story.

Julie and her family decided to leave Vietnam in the year 1979. The condition in the country had become unbearable for them because of extreme poverty, extensive violence and the seizure of their assets by the government. It was time for them to find a better living condition abroad and in a country where Julie could get medical treatment for her eyesight.

Having this in mind, Julie's family was frightened and they entered a leaking fishing boat bound for Hong Kong. Even before the boat had even set sail, the sailors were already shouting at the passengers to throw their luggage overboard in order to save weight.

Julie's mother had heard a lot of stories of families that drowned while trying to escape from Vietnam, some were even forced into cannibalism. However, they were some that were lucky. They got to Hong Kong safely and they prepared to move to the US. Julie was only three years old when she got to her new home: Los Angeles.

Her mother got a job as a manicurist while her father became a wholesale vegetable buyer. Julie's parents could finally afford her eye surgery. At the Jules Stein Eye Institute at UCLA, she would later recall fighting off the mask that was giving her general anesthetic, before waking up to a world of color and light.

However, her vision was not perfect.

Although the surgery was successful and it gave her some eyesight, the doctors couldn't provide her perfect vision. Still considered as legally blind, Julie forever saw the world through a hazy bubble. The things, item and details a normal-sighted person could see at 200 feet, Julie could only see them from 20 feet away.

Her vision range would have a deep effect on her life. For example, during her childhood, she would be mocked by her classmates, who teased her thick glasses and the magnifying glass she used to read. Due to her disability, she was regularly exempted from activities like playing sports, learning to drive and even going to the cinema. Whenever Julie asked her family why she wasn't invited to watch Star Wars: Return of the Jedi with them. They responded by saying it is because: "You wouldn't be able to see the screen."

Therefore, from a tender age, Julie felt different, left out and disregarded due to her eyesight. However, these negative experiences did have good quality: Julie was determined to achieve

great things just to prove her worth, both to herself and to her family. And this wish formed her young adult life.

Julie dedicated herself to studying and then traveled the world just to prove a point.

Growing up as an immigrant is difficult already for her particularly when someone has to do it in a country with a huge culture difference than her own, with parents who hardly speak English. Every child is finding who they are and finding their place in the world, however, for immigrant children, this is a particularly complicated process. Their identities overlap between two different worlds, leaving them with a sense of never entirely belonging to either.

Also, adding to that, she was legally blind, school bullying and low expectations from her family. However, Julie didn't buckle under the weight of these burdens – she flourished.

Julie used the cards life threw at her and she used them as lighting to light a burning determination in her heart. Instead of driving her into self-pity, Julie's blindness and history made her more determined and she was dedicated to proving a point that she has the capability of doing anything.

Just look at her academic success. In spite of her requiring large-print textbooks and magnifying glasses, Julie wasn't discouraged. All through her high school, she set herself tough and difficult principles; nothing less than an A was acceptable. To prove her independence, Julie attended the college in Massachusetts, very far from her home in LA. She got a bachelor's degree in English and Asian Studies, getting excellent grades. Afterward, she was accepted into Harvard Law School.

However, Julie's ambition was beyond academic pursuits. As soon as she was old enough to go on trips on her own, Julie fell in love with traveling alone. At the age of 30, she'd already been to all seven continents! Traveling didn't just reaffirm her independence, strength, and self-worth; it also thrust upon her demanding physical and emotional tests, which she enjoyed.

As a matter of fact, Julie actively tried out all these tests, dipping herself into deep water where the only choice she had was to swim. Also, by traveling alone and refusing to book accommodation in advance, she put herself in circumstances where she had to sort things out for herself. With just a paper guidebook and binoculars to read train timetables, she would walk the cities alone – from back alleys in China to boulevards in Budapest.

Julie's travel experiences gave calmness to her soul from wondering at the Sistine Chapel to staring out at New Zealand's pristine landscape and trudging across Arctic tundras. They gave her a sense of wholeness and harmony, together with strange lands and foreign people, and they strengthened both her spirit and her love of humanity.

Julie had a career that was successful and she fell in love.

Unfortunately, as anyone who has gone backpacking is very aware that, wanderlust doesn't pay the bills. After traveling extensively after her college and law school, Julie had to go back to the US and build a career. Her life would still be showered with solo adventures to unknown lands, however, they would be centered around vacation days and holidays now.

In 2002, Julie relocated to New York City and she joined the law firm named Cleary Gottlieb.

This esteemed law firm represents some of the largest American businesses; firms that do transactions worth billions of dollars, and whose machinations are worthy of headlines in The Wall Street Journal. Although the work was difficult as it involved regular all-nighters and extreme stress, she loved it anyway, and she enjoyed the unlikelyhood of a disabled Vietnamese immigrant blooming in a big American law firm.

A while after, Julie focused on corporate mergers and acquisitions. The role wasn't all-consuming, it enabled her to have more time for her personal life. That proved to be handy as Julie would soon meet the love of her life, fall in love and she would become a mother.

Josh Williams went to Manhattan into Julie's office in a skyscraper in the year 2007. This love story was unbelievable in keeping with her life. Josh was brought up in a wealthy family in the

Deep South. Julie was the exact opposite of the kind of woman Josh's family believed he'd marry since Julie escaped poverty and she was struggling with legal blindness.

However, the powers of the universe brought the two of them together, and they had a connection that some people spend their entire lives looking for, in vain. Julie saw an exceptionally being and generous man in Josh – a man who wouldn't wink an eyelid reading through the food menu to her in classy restaurants.

Julie and Josh soon got married and they started building a family together. Mia their first daughter, was born in 2010; Belle was born after Mia in 2012. In the years to come, Julie would marvel at Mia's beauty and Belle's intuitive understanding of people. However, for now, Julie and her husband settled into parenthood, and their children became the greatest joys in their lives.

Then, this ought to be where this unbelievable story finishes – with a “happily ever after” moment. However, it wasn't as Julie would be deprived of much of motherhood. She'd never see her children graduate high school, buy their own houses or fall in love.

Julie was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer while visiting Los Angeles for her cousin's wedding.

A lot of us have been to a wedding. Ordinarily, it is a place filled with unbridled joy, filled with love and life-affirming vows, food, drinks, music, and dancing. In the summer of 2013, when Julie's family came together for her cousin's wedding in LA, they believed this one wouldn't be any different from the normal wedding. However, it was.

This is because the wedding was outshined by Julie's diagnosis of colon cancer.

A month before the wedding, Julie started feeling stomach distress: cramping, nausea, and constipation. She went to see a doctor and she was told that it wasn't anything serious. Having that in mind, Julie traveled to LA a few days before the wedding with an unhappy stomach however a happy heart.

However, as soon as she got there, her condition changed.

Julie started to feel a sore, searing pain that immediately became continuous. She didn't have bowel movements for more than a week. Immediately, she started vomiting water. Although she was determined to finish the wedding and head back to New York before seeking medical attention, she couldn't do that. On the day of the wedding At 4:00 a.m., the pain became intolerable and her father took her to the emergency room.

The next day, Julie's life as she was aware ended.

Julie woke up that morning from a colonoscopy and looked into Josh's face. It confirmed what she'd assumed: they'd saw a mass which is an abnormal growth of cells in her colon, and it was assumed to be cancerous.

In a burst of calls to Julie's insurance company, Josh fixed a surgery date for the next few days in order to have the mass removed. For the time being, the official colonoscopy report came back and she had a tumor that was cancerous.

The surgery was a success. The doctor removed her tumor and she was surrounded by her family members. However, they had a devastating look on their faces. Why were they troubled after a successful surgery?

It was because the doctor had seen and removed a metastatic spread which is a group of cancerous cells that have divided from their initial source, "spreading" out to create new tumors in other parts of the body. Metastatic cancer is nearly never curable, and that meant that Julie had stage IV cancer. She was just 37.

Immediately, Julie started chemotherapy, and the side effects were terrible which included nausea, diarrhea, fatigue, mouth sores, and hair loss. However, this would only be the start of a long and painful relationship with chemotherapy and a long and painful psychological journey.

Julie struggled with the notion of hope.

Once a person is diagnosed with cancer, the person is unalterably changed not only physically, but mentally too. The long death sentence of terminal cancer patients takes a huge psychological toll – taking the person on a roller coaster ride that climbs to the shaky, deceptive heights of hope and crashes to the stomach-churning depths of pure, unadulterated fear. In Julie's ride through cancer, she went through a full range of human emotions – and she experienced a stormy relationship with hope specifically.

Never one for clichés or platitudes, Julie hated how often the word “hope” was used. Words like “there's always hope” and “you mustn't give up hope” feel like void words, used just to fill the silence. Also, hope can be misleading, when you believe in it too much it takes on the aura of religion. People begin to believe that hope is you need to be cured.

However, for Julie, this hope of being cured also caused her to one of her most amusing adventures.

Trying to fight her cancer on all fronts, Julie resorted to Chinese herbal medicine. Her friend suggested a Harvard-educated doctor that specialized in alternative medicine; however, Julie was shocked when he asked her to meet him on a doubtful street corner. However, when he showed up in a floral shirt, she couldn't help but laugh. What an absurd situation this was!

Julie was shortly relieved by the doctor's professional act. He explained to her that meeting him on a street corner was better than meeting him at his hospital because the hospital would have to record the details of their chat and thereby limiting the advice he would give her. After their meeting, Julie got a shopping list which included tangerine peel and cinnamon twig. Even if the \$300-per-month herbal medicine led to nothing, she had a great story at least.

Also, hope can be dangerous. Julie came to see hope as a delusion that a lot of dying patients stick to as a just as a form of denial. If a terminal cancer patient becomes so absorbed in the hope of seeking a cure, it will hinder her from making the most out of her remaining time and years.

However, even this – living fully, sucking up joy like a greedy mosquito is too idealistic when you have stage IV cancer.

Julie stood around, smiling and making small talk with the other moms when she took her daughter for a birthday party. Although, she was full of rage inside – curse words spinning around her head. She wanted to shout at them and ask them the reason why her children deserved to have a mom with cancer.

Small instants like these would be warning flashes of Julie's dark journey ahead, as her cancer became terminal and she had to face her death.

Julie's cancer extended to her lungs which made it terminal.

During late 2014 which was 18 months after her diagnosis, Julie's cancer wasn't yet terminal. Truly, she had stage IV metastatic colon cancer and her chances of survival were low. However, what were the chances of her escaping her grandmother's murderous plan? Or that of escaping poverty and becoming a lawyer? For Julie, chances never counted.

Then, in December 2014, she got the worst piece of information in her whole struggle with cancer.

It began when Julie went to her doctor to get the results of some scans that she had done a week before. She was alone at the doctor's office and she was told her lungs had 20 nodules – small spots measuring just a few millimeters. They were likely to be cancerous – and if they were, Julie's cancer was no longer curable. She would only live a few more years.

Julie dashed out of her doctor's office dizzy and confused. She was anguished by the thought of leaving her children behind. Who would take them to the piano lesson and swimming lessons? What could she do to leave the memories of her? How would let everyone in her life know how much she loved them?

The nodules were truly cancerous. The time would soon approach when Julie would start further series of chemotherapy – not to cure herself, however only to extend her life on Earth. However, not now – now was the time to grieve over her bad news.

In the following weeks, Julie fell away from her well-balanced, nearly stoic mental state.

At that time, she was absorbed by deep emotional trauma, worse than anything she'd ever experienced in her life. She lay broken and sobbing on the floor for more than once, shouting at her onlooking husband and children. She fell into a level of depression she wasn't even aware that humans could experience. Julie experienced emotional suffering a few of us will ever know, feeling extreme forms of jealousy, rage, torment, anger, and terror. She was close to insanity.

During the last few years of her life, Julie experienced irregular moments of despair, regularly complemented by the side effects of chemotherapy, like diarrhea, nausea and searing mouth ulcers. In the wake of them, Julie couldn't calmly reflect or meditate. She tried to place her life in the grander structure of human history or see it as luckier than those of child cancer victims, however, her efforts were frequently fruitless. In those moments, there was nothing to do than to cry, accept the pain and curse life's lottery.

As Julie's cancer started to accelerate, she also started planning her death.

It's difficult to think of the mental journey terminal cancer patients have to embark on. It's one of the difficult journeys human beings can experience. However, after climbing dizzying mountains of hope and crawling through deep valleys of misery, patients have to come to terms with cancer and accept their mortality.

Julie's acceptance of her own mortality was enhanced by her specific illness. Not satisfied with stopping in the colon or lungs; in 2017, her cancer spread to her liver. Another important organ had collapsed to cancer's attack; the end was close. Julie was in continuous pain due to the radiation treatments.

However, she was able to admit to her mortality due to her faith in God. Though she didn't belong to any specific religion, Julie constantly believed in a divine creator and afterlife. She tried to, and finally succeeded in, making peace with a creator who took her away from her

children. She drew near to death with dignity and grace, instead of being furious, being in denial and resentment.

Julie had accepted her death. The only thing left was to plan it.

Cancer is a strange beast – the utter opposite of a tragic car accident. With cancer, you can prepare for your death in the minutest detail, tying up technicalities and transferring over your responsibilities. But planning your death is not an easy thing to do.

In the summer of 2017, Julie prepared to die. Her first task was to summon her family and friends to say tear-stained goodbyes. In late July, Julie sat in her dining room with her parents, sister, and brother. Everyone knew it would be their last moment together. Nobody said much.

Julie also bought herself a burial plot. Ever since her illness became terminal, she'd wanted cremation, but then she changed her mind; since her husband wanted a place to visit her – a place to lie and rest next to her.

Finally, Julie wanted to die at home, which is harder than it sounds. Many cancer patients nearing the end of their lives visit a hospital to receive treatment of their symptoms, but they become trapped in the process – the hospital unable to release them as their health deteriorates. To ensure she died in comfort with her family at her bedside, a team of medically-trained professionals from a hospital needed to be brought into her home early on in her end-of-life journey. After this, she was ready for death.

Julie Yip-Williams died in her apartment on March 19, 2018.

From blindness, poverty, and attempted murder to solo traveling, Harvard and practicing law – Julie's life was a miracle. Her cancer was merely the unwinding of it.

The Unwinding of the Miracle: A Memoir of Life, Death, and Everything That Comes After by Julie Yip-Williams Book Review

Julie Yip-Williams's life was a complete miracle. Making it through extreme poverty, blindness and a grandmother who wanted her dead was surprising enough, however becoming a lawyer and meeting her husband, Josh, would have looked unbelievable in her childhood, however impossible. Though she reviled against the injustice of her life and she went through moments of utter misery, Julie was aware that her cancer diagnosis was only the unwinding of a miracle, put in place 42 years before her death.

<https://goodbooksummary.com/the-unwinding-of-the-miracle-by-julie-yip-williams-book-summary/>