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The Light Within: the Extraordinary Friendship of a Doctor and Patient Brought Together by Cancer

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A friendship between two women—a gynecologic oncologist and her patient—is the heart of *The Light Within*.

Lois Ramondetta, MD, of M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, and Deborah Rose Sills met in 1998, when Sills refused to drink the required bowel cleanser before abdominal surgery that would determine if her ovarian cancer had returned. Dr. Lois—as Sills called her—showed up with arms crossed, declaring there would be no surgery if Sills did not drink up.

After surgery, Sills, joyful that there was no sign the cancer had returned, grew to enjoy the funny, smart doctor who had studied both biology and Sills' own discipline, religious studies. Before Sills left the hospital, the two had formed an intellectual and spiritual bond that would result in a great friendship and ongoing discussion about the relationship between patient and physician in the face of terminal illness.

Over the following years, Sills and Dr. Ramondetta developed a friendship rooted in the joy and pain of living life while facing death. When the cancer did recur, Sills returned to Houston from her home in Santa Barbara, California, for an experimental bone marrow transplant. Sills struggled to raise her adolescent daughter, Abby, in the midst of her own dying, while Dr. Ramondetta struggled to raise her young daughter, Jessica, while working 90-hour weeks and dealing with the deaths of her patients.

While the book explores aspects of death, including that of Sills, it is mostly about life, perfectly illustrated in one of her last requests—that the book not end with her death, but the birth of Dr. Ramondetta's second child, Leila Rose. In their friendship the two women found a safe harbor where they could explore the issues of life and death that surrounded them—an exploration they left for us in *The Light Within*.