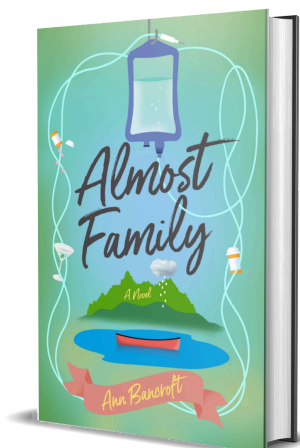


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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## A tender and witty reflection of living unapologetically in the face of terminal illness

*Perfect for fans of “Maybe You Should Talk to Someone” by Lori Gottlieb*



**SACRAMENTO, CA** – *How do you find joy when faced with a terminal diagnosis?* Debut author Ann Bancroft tackles this theme with sharp humor and profound compassion in her new novel, **“Almost Family” (She Writes Press, May 28, 2024)**. Featuring a rough-around-the-edges, quick-witted heroine who stumbles upon an unlikely, but necessary, found family; this debut deftly balances the existential questions raised by terminal illness with honesty and wry humor, reflecting the power of love to heal and foster growth even at the end of life.

Liz Millanova has stage four cancer, a grown daughter who doesn’t speak to her, and obsessive memories of a relationship that tore her marriage apart. She thinks of herself as someone who’d rather die than sit through a support group, but now that she actually is going to die, she figures she might as well give it a go.

At a hospital-sponsored group, Liz hits it off with two other patients. Dave, a gay Vietnam vet, Rhonda, a devout, *nice* woman, and snarky Liz decide to ditch the group and meet on their own. They call themselves The Oakland Mets, and their goal is to enjoy life while they can. In the odd intimacy they form, Liz learns to open up and get close. The trio joined forces to have a good time – but what they wind up doing is helping one another come to grips with dying and resolve the unfinished business in their lives.

*“It’s a story that follows a remarkable trajectory from loneliness and heartbreak to lasting love. An often-resonant narrative of adversity and friendship.”*

— **Kirkus Reviews**



## “Almost Family”

Ann Bancroft | May 28, 2024 | She Writes Press | Fiction

Paperback | 978-164742-666-8 | \$17.95

Ebook | 978-164742-666-8 | \$9.95



**Ann Bancroft** began writing fiction after a career in journalism and communications. Her first job after graduating from UC Berkeley was as “copy boy” at *The Oakland Tribune*, at a time when there were few women in the newsroom. As a reporter, she worked in the State Capitol bureaus of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, United Press International and the Associated Press. She wrote editorials for *The Sacramento Bee* and was later appointed communications director for the State Department of Education. After a first bout of breast cancer, she retired early and began writing fiction, leading generative writing workshops, and mentoring breast cancer patients. She’s an alumna of the Community of Writers, the Tomales Bay Writers Workshops, and Everwood Farmstead artist’s residency. “Almost Family” is her debut novel, to be published when she is 71. Ann and her husband are avid travelers and hikers, and when not writing, she loves to cook and entertain. They live in Sacramento and Coronado, California. Find out more about her at her [website](#).

### Follow Ann Bancroft on social media:

Facebook: [Ann Bancroft Author](#)

Instagram: [@bancroftann](#)

TikTok: [@annban24](#)



## In an interview, Ann Bancroft can discuss:

- Why it is never too late to pursue a dream and what inspired her to become a debut author at 71
- How her experience as a two-time breast cancer survivor profoundly informed her writing
- The parallels between her journalism career and the rich narrative she crafts, drawing inspiration from her professional journey
- How her concerns about addiction inspired an underlying theme of the novel
- Why the concept of “found family” is so important and what compelled her to make that a cornerstone of the narrative

## Advanced praise for “Almost Family”

“*Almost Family* is a book that comes right at the hard stuff with a whole lot of truth and even more humor. Ann Bancroft writes a beautiful story about love and the power of friendship to heal what the doctors can’t.”

— **Jodi Angel, author of “You Only Get Letters from Jail” and “Biggest Little Girl”**

“I found Ann Bancroft’s bracingly honest novel about three ordinary people wrestling with the end of life impossible to put down. Who would have guessed that dancing on the edge could be so much fun?”

— **Hugh Delehanty, coauthor with Phil Jackson of the #1 New York Times bestseller “Eleven Rings”**

“*Almost Family* by Ann Bancroft is most certainly a literary masterpiece. . . There was so much to be felt, learned, experienced, and savored in this narrative. . . Each character was beautifully, intelligently portrayed and intensely believable.”

— **Readers’ Favorite, 5 star review**

“It’s a story that follows a remarkable trajectory from loneliness and heartbreak to lasting love. An often-resonant narrative of adversity and friendship.”

— **Kirkus Reviews**

“*Almost Family* is a well-written, thought-provoking story from a gifted writer.”

— **Readers’ Favorite, 5-star review**



## An Interview with Ann Bancroft

### **1. What compelled you to pursue writing fiction later in life? What has your journey as a debut author at 71 been like?**

I've always written stories, but since I was an eight year-old writing a crayon-illustrated sequel to Pippi Longstocking, my stories have always been based on reporting about other people, or inhabiting the voice of other people as a speechwriter and ghostwriter.

I decided to try my hand at fiction when I retired early, at 57, and took some classes, beginning with a couple of short stories. I liked getting lost in the flow of imagination and that wonderful experience of falling in love with characters I'd made up. I did not start with a goal of writing a novel but the story kept growing and I kept at it until I thought it was done. It's been through years of ups, downs, rejection, praise and revisions, through the pandemic and another bout of cancer. During a couple of years when I'd gotten discouraged and stashed this story in a drawer, I got halfway through a second novel, but this one, originally titled *The Oakland Mets*, kept calling me back.

### **2. Tell us about how your experiences with breast cancer helped you write "Almost Family." Why is the topic of end of life companionship important to you?**

Having been a reporter for much of my life, I tend to look at experiences through a reporter's eyes. The experience of cancer was rich with anecdotes, from acts of kindness to the ways people responded to my post-chemo self, to the raw physical and emotional experience of getting through treatment. I was also a mentor to many cancer patients, through a hotline and as a one-on-one peer navigator for women going through treatment. So it's something I feel confident writing about, and it felt good to explore my thoughts about it in writing.

Since my 30s, I've lost many loved ones to cancer, from both of my parents to two of my closest women friends, a boyfriend, a beloved boss, close work colleagues, neighbors - really, there was a time when people must've thought, "stay away from her, everyone she comes across gets cancer!"



But along with the awful parts of witnessing terminal disease, staying close to a person who is at the end of their life is a powerful, almost sacred experience. Once you get past your own fear and discomfort, you have the opportunity for a profound openness and connection unlike any other. That's what I wanted my characters to experience.

**3. How were you able to use humor in order to craft a story around a painful and sometimes taboo topic?**

If you've ever experienced the irresistible urge to laugh at, say, a funeral or while wedding vows are being read, you know that things can strike you as funny even in the most inappropriate circumstances. There is a certain absurdity that underlies even Very Serious Situations, because life is often absurd, particularly when we're trying to be very serious. I had lots of darkly funny thoughts while undergoing cancer treatment, and I wanted to bring that sensibility to my writing. Actually, I couldn't help but bring that sensibility to my writing because that's how I see things. Dark humor is my favorite genre.

**4. What are some misconceptions you feel people have about cancer patients? Do you think that "Almost Family" will challenge those misconceptions?**

I hope it will challenge some misconceptions. I hope it will make people more comfortable thinking and talking about terminal illness in this culture that is violent, but doesn't deal well with mortality.

Some common misconceptions - that once you have cancer, it defines you. That cancer patients can't possibly want to joke around, or enjoy trivial things, or that because they have cancer they can't also be worried about their jobs and relationships, or be troubled by that stupid thing they said or annoyed at the long line at the grocery store. Also, even while cancer can help a person grow emotionally, it does not confer sainthood. Cancer doesn't automatically make you see the light and become the very best human being you only imagined you could be. That's why Liz is a character with many flaws who continued to make errors in judgment even after her first cancer diagnosis.

Of course cancer casts a huge shadow, but even when it's stage four, it's not the only thing in a person's life. Life, for better or worse, does go on until you die.



**5. How did your previous career as a journalist translate to becoming an author?**

Being a journalist helped me to see details, to empathize and, of course, to write clearly and quickly. What it didn't do was teach me how to write from my imagination. I had to work pretty hard at that, but my experience in prompt-writing workshops helped a lot. I had to pay attention to my career-long tendency to summarize events, rather than slowing down and showing them, and I really didn't get, early on, that speed doesn't count in the painstaking process of getting a book ready for publication.

**6. What do you hope readers will take away from reading "Almost Family?"**

First of all, I hope they'll laugh and maybe cry with the three wonderful characters who came to inhabit the page. I hope they'll get more comfortable thinking and talking about cancer. For those many people who have experienced cancer either personally or with a loved one, I hope they'll feel seen and heard, and that they'll also laugh even if they cry along with Liz, Rhonda and Dave.