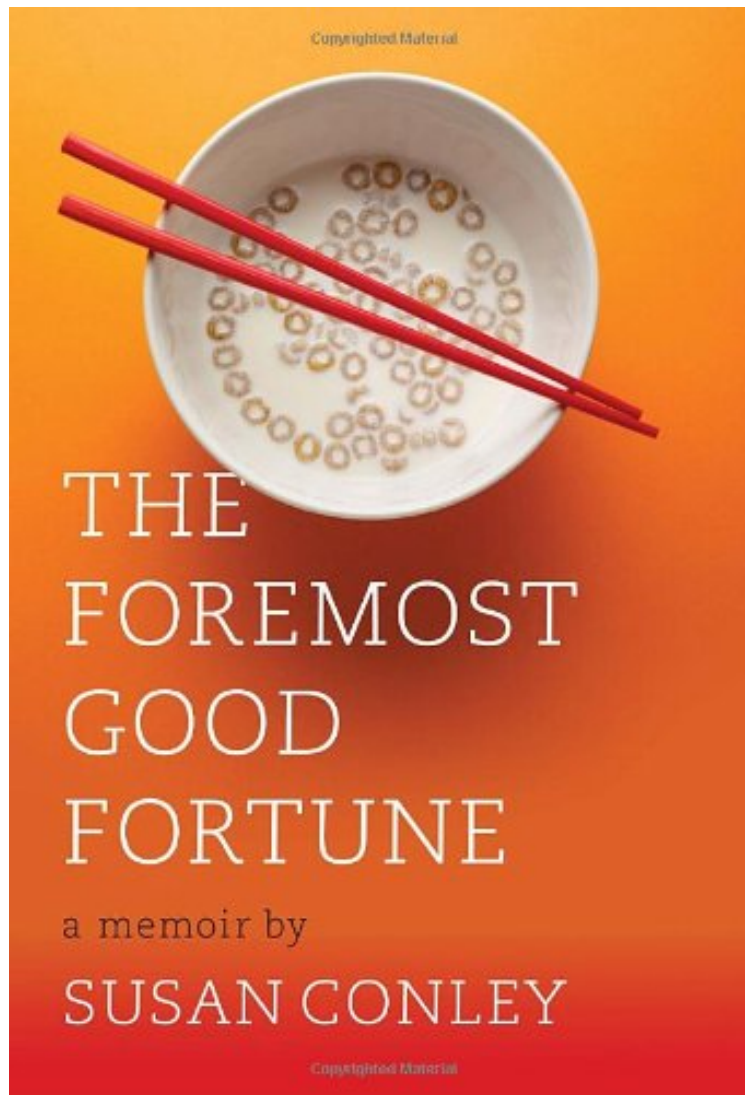


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The Foremost Good Fortune

Susan Conley

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Susan Conley : The Foremost Good Fortune before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Foremost Good Fortune:

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Foremost Good FortuneBy OverseasMomI 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. 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Beijing Life Richly Described By M Barry 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 Beijing ...and 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! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Relatable By Emily 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.

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 Publishers Weekly Starred . "China sat in the rooms of our house like a question," begins Conley in this luminous memoir of moving her family from Portland, Maine, to Beijing on the eve of the 2008 Olympics. Conley's husband had accepted a dream job in Beijing, and they had decided to say "yes to all the unknowns that will now rain down on us" including common difficulties faced by many families moving to a new city: a new school for her two young sons, finding new friends, and adjusting to a new apartment all compounded by the intensity of learning a difficult new language and adapting to a new culture. Conley's writing is at once spare and strong, and her description of having to present an unflappable front to her children while being hit "with a rolling wave of homesickness" pulls the reader into her world like a close friend. As Conley starts to hit her stride in her adopted city, she discovers lumps in her breast and finds herself on a different kind of journey, which she describes as "an essential aloneness that cancer has woven into my days." She explains in this engaging memoir that after her treatment in the U.S. was over, she returned to Beijing, where she searched for the perfect Chinese talisman to "ward off the leftover cancer jujū" and hoping to help her boys move past their own fears of their mother's mortality. (Feb.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. From Booklist Conley, a writing teacher, and her husband, Tony, an IT consultant, relocate from Maine to Beijing with their two young sons. Her compelling and humorous account of the cultural zeitgeist in which they are suddenly immersed draws the reader in immediately. It's a travelogue, a cultural history, and a memoir of parenting successes and disasters as she and Tony feel as though they're running a small overnight camp for American boys in Beijing. As their initially reluctant sons gradually make friends, and Susan slowly learns enough Mandarin to negotiate bargaining at the market and trips with visitors to the Great Wall, their lives seem to be reaching an even keel. Then Susan discovers lumps in her left breast. The family returns for Susan's mastectomy and follow-up radiation to Maine, where family and friends take over as surrogate moms, shuffling the boys from one activity to the next. Then they're back in Beijing, where Susan must come to grips with not only a foreign culture but also the haze of cancerland. Beautifully written and insightful on many levels. --Deborah Donovan This is a beautiful story of womanhood, motherhood, travel and loss, written by an author of rare and radiant grace. Elizabeth Gilbert Susan Conley has written a moving and deeply thoughtful memoir about her years in China. The Foremost Good Fortune begins with one

dislocation a familys move to Beijing and then proceeds to another challenge on a completely different level, as Conley is forced to cope with a cancer diagnosis. This book is for anybody who has felt out of place, whether in a foreign country or a doctors office. "Peter Hessler, author of *Oracle Bones* Heartbreakingly honest . . . strange, sweet, terrifying, and hilarious . . . A beautifully intimate story of homesickness and culture shock, of motherhood and illness, of China and cancer, and the unwavering truths of family and friends and home . . . The lovely surprise is that [Conley] turns the same observant eye on her memories of Maine. Kathleen Meil, *DownEast.com* Conleys ability to describe her challenges honestly, without self-pity, leads you not only to relate to her, but also to admire her. Ellen Tarlin, *Double X* Rewardingly perceptive and frank. Judith Chettle, *Richmond Times-Dispatch* Graceful and honest, humorous and insightful. Christina Eng, *San Francisco Chronicle* You hear about riveting prose, and this is it. The *Foremost Good Fortune* is just about as honest a book as youll ever read . . . a beautiful [story] about China and cancer and how to be an authentic, courageous human being. Carolyn See, *The Washington Post* Startling, poignant. Rebecca Adler Warren, *MoreOne of Os 10 Titles to Pick Up Now: An American mother recounts her struggle to adjust to a new life in Beijing and then face another challenge, this one medical.* Karen Holt, *O, The Oprah Magazine* Terrific . . . Conley deftly balances humor, poignancy and fierce honesty. She captures perfectly the distortion of normal family rhythms [and] is marvelously adept at giving readers just the right doses of her boys quirky quotidian habits, as well as her own manner of coping with the pleasures and burdens of living far, far from home . . . This is a book of fortitude, of good humor, of love that is absolute and enduring. Debra Gwartney, *The Oregonian* Fresh and engaging . . . [Conleys] running account of the profound strangeness of both expat existence and contemporary China is fascinating. Rebecca Steinitz, *The Boston Globe* Conleys lovely memoir powerfully reminds us that we draw our strength from the many little wonders of our everyday lives. Henry L. Carrigan Jr., *BookPage* Compelling and humorous Beautifully written and insightful on many levels. Deborah Donovan, *Booklist* Luminous. Conleys writing is at once spare and strong [She] pulls the reader into her world like a close friend. *Publishers Weekly*, starred review I loved this memoir not only for its humor and humility, but for its gentle weaving of disparate elements dislocation, illness, motherhood, travel, marriage into a seamless, irresistible whole. It is beautifully written. Monica Wood, author of *Any Bitter Thing* Susan Conleys China is gritty, unforgiving, and magnificently perplexing. How fitting a backdrop for a journey into motherhood and how perfectly absurd a setting for the harrowing passage through cancer. This is an exquisite memoir, a gripping story from page one that tugs you along with the honest questioning and insightful whispers of a courageous best friend. Jeanne Marie Laskas, author of *Growing Girls* Susan Conley vividly shows how complicated life in China can become for expats. She expected surprises and adjustments when she moved to China with her husband and two little boys, but she never expected that the surprises would include her coping, as a young mother, with breast cancer. Her book is a story of resilience, told with grace and humor, and with Chinese accents. James Fallows, author of *Postcards from Tomorrow Square* The *Foremost Good Fortune* is a moving and exhilarating ride, as well as a deep meditation on family, belief and mortality. Conleys keen eye captures small moments in gorgeous detail that offer a wider perspective on the whole they create. Conley resets the bar for the memoir with her humor, sensitivity, and stunning sentences. Lily King, author of *Father of the Rain* The *Foremost Good Fortune* is a treasure: The unique experience of being yanked out of context by moving to China and diagnosed with breast cancer allows Conley, paradoxically, to explore the most universal of womens experiences the meaning of our lives, the meaning of motherhood, the meaning of partnership. Peggy Orenstein, author of *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* From its endearing and at times comic tableau of an American family abroad in the new, proliferating China of todays headlines, to the heartrending news that narrows Conleys whole world to survival, *The Foremost Good Fortune* is told by an intrepid traveler who has found her voice in a daunting, exhilarating cultural wilderness...and has found it with wisdom and grace and wonder. Michael Paterniti, author of *Driving Mr. Albert: A Trip Across America with Einstein's Brain*