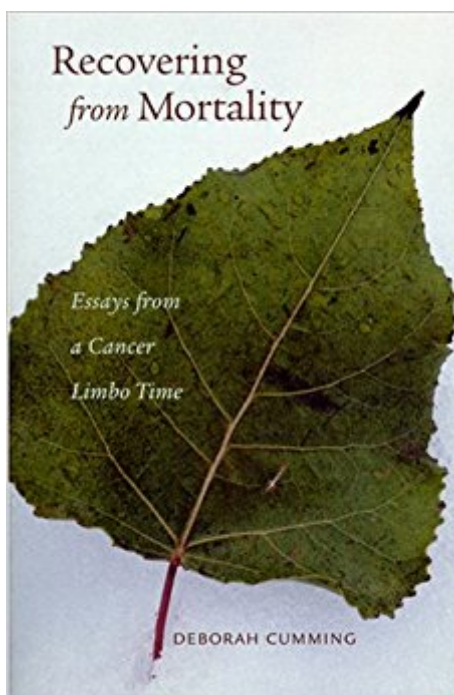


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# Recovering From Mortality: Essays From A Cancer Limbo Time



## Synopsis

At the time that Deborah Cumming wrote *Recovering from Mortality*, she was living in a situation not widely recognized but shared by many people. She knew that she might die soon, yet she was not dying now. What is a person to think in this limbo time? How is a person to act? Rather than accept formulaic answers to these questions, she decided to discover her own path. She didn't want to pass on her answers to others; she didn't believe she knew universal answers. Nor was she interested in adding another story of a cancer patient who survived heroically or died movingly. She did want to commune with others in limbo, with people who might find it a lonely or mysterious condition. And she felt increasingly that she was talking about the human condition in general, for whether we acknowledge it or not, all our lives will end in the not-very-distant future. She felt she wanted to be in communication, not just with the dying, but with the living. This poignant collection of essays examines how we live our lives, in large and small ways. Friendship, family, neighbors, community—these help define who we are and Deborah Cumming writes about them with insight, and with heart.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Deborah Cumming was the author of the critically acclaimed short-fiction collection, *The Descent of Music*. A teacher and writer who traveled the world, she made her home in Davidson, North Carolina. Deborah Cumming died in 2003.

I didn't read it my terminally ill mom said it was comforting and heartfelt. It made her feel good at a bad time so I would recommend it.

It was only in acknowledging her mortality - in confronting it directly, and most intimately: in absorbing into her life, not only the certain knowledge that she would die, but the various uncertainties of the limbo time - that she was able to live fully, and achieve the most complete expression of her life, and of the depth and fastness of her bond with us, with all mortal beings. For me this is because her book written on the edge of death is so charged with life, with the affirmation of all that is most holy and most central in life, and most to be treasured. At some point in the progress of her illness, Deborah came to understand that her predicament was at once an opportunity: that this limbo time had never been described, exhaustively, before: that it was a territory still partly undiscovered, not yet fully known, or absorbed into human experience, hovering, beyond her ken, like an unknown continent; and that, now, she had the chance - even the good fortune - to venture into it with her eyes fully open, with all her receptors alert. Every moment was precious, not only because there were so few of them, but because they contained this experience which might be conveyed to others, who might pass through the same place. It became her habitat: this in-between area where there were no certainties, no securities. Throughout the book the reader can feel her adapting to her new territory. She was equipped to do so: she had the vision, the mind, the will and the heart, to keep herself open to whatever came; to see, clearly, without prejudice; to sustain her attention without remission, without falling under the spell of a dogma; and to convey all this, with moving eloquence, in part because she was so gifted a writer, and partly because she was motivated to do so. She wanted to help others, and she wanted to see, and speak the truth, of her condition. She realized that, in this limbo time, it was in being true to herself that she could be of the most help to us. Jack McMichael Martin

Read this book as fast as possible to experience the brilliant highlights and the thoughtful shadows of the "limbo time" and then go back and read it again--essay by essay. Use each essay as a meditation on living. Deborah Cumming's essays are not your typical cancer book. People who are not dying of cancer do themselves a disservice by leaving this book on the shelf. We are all living and dying every day. Deborah's observations about her experiences, when she felt well after treatment and before decline, can be applied to anyone. How often do we feel stuck in our lives? How often do we wonder what is important? How much should we pay attention to other people's opinions? Can we chart our own course? Do we want to? There is humor in this book and wonderful

juxtaposition. One of the first quotations is from a nautical chart: "the prudent mariner will not rely solely on any single aid to navigation..." Most healthy people in our modern, stress-filled time, do not take the time to exercise or relax, let alone take the time to contemplate the meaning in their lives. Deborah's words give us that opportunity: "Balance is awareness, confidence, and--yes--belief. Belief that balance matters and that it can be achieved." I received this book as a gift. It opened my mind and my heart. It is an amazing book. I bought two more books and gave them to friends with the caveat that if the book touched their hearts, they should buy a book and give it to a person of their choosing. They loved the book as much as I did and I think you will too.

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