BOOK OF THE WEEK

Empathy in the face of uncertainty

'Autumn Gold' a deeply personal story of love, loss and courage

BY DAVID STEINBERG FOR THE JOURNAL

esley Lowe's book "Autumn Gold" will warm your heart ... and break your heart. It's heartwarming not least because of the inexhaustible courage Vashti shows in her

fight against multiple myeloma, an incurable. but treatable, bone marrow cancer. Vashti is Lowe's daughter



and the book's tragic central figure. The book is, in part, a love story. Vashti reunites with the love

of her life, Lesley Lowe Jeff. The two had been together years before, but broke up. Surprisingly, and to their delight, he comes back into her life and they make plans to

Because Vashti demonstrates a deep empathy despite her physical pain and uncertain future, she reaches out to offer hope to others dealing with the disease as they, too, face uncertainty. Her joie de vivre resonates with everyone who comes in contact with her.

In the end, "Autumn Gold" is a heartbreaking story. After chemotherapy and radiation treatments, and two bone marrow transplants — one from a live donor in Germany Vashti loses her 18-month battle with cancer at the age of 34. She died in April 2015.

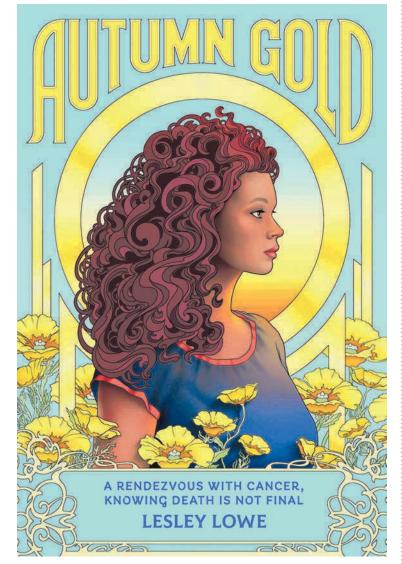
Vashti, Lowe said, wanted to write a book on bone marrow transplantation particularly for younger people if her cancer had gone into remission. It never did.

Lowe, of Albuquerque, said she promised her daughter she would write a book about the procedure if Vashti couldn't. Lowe's book is more about her daughter's life, but includes information on the bone marrow transplantation procedure.

She calls what she wrote an historical biography. Remembrances provided by Vashti's friends are grafted on. "Those parts ... wrote themselves," Lowe said. Her husband, Russell, also contributed a story about Vashti's attempts to get to places on time.

Lowe waited until 2019 to start writing the book because it would have been too emotionally difficult for her to have begun it sooner.

An oncologist explains to Vashti that multiple myeloma is a cancer that develops in



the plasma cells, a type of white blood cell important to the body's immune system. Myeloma cells collect in the bone marrow, forming tumors in the bones; the disease occurs mostly occurs in older men.

The source of the title "Autumn Gold" comes from what Lowe said Vashti had told her about a session she had with a psychiatrist.

Lowe writes that her daughter discussed two things about the session: One was that she told the psychiatrist her soul had been shattered when she learned about her cancer diagnosis; the other was that, while looking out of the psychiatrist's window and seeing the autumn leaves, Vashti told her that "she had wondered why, in their natural progression toward imminent death, they displayed such vibrant colors as vivid, exquisite

Lowe "realized that Vashti had mirrored that mystery by turning her fear and disappointment into a seemingly golden aura of love and compassion for others and gratitude for the life she had

Vashti's thoughts about nature was but one striking example of

her ability to make a connection to the spirit world. At one point, June silently thanked the Divine Presence for getting the family through Vashti's first transplant procedure. She then "prayed that the strongest force in the universe — love — would surround her daughter and kill any cancer cells in her blood."

In the final chapter, Lowe unexpectedly finds Vashti's journal while cleaning out her late daughter's North Valley home. The find, Lowe writes, awakened a sense of her daughter's continued presence in her life. The book is subtitled "A Rendezvous with Cancer, Knowing Death Is Not Final."

Vashti graduated from La Cueva High School, and received undergraduate and law school degrees from the University of New Mexico. She was an Albuquerque attorney.

Lowe said March is Multiple Myeloma Awareness Month and that bethematch.org is the website of the organization handling all bone marrow testing for donations for transplants. The National Marrow Donor Program maintains a national registry for people willing to donate their bone marrow.

BESTSELLERS

FICTION



1. "House of Sky and Breath" Sarah J. Maas. Bloomsbury 2. "Diablo Mesa" Preston/Child. **Grand Central** 3. "Abandoned in Death" J.D. Robb. St. Martin's 4. "Gwendy's Final Task" King/Chizmar. Cemetery Dance 5. "Sierra Six" Mark Greaney. Berkley 6. "Dawnshard" Brandon Sanderson.

7. "The Last Thing He Told Me" Laura Dave. Simon & Schuster 8. "The Judge's List" John Grisham. Doubleday 9. "The Lincoln Highway" Amor Towles. Viking 10. "The Horsewoman" Patterson/Lupica.

NONFICTION

Little, Brown



1. "Life Force"

Tony Robbins et al. Simon & Schuster 2. "PlantYou" Carleigh Bodrug. Hachette Go 3. "Good Enough" Bowler/Richie. Convergent 4. "Atlas of the Heart" Brené Brown. Random House 5. "The 1619 Project" Nikole Hannah-Jones. One World 6. "Red-Handed" Peter Schweizer. Harper 7. "The Art of Star Wars: The Mandalorian (Season Two) Phil Szostak. Abrams 8. "Competing in the New World of Work" Ferrazzi/Gohar/ Weyrich. Harvard **Business Review** 9. "The Way of Integrity" Martha Beck. Open Field 10. "The Real **Anthony Fauci**" Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Skyhorse

'THE HEIGHTS'

Candlish a masterful storyteller

BY MOLLY SPRAYREGEN

ouise Candlish's "The Heights" opens with Ellen Saint spotting a man she knows standing in an apartment window. His presence there doesn't make any sense, as Ellen killed that very man two years earlier. What follows is a wild adventure, told from the alternating perspectives of both Ellen and her family members, in which Ellen investigates how this man could possibly still walk the Earth.

Her investigation intermingles with flashbacks to the past, where we learn why Ellen, a devoted wife and mother, believed this man had to die in the first place — and why she's

determined to make sure that this time around, he really and truly does.

"The Heights" is a delight. Ellen is a quirky, vengeful, unreliable narrator with a one-track mind focused on nothing but revenge

- and it is so much fun to spend time inside her head. Candlish's storytelling is masterful. Just when you think you understand, she pulls the rug out from under you and takes the story in an entirely different, but no less thrilling, direction. Candlish will have you constantly questioning whose side you're on, as every character is deeply flawed, yet also empathetic.

The story is captivating the entire way through, chock full of twists and turns you'll never see coming.

Friends of the Public Library to hold sale

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Friends of the Public Library will hold their inventory blow-out \$6-a-bag sale from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, March 12.

There is no limit on the number of bags that can be bought and carry-out service will be available. The event is free for Friends of the Public Library members and \$2 for

The group also will hold a new inventory sale of used books, CDs and DVDs from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Friday, March 25. There will be free admission.

The events will be held on the lower level of the Main Library, 501 Copper NW. Validated parking is available in the Special Arts parking garage on the southeast corner of Fifth Street and Copper Avenue NW.

All proceeds benefit the Public Library Albuquerque and Bernalillo

'THE ECONOMIC WEAPON: THE RISE OF SANCTIONS AS A TOOL OF MODERN WAR'

Economic sanctions have been thrust into the global spotlight

Book explores how they were designed as a severe threat but now they're a default option

BY JOSHUA KEATING

hen President Joe Biden threatened on Feb. 15 to impose "powerful sanctions and export controls" on Russia if it decided to invade Ukraine, he was sure to add that these sanctions would include some "actions we did not pursue when Russia invaded Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014." The implication was clear: The United States has been trying to punish and coerce Russia with hundreds of sanctions for years. And no, it hasn't had much noticeable effect on Vladimir Putin's foreign policy.

Of course, Russia invaded Ukraine anyway. Putin seems to have priced this into his calculations. In an era when sanctions often feel like the default U.S. response to every international crisis, Russia is already the second-most sanctioned country by the United States, after Iran. Politicians love sanctions for an obvious reason: They're a way of taking concrete action to address wrongdoing without committing U.S. military force or putting American lives at risk.

This happens even though the evidence that sanctions work is mixed at best — they accomplish their goals about a third of the time, according to one widely cited estimate. As the past week as shown, sanctions can only go so far toward preventing a foreign leader from doing something he's already bent on doing. So, how did we ever get the idea that they

In his new book, "The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War," historian Nicholas Mulder traces the origins of modern sanctions back to the period between the two world wars. Of course, countries have been using economic pressure for much longer. Mulder notes that Thucydides wrote about what may have been the first use of sanctions, when Athens

instituted a commercial ban against merchants from the city of Megara in 432 B.C.

But what distinguishes modern sanctions, in Mulder's view, is that they are often implemented in peacetime rather than during war and are justified by reference to international law or norms. This 20th-century approach emerged in the era of the League of Nations after World War I and the much-



maligned 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact outlawing international aggression a time when statesmen and diplomats believed it would be possible to use nonmilitary tools to end war once and for all. In some ways, Mulder's account of the origins of a damaging but often ineffective tool reads as a dark counterpoint to the more optimistic vision of this period in Oona Hathaway and Scott

Shapiro's 2017 volume, "The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World.' Hathaway and Shapiro put forth the notion that the diplomatic groundwork laid during this period helped make interstate war far less common in the decades to come. Though the two works come to very different conclusions, taken together, both suggest that much of what we often refer to as the "postwar international order," for better and worse, emerged after the first rather than the second world war.

Sanctions were the League of Nations' enforcement mechanism, written into its charter. Article 16 states that any member that commits an act of aggressive war will be subject to "the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State, and the prevention of all financial, commercial or personal intercourse between the nationals of the covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State."

The politicians of this period, in choosing economic sanctions as a tool to deter and punish military aggression, were influenced by the use of crippling economic blockades during World War I. While sanctions are often thought of today as a "softer" tool than military force, this wasn't how those who implemented economic war saw them. President Woodrow Wilson said that sanctions bring "a pressure upon that nation which, in my judgment, no modern nation could resist."

In other words, sanctions were viewed less as a cost of doing business for aggressor states, which is how leaders like Putin often appear to see them, than as a threat more akin to how nuclear weapons are now viewed: a tactic so horrific that no state would risk being a victim of them. Whether they were actually experienced this way is another question.

"The Economic Weapon" is a dense work of history, much of it laser-focused on a fairly short period in which the sanctions regime emerged. At times, one wishes that Mulder had taken the longer view to show how the signature tool of a fairly anomalous period of international relations grew into the default option it is

Whether or not they are effective, sanctions don't appear to be going out of style.

