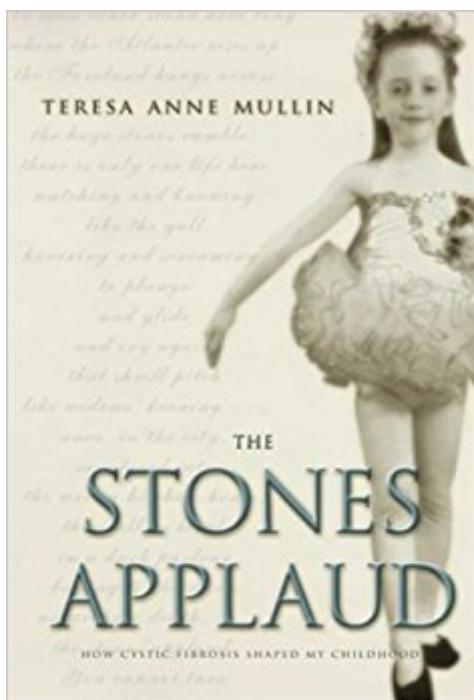


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# The Stones Applaud: How Cystic Fibrosis Shaped My Childhood



## Synopsis

Teresa Mullin was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at four years of age, but it was not until she was nine that she learned most children with the disease were not expected to live to adulthood. What had been a nuisance soon became a force that molded her childhood, youth, and future. In *The Stones Applaud*, Mullin writes of absences from school, serving as a poster child, frequent hospitalizations, medical treatments, and most painful the isolation that came with cystic fibrosis, an inherited condition that damages the lungs and affects the digestive system. With dry humor and sharp insights, Mullin describes her battles with the disease, teachers, fellow students, and even medical professionals who tried to hold her back from experiencing life. Alternately funny, frank, poignant, and gripping, *The Stones Applaud* reveals the talented young writer's fierce determination to live, thrive, and persevere. Whether writing about the joy of being accepted to prep school and Harvard University, the tragedies of others deaths, or the pain of a broken friendship, Mullin never resorts to sentimentality or courts pity. The result is a powerful self-portrait of a young woman who bravely faced death while living life, who fought for every breath and every experience, and who challenges others to carry on the fight for dignity and independence for those with chronic illness. Before she died, Mullin visited Ireland and witnessed cold Atlantic waves beat against the cliffs. Inevitably, the cliffs will not withstand the unrelenting waves, but still they persevere and only the stones applaud. Mullin selected that metaphor from a poem by Gerald Dawe as the title of her memoir. She saw herself and others impacted by cystic fibrosis as the stone cliffs, standing resolute and strong in the face of a battle they suspect they will never win.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I came to know Teresa Mullin in London during what turned out to be the last months of her life. She was a strong, fearless, committed, gutsy, obstinate person who fought for her life against a ruthless disease. She was also a talented young writer whose promising career was cruelly cut short. She left behind a loving family and this gripping account of her struggle. Every page will inspire you and break your heart. --Glenn Frankel, Former London Bureau Chief, Washington Post

While cystic fibrosis wreaked havoc on her physical being, Teresa Mullin possessed a spiritual insight and strength that many of us may never experience. Teresa's book reveals a beautiful, courageous spirit imprisoned in a body that could not go the distance against CF. She leaves to all of us a truly inspired legacy. --Pamela Dent and U.S. Congressman Charlie Dent

God gave the Mullins a precious gift: Teresa, who lived her life as an Olympic champion of every challenge. God gave me a precious gift: the privilege to be an observer of something so special: her life. I learned from her the value of one minute, one breath, and one thought, and was able to understand what is real and true.

--Kostas Kalogeropoulos, Founder, Dream Come True, and Co-founder, Camelot for Children

TERESA ANNE MULLIN was a student at Harvard University when she began work on *The Stones Applaud*, an autobiographical look at her experiences with cystic fibrosis, a hereditary chronic disease affecting the lungs and digestive system. Mullin refused to let the disorder defeat her especially after she learned that, at the time, most children with cystic fibrosis were not expected to live beyond their teens or twenties. After attending elementary school in Allentown, Pennsylvania, Mullin attended Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. She was the first chronically ill student to attend and graduate from the prestigious preparatory school. Attending Harvard University was a longtime dream for Mullin. As a student, Mullin worked as a reporter and editor for the Harvard Crimson, eventually handling the Harvard Business School beat. She also worked for the Boston Globe as an intern and freelance reporter. Several of her stories received front-page bylines. Mullin applied and was turned down for a lung transplant, a potentially long-term solution for cystic fibrosis. After graduation from Harvard in the spring of 1990, she moved to Great Britain, hoping to obtain a transplant there. While waiting to complete her residency and other requirements, the twenty-two-year-old was hospitalized with complications from the disease. She died in London on May 9, 1991.

I really enjoyed this book, and read it in 2 sittings. The author was a courageous young woman and I'm amazed what she accomplished in such a short life. It is written in a pleasant conversational way

that I felt like I knew her a bit when I finished. The one thing I wish it had was a more in depth study of the authors family (Theresa also had a sister who had CF, and died a few years after she did). Her family went on to have a few more children (were her parents aware of the risk?) after her and her sister were diagnosed. I was also curious to how it affected them emotionally, I wish maybe her parents could have touched on this a bit more, just because it was so interesting I would have loved to know more, particularly how her sister struggled as well. I also recommend *Breathing for a Living* by Laura Rothenburg, my favorite book.

I think Teresa Mullin achieved her goals in writing this book. It's a truly eye-opening account of what it's like to grow up with a severe chronic illness---how much she had to fight to be able to even be given a chance to do things we all take for granted. I was especially horrified by the account of the sadistic sounding head nurse at her prep school, who seemed to enjoy making her feel out of place. It was sad but telling to read about her delight in very ordinary things like pulling an all-nighter with friends studying and then going very early to Dunkin Donuts---something most of us would not count among life's big events. I also realized how the emphasis on finding the genes for genetic diseases might distract those who would otherwise work to make everyday life for people with the diseases better. Mullin felt it might have been not that hard to find a way to better fight lung infections and loosen secretions, but so much of the time and money went into finding a cure, and not into finding new treatments. That must be a huge dilemma. I don't know anyone personally with CF, but I do know quite a few children at my sons' inclusive school that are living with severe chronic conditions, and this book will affect how I see them. I wish the best for Mullin's family. I think her parents should also write a book. They would have much to tell about their life with two children with CF---their younger daughter Susan's story is overshadowed here, naturally, as Teresa was away from home so much, but I would love to know more about her, and about how the parents decided to have more children, and about their work on the behalf of CF. I want to thank them for having this book published.

Teresa's book about her life is excellent. She's a strong-willed, brilliant person who conveys her experiences without a hint of self-pity. She's articulate and honest, and she opened my eyes to the shortcomings of preventative medicine and its neglect of those who are already living with disease. She also reminded me that you can't take a break from fighting injustice. Every day she fought it, through exhaustion and other people's ignorance. Teresa seems to have had a tireless spirit, and I hope this book helps people remember to continue Teresa's fight against medical complacency and

the marginalization of chronically ill people.

My husband's best friend has Cystic Fibrosis and that initially led me to read this book. Our long-standing friendship with him has led me to a passable knowledge concerning this disease, but I looked forward to reading this book and gaining new perspective. This book was very well written and informative, not just about the physical trials of this disease, but also about the continual shifting of emotional perceptions and reactions to all aspects of life while battling a chronic and fatal illness. Overall, I found this book to be a brutally honest account of one woman's struggle with a disease...however, I think that this is an accurate portrayal of her struggle in the time period in which she was raised. Reading this opened up a very detailed discussion with our friend, whose experiences have been similar in some ways but vastly different in other ways. Teresa's account is largely laced with frustration, anger and bitterness at her treatment, others reactions and to her disease in general. Our friend and his experiences have been much more optimistic and I accredit this to his facing the disease one decade later than Teresa. This has led me to two conclusions about the timing of her life and the writing of this book. First, that she wrote it in her early twenties, during a time in life when many of us having just become adults are still settling into ourselves. This may have contributed largely to the general negativity in the book. But also, I felt it somewhat hopeful for the disease in general, that though Teresa had to face such inadequate and uninformed health care, that in such a short time CF has come so far. Of course it still has a ways to go, but many of her experiences are now obsolete because research and knowledge have increased at a continually growing rate. The other well-known book about CF (Alex, the Life of a Child) is told from a mourning father and I found to be decidedly tragic and emotionally draining and this book seems to have a much more even and pragmatic approach. I would hesitate to recommend this book to parents facing a newly diagnosed child, only because I feel, after speaking at length with our friend, that the research is moving so steadily forward that this book, thankfully, seems soon to be an inaccurate representation of the face of CF today. Although the emotional and social issues addressed will undoubtedly remain relevant.

Teresa's words are filled with insight, purpose, and pure honesty. The Stones Applaud offers the healthy an eye-opening account of life as we've constructed it, and offers the chronically-ill a champion for their cause. Highly recommended.

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