

It All Belongs

Love, Loss, & Learning to Live Again



JUDY & ROY SMOOT

with MELINDA FOLSE



It All Belongs

Love, Loss & Learning to Live Again

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

When Grief Invades the Holiday Season: New Book Offers Timeless Message of Hope

“You have a large mass in your right temporal lobe.” When these 10 words rocked Judy Smoot’s well-sculpted world, she and her husband, Roy, began a 10-month journey through brain cancer surgeries, treatments, stroke therapy, unexpected and tender moments, fears, anger, and beauty.

KENNEBUNK, Maine, Nov. 13, 2023 — *It All Belongs: Love, Loss, & Learning to Live Again* is an exquisite juxtaposition of perspectives tracing Judy and Roy Smoot’s final four years together. Much more than a book, *It All Belongs* is an immersive experience that opens a rare window into uncommonly candid end-of-life realities through a soulful mosaic of expressive art, journal entries, poetry, and deeply personal writings.

“This is a book to be used,” Roy Smoot explains. “It’s filled with ideas, tools, and examples to help guide individuals and groups in discussing and contemplating their own inevitable journeys of love and grief.”

When Judy, a spiritual director who used expressive arts to help others cope with chronic illness, receives the devastating diagnosis of glioblastoma multiforme, she must put these spiritual practices to the ultimate test. Because she knew how making art sustained her, Judy continued to paint or draw up until the very end of her life. As Judy lives fully into her own mortality, she models her practices for others. But that’s only half the story.

“Judy shows us how to live—and how to die. Roy shows us how to survive. It all belongs.”



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PRESS RELEASE

Following Judy's death, Roy, Judy's husband and soulmate of nearly 40 years, enters a world he didn't know existed, a world he didn't want to know, a world of searing pain, grief, and grace beyond anything he could conceive. *It All Belongs* invites readers to follow Roy from the raw angst of navigating immediate day-to-day realities to his deep introspection. In constantly journaling through his travels, including a long road trip out west and a spiritual quest in Iona, Scotland, Roy mirrors Judy's work to find his own path through his devastating grief.

This unique pairing of perspectives offers spiritual tools and healing practices to help readers face end-of-life realities by exploring the beauty, light — and even joy — tucked within even the most tragic of circumstances. *It All Belongs* encourages readers to listen deeply, explore purposefully, and fully embrace this sacred time.

“Hold nothing back in your questions, rantings, thoughts, emotions,” Roy Smoot writes in the book's introduction. “As this book's title affirms, everything you feel, think, ask, experience, live through, and release is a sacred part of your journey. It all belongs.”

It All Belongs: Love, Loss & Learning to Live Again

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<https://sparkpointpress.com/book/it-all-belongs-love-loss-and-learning-to-live-again/>.

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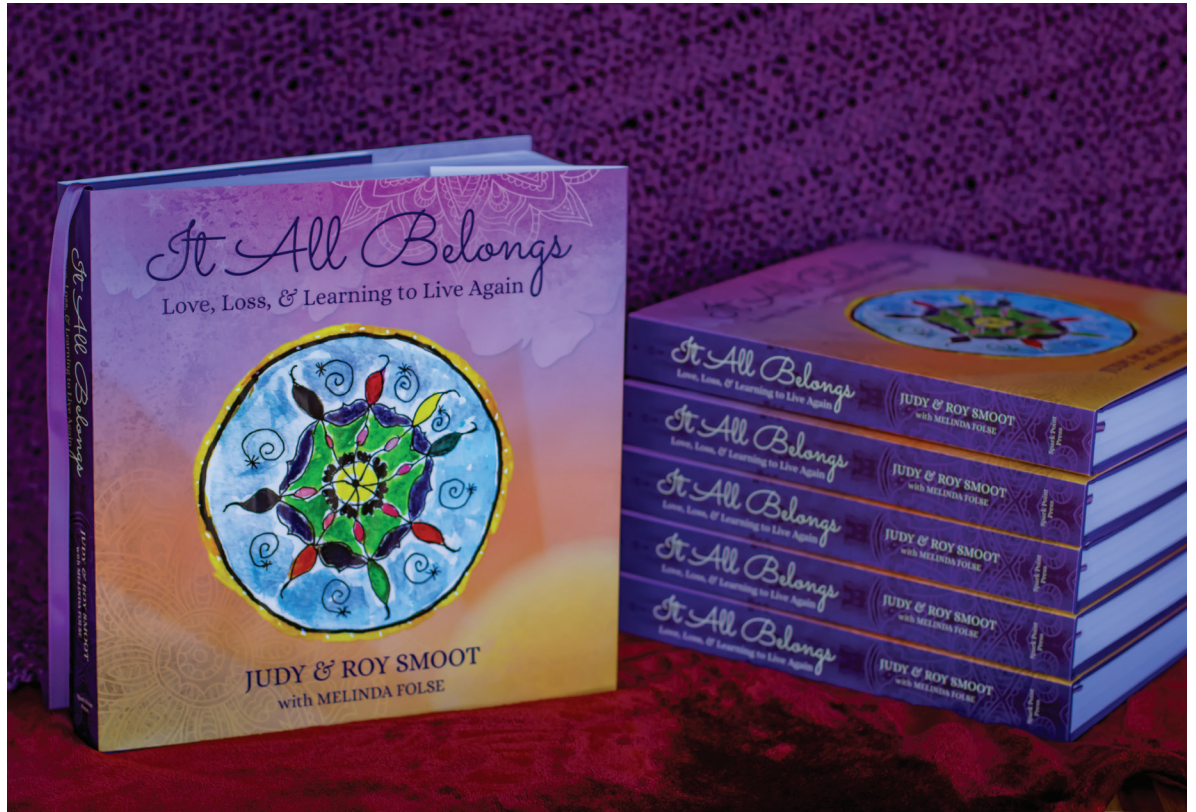


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JUDY & ROY SMOOT

What do you do when you're facing the end of your life—or the life of someone you love?

It All Belongs offers a unique pairing of perspectives and actively models spiritual tools and practices most helpful for navigating life's inevitable realities and unwanted journeys — while embracing the love, beauty, light, and joy in all our life's moments.

Upon her devastating terminal Glioblastoma Multiforme diagnosis, Judy Smoot was forced to put spiritual practices she taught so many others to the ultimate, personal test. In the opening section of this beautifully illustrated book, “How to Live,” we get to know Judy as an artist, spiritual director, expressive arts teacher, retreat facilitator, and innovator of a non-profit organization supporting people with chronic disease.

The book's second section, “How to Die,” begins with Judy's terminal diagnosis and unfolds with her heart-wrenching yet strangely uplifting narrative and art through which Judy shows us what it looks like to live fully into our own mortality by living fully into hers. Actively modeling spiritual and expressive arts practices she taught to so many others, Judy's living into her own mortal battle prompts a friend's observation, “Judy taught us how to live . . . and how to die.”

At first interspersing with her primary narrative, and then gradually moving toward full ownership of this interwoven tale, Judy's husband and soulmate Roy reveals his own day-by-day struggle to navigate his unwanted journey using tools Judy taught—and some of his own. In the book's final section, “How to Survive,” *It All Belongs* invites its readers to journey with Roy as he learns to embrace life's twin realities of love and grief, offering a rare window into the elusive rhythms of his bittersweet dance.

Woven into both sides of this honest, beautiful, heartbreaking, and awe-inspiring narrative, readers will discover spiritual tools and practices to equip them for their own inevitable end-of-life realities. *It All Belongs* offers hands-on help for learning to embrace the love, beauty, light, and joy tucked within even our most tragic experiences.



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JUDY & ROY SMOOT

About the Authors



JUDY & ROY met in college at Ohio State, were married following graduation, and for the next four decades lived and loved in Georgia, Florida, Ohio, and Maine. Roy enjoyed a successful banking career; Judy served as a Wellstreams spiritual director, a Dominican Associate, and an Expressive Arts Florida Institute (EAFI) certified expressive arts therapist. Judy established Always We Begin Again (AWBA), a non-profit organization to support people with chronic illness. Later in life they made their home at “Sunrise Ridge,” their cottage and retreat center renovated and created in the breathtaking beauty of Ohio’s Hocking Hills.

Two and a half years after Judy’s death, Roy married June, a very good friend of Judy’s who says one of the reasons she fell in love with him was his fulfillment of his promise to Judy to publish this book. They live in Kennebunk, Maine, where they enjoy the mountains, ocean, and snowshoeing through Maine’s scenic winters.



MELINDA FOLSE is a writer, editor, and collaborator on a mission to tell stories that make a difference. She believes this story will strike a meaningful chord in every life it touches. *It All Belongs* is her eighth book, joining *Grandmaster*, *Dream Catcher*, and *Lessons Well Learned* as her favorite explorations of lives and passions well lived. She lives in Fort Worth, Texas with her husband David, horses and too many dogs.



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Author Q & A

In your own words, give me a short summary of your book.

It All Belongs presents a rare, deeply personal window into the roller-coaster realities of navigating end-of-life, written from two perspectives. Judy was a spiritual director who used expressive arts to help people cope with life-impacting events. She received a deadly, terminal glioblastoma multiforme diagnosis - “You have a large mass in your right temporal lobe.” She then modeled spiritual practices she shared with others as she faced her life’s end. I walked with Judy through her brain surgeries, chemo, radiation, clinical trials, stroke rehabilitation over ten months before an owl hooted three times to call her home. I then mirrored Judy’s work to find my path through devastating grief to find how to live again. *It All Belongs* offers readers real tools and deep inspiration for making peace with life-ending experiences common to everyone.

What do you want people to know and remember?

Judy taught us how to live and how to die. She taught me how to live again when she was gone after 41 years together. We hope to offer our lessons to all who read and experience our book.

What made you want to share this very personal and painful story with other people? Why did you decide to write it?

As friends and family read Judy’s meditations, writings and saw her art done before and during her treatments, they told her she should have it published to help others. When Judy asked me to have her writings and art published, I promised her I would. As a few select friends read my journals, they told me the same thing to help people dealing with abysmal grief step by step. I had to keep my promise to her. Like we did in our lives, we did this together.

How involved was Judy in writing this book—the first part primarily?

It sounds like she might’ve been very motivated to share her experience.

Judy was an artistic journaler for more than 20 years. It was a deep part of her life and spiritual practices. She wrote her raw, beautiful, painful, loving observations, prayers, meditations to reflect her views of life and death before and during her treatments, combined with her art. She was incredibly motivated to share her experiences to help others. It all flowed from a sacred place deep within her. Everything she wrote and created was hers alone.

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Why did you choose a traditional method of storytelling—a book—instead of a blog or something online?

Good question in today's electronic world. I believe her art, words and use of secular and sacred texts will be best experienced with a reader's eyes, hands and heart. Our book has pages and space to write your own reactions, thoughts, art as you journey with us. Journaling was a huge part of my healing therapy, and I know how vital it was to engage my heart and hands, to write my observations, poems and stories. I hope readers will do likewise.

What's the reality of getting a book published now?

It's a monumental exercise, especially one so personal and vulnerable. Seeing this final product, holding it in my hands was overwhelming. Melinda Folsie was our engine, our collaborator, our guru to get this across the proverbial finish line.

How did you go about it?

I knew about Melinda's book writing and publishing skills and asked her to lead it. She then connected us with Jenkins Group in Traverse City, Michigan, who were invaluable in bringing this book to life.

Is this book self-published or did you have a publisher?

Melinda's firm, SparkPoint Press, indie published it with The Jenkins Group in Traverse City, Michigan serving as book packager who coordinated the design, production and printing.

What advice would you give to people about writing a book?

Be patient. This was a five-year process, sifting through more than 900,000 words of journal entries and hundreds of images of Judy's art. Pour your heart into it and don't skimp. When you hit a wall, take a well-deserved pause, then get back at it. Lean on people who know you best to offer support and constructive criticism. Remember WHY you decided to do it and hang onto your reason. Pray however you pray.

How did you handle going over these difficult parts of your life while you were writing?

I sobbed, often uncontrollably, reliving not only our difficult steps, fears, surgeries, treatments, the first words about her right frontal lobe, but also that our great times were coming to such a tragic end. I smiled as I remembered good times in our remodeled cottage, being her Sherpa as she completed her two-and-a-half year expressive arts studies in Sarasota, and unbelievably tender moments during her treatments and worst times; tender moments which would never have happened had her GBM not invaded her brain.



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For you, was this a cathartic process or did telling these stories bring back a lot of grief?

Both, absolutely both. It was another step in healing for me. Melinda often told me as she distilled almost a million words from many journals, and hundreds of art images, “I feel Judy’s presence. I hear her talking to me.” I too, felt Judy’s presence many times. Still do. It was also a way for June, my current wife who is a good friend of Judy’s, to learn much more about what we went through. In fact, June told me another reason she fell in love with me was because I kept my promise to Judy to have this published.

Tell me the two or three most memorable moments for you in this experience.

How about a two-part answer? From my journaling time, I recall amazing conversations with a high school girl in the Grand Canyon, with a young mother at a local pub, on Iona with a young couple facing her cancer diagnosis, with a fellow widower at a pizza shop as his family sat nearby, with a middle-aged man and his young friend in a mall--all prompted by their noticing me off by myself writing away and feeling safe enough to ask me what I was writing. I recall a kind stranger buying my dinner at Gaylan’s in Bar Harbor as she noticed tears falling to my journal pages. From our process of publishing this memoir to Judy, feeling her presence about what to include, who to ask for help, truly feeling from Melinda her increasing deep knowledge of Judy’s heart and soul. Judy was touching her from heaven, or whatever our next life phase is.

What do you hope readers will take away from your and Judy’s experience?

Life is everything together. Our title, *It All Belongs*, says it all in three words. Pain, horror, joy, grief, love, caring people, amazing healthcare professionals, surprising gifts from strangers and much more—it all belongs. Friends and co-workers sometimes told me, “I don’t think I could do what you and Judy are doing,” as we traveled our ten-month dance with cancer and death. I told them, “You don’t know what you can do until you have to.” We are stronger than we know, with help from others and from whatever faith tradition you follow. We hope *It All Belongs* is a tool and possible guide for your journey, or a loved one’s journey.

Knowing what you know now, is there anything you would’ve handled differently as you found out about Judy’s illness and went through her treatment?

Oh my! So many things initially come to mind, things to maybe heal her better or keep her here longer. Mostly wishes, but not reality. I know we were incredibly blessed with beyond-amazing people at The James Comprehensive Cancer Center at Ohio State. Not only was their expertise world-class, their hearts motivated their work. We became their extended family and vice versa. I recall her lead oncologist



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not being able to be at our last meeting when we were told there was nothing more to be done for her because he cared for her so deeply and couldn't face her. I recall her surgeon visiting us after her first brain surgery on Thanksgiving, the day after he had removed most of her GBM tumor. I recall her hospice nurse bathing her and anointing her for her journey home to heaven before Judy left us. Nothing different, nothing at all.

Who were your most valuable support people to get through something like this?
People who were able to walk with me without trying to fix me were most valuable. They let me be me; messed up, fragile, confused, quiet, loud, vulnerable, explosive at times. They talked about Judy with me versus never mentioning her name. They listened and listened. Two told me how angry they were with God for separating Judy and me. Such incredible honesty from them. Friends, family, nuns (Sr. Noreen, Sr. Joan) who were spiritual directors with Judy, her spiritual director, a hospice counselor named Kermit, Katherine, Amanda, my brother David, and my wife June.

Is there anyone you wish would've come to your aid?
Interesting question. This may not answer your question directly, but may I share a realization? As time moved on, I had to expend more and more energy to initiate connecting with people. Part of me held a bit of anger about this. Yet, I realized that life moves on after loved ones die. They were incredible support sources beyond anything I had hoped for. Yet, their lives moved on for them, and they had to move on. It actually helped me spend more time by myself to write and move forward, literally step-by-step.

In the desperate fight against cancer in our medical system today, what did you find most confusing?
Most confusing was all the various options, treatments, advice, billing, side effects of one medicine on other medicines Judy was taking (one instance was especially frightening when we almost had to run to the ER at Christmas). It was a barrage of information which was hard to process in a terrifying time.

Most helpful?
Caring medical professionals who seemed to understand what we were facing, our fears, our lack of being familiar with all their medical expertise, our difficult decisions. They cared about us. We were not merely their next patient that day.



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Most hurtful?

A few, very few medical professionals who didn't listen to us and our fears; who were more concerned about following their protocols. Insurance processors who blocked clinical trial options until her doctors went to bat for Judy, with big bats.

What's next for you, now that the book is finished?

Doing all we can—June, Melinda and I—to get this book into the hands and hearts of people facing, or who will face, similar circumstances, whether it's cancer or not. This is a mission to serve and to honor my promise. And keep another promise Judy and I made to each other many times about the survivor of who would die first. I will love and live. Now ... with June!!



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Judy and Roy Smoot



It All Belongs launches on December 1, 2023.

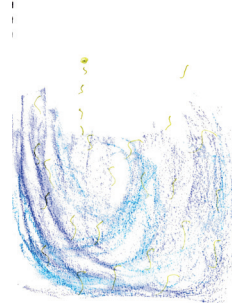
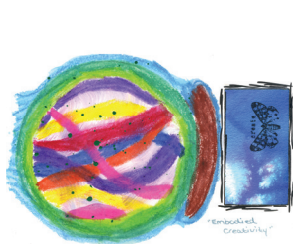
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“It All Belongs”



Judy Smoot promised to share her end-of-life journey with people who could benefit from her experience.



During her terminal illness, Judy Smoot practiced the same expressive art therapy she taught to others. Toward the end of her life, her drawings reflected her decline.

Art by Judy Smoot

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For your group or organization, the twin narratives of *It All Belongs* overlap, envelop, and invite its readers along for a tender journey. Its colorful, vibrant, and inspiring “How to Live” section overviews Judy’s work as a spiritual director, and then its heartfelt and searching “How to Die” section follows her through diagnosis, illness, treatment, and eventual death. At first interspersing with Judy’s primary meditations and thoughts, and then picking up full

ownership of their story as Judy declines is her husband and soulmate Roy, whose journaling reflects his struggle to navigate his unwanted journey using some tools Judy taught—and some of his own.

Through Judy’s art, easily accessible tools and spiritual practices, *It All Belongs* is woven with real help for facing a life’s end, whether it’s yours or the life of someone you love. By encasing its more therapeutic elements in a riveting story, *It All Belongs* engages as it teaches, with easy-to-teach and easy-to-absorb lessons well suited to group study as well as guided or unguided individual use. Packed with insights from diverse and ecumenical resources of inspiration, this book is a valuable resource, offering blended wisdom for these heart wrenching times almost everyone will eventually face.

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