



Stranger in the Village of the Sick: A Memoir of Cancer, Sorcery, and Healing

Paul Stoller

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After more than fifty years of good health, anthropologist Paul Stoller suddenly found himself diagnosed with lymphoma. The only thing more transformative than his fear and dread of cancer was the place it ultimately took him: twenty-five years back in time to his days as an apprentice to a West African sorcerer, Adamu Jenitongo.

Stranger in the Village of the Sick follows Stoller down this unexpected path toward personal discovery, growth, and healing. The stories here are about life in the village of the healthy and the village of the sick, and they highlight differences in how illness is culturally perceived. In America and the West, illness is war; we strive to eradicate it from our bodies and lives. In West Africa, however, illness is an ever-present companion, and sorcerers learn to master illnesses like cancer through a combination of acceptance, pragmatism, and patience.

Stoller provides a view into the ancient practices of sorcery, revealing that as an apprentice he learned to read divining shells, mix potions, and recite incantations. But it wasn't until he got cancer that he realized that sorcery embodied a more profound meaning, one that every person could use: "Sorcery is a body of knowledge and practice that enables one to see things clearly and to walk with confidence on the path of fear."

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