Liz Tilberis lives a fabulously successful life: she studied fashion editing and became an editor of the British Vogue in London. In 1992, she became the editor-in-chief of Harper's Bazaar, and moved her husband and two sons to an Upper East Side brownstone in New York. She began her book by describing an opulent party she hosted in 1993 for all the big names in the fashion industry. This four-page narrative seems to represent her life: glamorous people and delicious cuisine, set against a backdrop of beautiful decorations. However, as she stated, no one at the party was aware of the fact that she had just learned she had ovarian cancer, and was scheduled for surgery the next day.

Liz Tilberis wrote this autobiography, spending a great deal of time describing her past, her family and her career. She also described her battle with ovarian cancer, and how this permeated all these aspects of her life.

In describing her past, she began with her affluent upbringing in Britain, and how this influenced her life. For instance, she loved her mother's beautiful gowns, and loved to play dress-up herself. This sparked her interest to work in fashion. She was always fun and adventurous, and never cared what people thought of her (she was expelled from her first fashion school after being caught with a man in her room). She relates her incredible drive and desire to work in the fashion industry (she managed to get accepted into another school). While attending this school, she had an affair with the man who interviewed her for admission, Andrew Tilberis, who later became her husband. Her personal life was as wild and adventurous as her career, and she approached both with the same zeal and incredible sense of humor.

Throughout this account of her life, she interjected her journey with ovarian cancer. In describing her past, she explained that she learned she was infertile in 1978, due to damaged fallopian tubes. She underwent surgery to correct the damage, tried nine attempts at in vitro fertilization, and repeatedly used the fertility drugs Pergonal and Clomid. She was never able to conceive, so she adopted her two sons, Robbie and Chris. She feels this information is important to mention, because she wonders whether all these procedures led to an increased risk of developing ovarian cancer. In her fight against ovarian cancer, she endured a hysterectomy, chemotherapy, an autologous bone marrow transplant, and monthly CA-125 tests. What strikes the reader most when the author discusses these battles against cancer is her remarkable sense of humor. For instance, she calls the personnel who were in charge of managing her pain during her hysterectomy "angels in green"
The author was often downright hilarious, and this sense of humor is probably what fuels her strength. No matter how ill she became, she managed to maintain her glamorous life style: flowers and care packages were brought to the hospital from people such as Donna Karan and Daryl Hannah. Her husband and sons were incredible sources of strength for her, which forged her optimism. For example, she stated that “There is nothing like being sick to make you realize how people feel about you.” She thus uses her illness as an opportunity to feel loved. She spent surprisingly little time describing her bone marrow transplant, clearly not wanting to focus on the bad things in life. Even at this low point, she can laugh: “Some funny things transpired: BMT destroyed my taste buds but gave me a soprano’s vocal cords: Suddenly, I could hit the top notes in “The Star-Spangled Banner,” although the Yankees never called to request my services.” Her powerful optimism and delicious sense of humor are inspirational.

This book is an autobiography; it was not intended to provide medical advice. The author does devote a chapter to detailing ovarian cancer: what it is, some statistics on who is at risk and probable causes. She also included a brief discussion of research into a possible link between fertility treatments and ovarian cancer, and a need for better screening. This book was intended to be entertaining while inspirational to cancer patients, and it certainly does an excellent job accomplishing both. Liz Tilberis described her life and her battle against cancer with an infallible passion, and hoped that the reader would learn some things from her experiences. She stated: “Most of us walk around feeling immortal, which is normal and important. But I’ve seen the dark side of the moon and will never take the fact of life for granted.” She ended the book by describing her last moments with her friends, Princess Diana and Gianni Versace, and feels the lesson that she learned from these deaths and her struggle with cancer is “Carpe diem. Seize the day.”

Editor’s Note: In the end Liz Tilberis lost her battle with ovarian cancer she will be remembered for her courage, humor, and style.