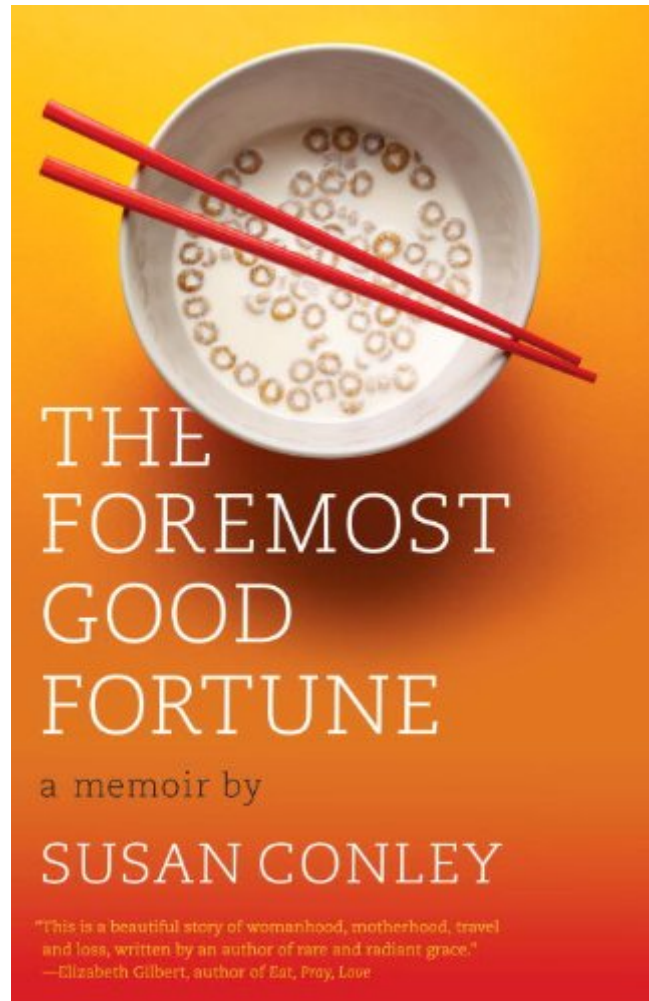




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The Foremost Good Fortune



Synopsis

Susan Conley, her husband, and their two young sons say good-bye to their friends, family, and house in Maine for a two-year stint in a high-rise apartment in Beijing, prepared to embrace the inevitable onslaught of new experiences that such a move entails. But Susan can't predict just how much their lives will change. While her husband is consumed with his job, Susan works on finishing her novel and confronting the challenges of day-to-day life in an utterly foreign country: determining the proper way to buy apples at a Chinese megamarket; bribing her little boys to ride the school bus; fielding invitations to mysterious "sweater parties" and tracking down the faux-purse empire of the infamous Bag Lady; and getting stuck in an elevator, unable to call for help in Mandarin. Despite the distractions, there are many occasions for joy. From road trips to the Great Wall and bartering for a "starter Buddha" at the raucous flea market to lighting fireworks in the streets for the Chinese New Year and feasting on the world's best dumplings in back-alley restaurants, they gradually turn their unfamiliar environs into a true home. Then Susan learns she has cancer. After undergoing treatment in Boston, she returns to Beijing, again as a foreigner—but this time, it's her own body in which she feels a stranger. Set against the eternally fascinating backdrop of modern China and full of insight into the trickiest questions of motherhood—How do you talk to children about death? When is it okay to lie?—this wry and poignant memoir is a celebration of family and a candid exploration of mortality and belonging. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I read this memoir in one sitting. As someone who moved with my husband and young children to Asia, I was hooked immediately. Susan nails the incidental moments - the minutiae - that define a family's transition to a new culture. I highly recommend this book to anyone who has experienced or is anticipating an overseas move with children. However, this aspect of Susan's story only scratches the surface of what makes this book a gem. It is funny at times, poignant at others. If you have grappled with parenting decisions, wondered about the realities of day to day life in China, faced an illness of any kind, or supported someone you love through one, you will find this book hard to put down. It is enlightening, hopeful and unequivocally life affirming.

A wonderfully written account of an extraordinary experience connecting the worlds of China and Maine. The storyline does a remarkable job in weaving together the two parallel strands of a life abroad and the personal challenge of a life threatening disease. In capturing this confluence so well, I could feel ("juede") the life experience completely and also personally connect with the tales of survival. The reader can easily picture the sights, sounds and smells of Beijingand the overall experience that is China in transition circa 2007-2010. No other writing has captured this so well, in my estimation. This is a page turner that keeps you wanting to read more. I liked this book a LOT!

My mother has beaten cancer and I read this book years after her surgeries. Conley's words opened my eyes to how isolating her experience was and gave me an avenue to approach that with her. I had her read it and used this book to reflect on her experience. I am so grateful for those conversations, ones I wish we had while she was at home battling cancer and I was away at college. I gave my copy to an aunt with MS who was also able to use this book to communicate how isolated her disease makes her feel, even with the family. In short, the book is well written, engaging, and a clear look into the psyche of someone battling illness and the struggle that creates within a person. Whether or not you're in China, disease can isolate you from those around you. I am grateful that Conley's ability to articulate her process has allowed me to understand how others

manage to do the same.

This writer is truly gifted. She had me "at hello"-- I was hooked at the end of the introduction and felt I was with her in her journey every chapter. I could not put the book down. It has been a long time since a non fiction book moved me in such a way. I could relate as a parent who decades ago relocated with a young child to a major city in the US and then learned soon after moving that I had a cancerous disease. But she was all they way over in China where she didn't even speak the language! This woman has so much courage and so honest about what happened in her book and the medical treatment received in Beijing. I especially admire this woman for having the courage to leave her safe harbor in Maine and move back to China with her boys once her treatments were over so they could be a family again. She put her values and priorities in place--her own family. I highly recommend this book to anyone because there is so much to learn from the author. My personal thanks to the author for educating me about both China and breast cancer--the two foreign countries she explored.

The Foremost of Great Fortune is a wonderful read! Conley does a great job describing what it's like to live in a completely foreign world--without having been to China, I feel like I could envision Beijing quite well. Similarly, her descriptions of her emotions as she goes through such a tough time with the diagnosis are so candid and truthful--the reader cannot help but to verbally cheer her on as she journeys through such a challenging time. Her story-telling is so effective--while in one instance I can empathize with her for her challenges, in the next the comic relief of her sons and their growing up is a wonderful balance on the flow of events. This was definitely a book that I couldn't put down after I had started and one that I plan on rereading soon!

If you like 1st person narrative, this may be the book for you. Plowing through the long descriptions of life in China with 2 children may prove to be a bit tedious. It is difficult to discern why she would have stayed in China through the trials of breast cancer and why the husband didn't just demand her return to the US. All in all, this book was far from a great choice for me. I read it as a book club pick, but I found it to be a trial rather than a joy.

This is one of those books that you just can't put down. It's the kind of book that you want to buy a zillion copies of to give to all your friends, because you know they will love it just as much as you did. Moving, heartfelt, hilarious, authentic.....I'm not a writer, so it's hard for me to put into words (I

leave that to Conley!). But this is the type of book that stays with you. I *highly* recommend The Foremost Good Fortune.

Susan Conley recounts her life in Beijing with her family and its travails and triumphs with panache. Her writing style is expert: breezy yet compelling with doses of well-done foreshadowing. You know what's coming but you still enjoy the trip getting there.

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