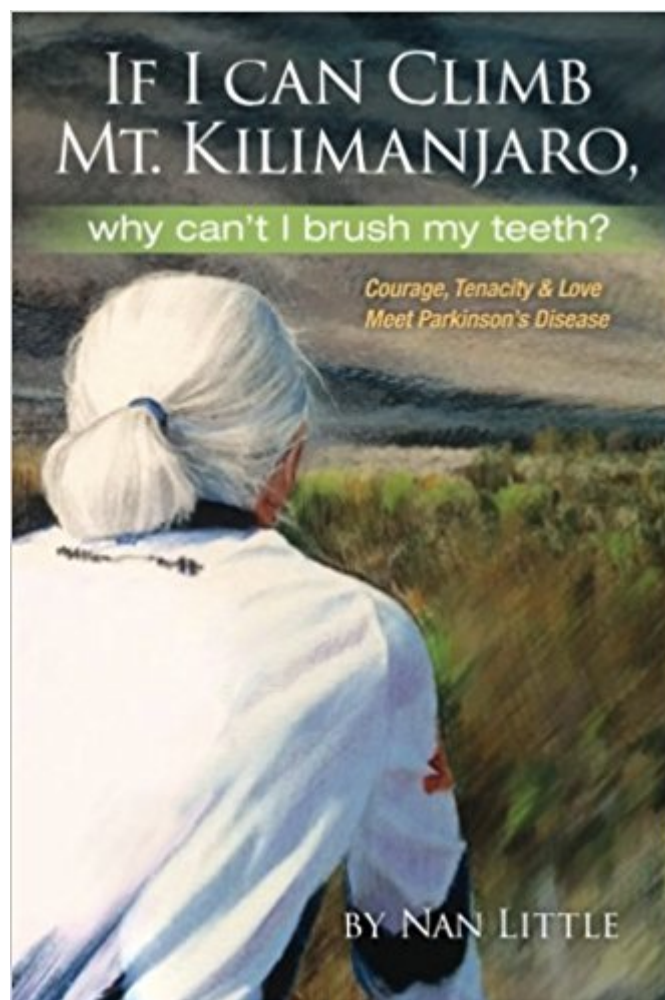




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# **If I Can Climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, Why Can't I Brush My Teeth?: Courage, Tenacity And Love Meet Parkinson's Disease**



## Synopsis

â œYou have Parkinsonâ s diseaseâ • transformed Nan Little from a Person into a Person with Parkinsonâ s, setting her squarely on a life path leading inexorably to physical and mental deterioration marked by increasing disability and a painful, possibly demented, end. Although never considered an athlete, upon hearing this diagnosis in 2008 at age 62, she became physically and mentally stronger by setting, and meeting, unexpected goals. Mitigating her symptoms through fast cadence cycling, she has climbed mountains and cycled thousands of miles. One doesn't heal from Parkinsonâ s; one chooses how to live with it. Unlike most â œathlete overcomes adversityâ • books, IF I CAN CLIMB MOUNT KILIMANJARO, WHY CANâ T I BRUSH MY TEETH? COURAGE, TENACITY AND LOVE MEET PARKINSONâ S DISEASE chronicles an older womanâ s unorthodox approach to managing PD. She tells stories, encouraging patients to draw from her experiences points that are relevant to their own lives. She doesnâ t hide. Hallucinations, constipation, compulsive behaviors, and loss are all part of the picture. So is the emotion of standing on the roof of Africa, dipping her bike wheel in the Mississippi after cycling across Iowa for seven days and paying careful attention as her two year old granddaughter explains how to stop her â œdancing handâ •. Each story is laced with courage, tenacity and love. â œNan shows how even the most challenging obstacles life puts in front of us can be stepping stones to something greater than we ever dreamed!â • Linna Dossett Patient efficacy, having some control over her personal Parkinsonâ s path, distinguishes this book from other medical memoirs. Nan encourages patients to take action based on scientific research with measurable outcomes. â œYou have Parkinsonâ s disease.â • Those few words throw a person on an ice sheet with no ice axe to arrest the slide. Nanâ s story can be an ice axe. An estimated 1-1.5 million Americans live with Parkinsonâ s with an additional 50,000-60,000 diagnosed each year, numbers growing as the population ages. Globally, this chronic neurodegenerative disease currently affects about 5 million. Although this book is about her experiences with Parkinsonâ s, it is appropriate for any person who endures a neurodegenerative disease, and those who work with them or care about them. â œNan gives honest and raw insight into the process one goes through after being diagnosed with a neurodegenerative disease and how our biggest trial can give us our greatest life lessons.â •

Brandis Gunderson

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## Customer Reviews

Born in Detroit, Michigan in 1945, the youngest of four siblings and the only girl, Nan Little learned early on to meet challenges with strength and determination. Nan holds a bachelor's in English and Spanish from Albion College. After teaching middle school for a few years, Nan became a full time mom and volunteer. She returned to work at the YMCA, where she was a founder and first director of the YMCA Earth Service Corps, an environmental leadership program for high school students. After being recruited to the Chemistry department at the University of Washington to administer a program designed to help teachers understand how to teach Native American students, she was dismayed by her own lack of expertise. This led her to earn a doctorate in Anthropology focused on science and math education for Native students. Nan retired in 2003, intending to fly fish her way into the sunset. Life had other plans. In 2008, at age 62, Nan was diagnosed with Parkinson's. She joined Jay Alberts' Pedaling For Parkinson's (PFP) program and cycled with PFP at RAGBRAI, crossing Iowa four times. She climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in 2011, certainly one of few women over 65 to do so with Parkinson's. She trekked to the Annapurna base Camp in Nepal in 2012 and hiked the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu in Peru in 2014. Exercise and Parkinson's advocacy fills most days. Working closely with YMCAs and other health facilities Nan helps set up Pedaling for Parkinson's programs around the nation. She serves on the Parkinson's Disease Foundation's (PDF) People with Parkinson's Advisory Council (PPAC) and on the board of the Parkinson's Creative Collective (PCC). She is an Ambassador for the Michael J. Fox Foundation's Partners in Parkinson's program, a representative with the Northwest Parkinson's Foundation to the Parkinson's Action Network (PAN) and an advisor for a company that makes an assistive cycling app for people with Parkinson's. Nan and her husband, Doug, live with their two long-haired miniature dachshunds in

Seattle, WA. They dote on their four grandchildren. You may contact Nan at [nan.little@comcast.net](mailto:nan.little@comcast.net)

Nan Little writes a compelling story about dealing with the diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease (PD), and her attempt to "make lemonade" out of the lemon she was dealt. After some months of knowing something is wrong, the truth becomes evident when she is diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2008. She immediately tries to learn everything she can about PD and more important, she tries to learn anything she can do to help her fight the symptoms. After discovering research that showed that high cadence cycling could help, she found a real improvement in her symptoms, and she made it a priority to incorporate this exercise in her daily life. And she not only did it herself, but helped many others have access to the good results by facilitating classes through a collaboration with the YWCA. In an effort to improve her health, as well as prove, to herself and others, her ability to face physical challenges, she embarks on immense efforts of physical strength and endurance by climbing Kilimanjaro, hiking the Inca Trail, and participating annually in the tough long distance multi day bike ride across Iowa (RAIGBRAI). She is diligent in maintaining her physical regimen, pushing past what would ordinarily be defined as huge obstacles, and this response is just one of her ways of dealing with her disease. She has found a voice and presence in advocating for funding and research for PD through national organizations such as the Michael J Fox Foundation, and the National Parkinson Foundation. Her writing style is casual and engaging, making it easy to read on and on. I am sure anyone with this disease, or who has loved ones or family members with Parkinson's, would find Nan's story inspiring and full of courage in her search for a life full of activity and advocacy in living with Parkinson's Disease.

Nan Little tells it like it is! A gifted story teller, she shares her journey as a person with Parkinson's with honesty and conviction in *If I Can Climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, Why Can't I Brush My Teeth?...* She writes of her disbelief and despair upon learning her diagnosis of Parkinson's. She tells of her determination to take hold of her life and be known for what she could do rather than for what she could not do. With honesty and humor, Nan tells the readers of her bumpy journey to make lemonade from the lemons of life, sharing details of her *downs*, her encouraging discoveries and her embracing of *new* ideas. She tells of friendships made along the way and the joy of being an advocate for others facing similar challenges. Certainly, she's a great role model for many. It's an excellent read for those with Parkinson's and for those who care.

The informal conversational tone in Nan Little's book allows the readers to imagine they might be sitting across from the author at the local Starbucks while she describes her recent life as an upbeat sixty-something Person with Parkinson's. No "woe is me." No "I'm being punished by some Ethereal Being." No time to play the victim. Instead, the dogged will to not be defined by the disease. As she explains, she's not ill; she just has this baffling disease and wants others to know what she's discovered about keeping Parkinson's from otherwise defining who she is and what she and others can still accomplish using the latest information about ameliorating the impacts beyond fistfuls of pills. No sugar coating. Her demons are palpable, and she shares the normally discomfiting experiences very candidly. Not everyone who has or will be visited by this designer disorder will be able to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, particularly later in life; but, Little provides enough information about science and grit to prove that such a journey is possible. Those with Parkinson's and their caregivers, and those like me who do not fall directly in these categories, but who may benefit from a dose of honest inspiration, will want to give Nan Little yet another hug after reading her book.

Nan was looking at retirement, a typical place in life we all strive for. An anthropologist of native Indian cultures in the Northwest. She like many of us didn't see the disease coming on, "it had to be something else." So what to do with this information. The disease is like sliding in slow motion to a inevitable drop off the cliff, we have two choices. To give up on life then slide even faster to our preordained fate or, do what Nan Little is doing in the face of this "Dignity stealing Disease that gets worse with time." Her story "facing the challenges of Parkinson's head-on" with the courage to do things most of us wouldn't do if we were healthy. I know this because I was honored to be with Nan and her husband Doug on one of her Journey's, to the top of Africa, Mount Kilimanjaro. This book has enlightened me on many of the obstacles I'm going through with my own Parkinson's Disease. She has the heart of a Lion and her story touched me in all of the things she has done on her journey's. Thank You Nan for your Inspiring book! PS Happy Birthday Nathan Henwood

I just completed the book. It is tremendously interesting but more important, is its inestimable value to those with this terrible disease and their care partners. The author delineates her many struggles with the disease. Then she rides her bike across Iowa in July or climbs Mt. Kilimanjaro, accomplishments, few healthy people would even attempt. Why does she do it? Is she proving to herself that she can do it or is she showing others with similar chronic diseases that they too can succeed far in advance of their own personal boundaries? I think the answer is both. I know that her

adventures and perseverance inspired me, a fellow "Parkie," to do more and be more.

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