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Book Review - My Scrapbook of My Illness with Polio: 1946-1951

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Off the SHELF

My Scrapbook of My Illness with Polio, 1946–1951 by Edna Black & Lassie G. Black (University Press of Florida, 2021: ISBN 9781944455095, \$18.95)

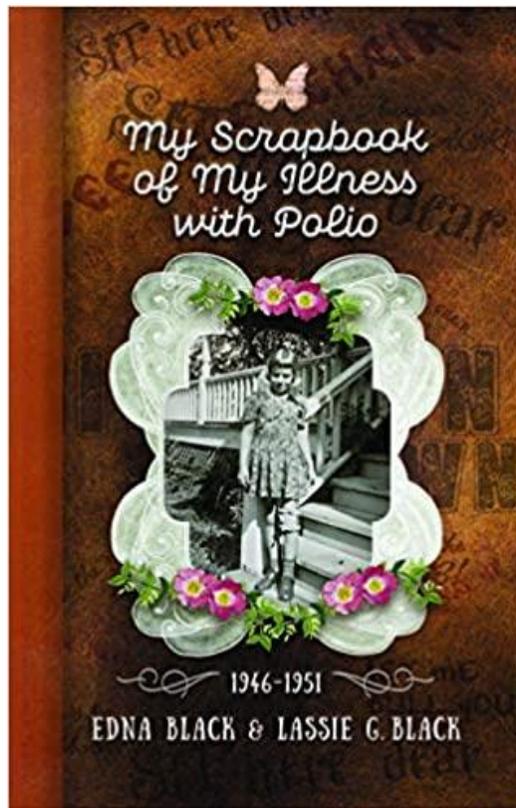
My Scrapbook of My Illness with Polio is a transcription of a scrapbooking journal that offers a first-hand look at the life of Edna Black of Lake City, Florida, who contracted poliomyelitis in the winter of 1946. The scrapbook, which is currently at the Smithsonian, predominantly covers 1946, with a few entries for 1947 and 1948. The journal concludes with a post in 1951, a year before the US polio epidemic and the development of Jonas Salk's vaccine.

My Scrapbook is a slice-of-life history, where young Edna describes her daily life while recovering from and living with a debilitating disease. Journal entries contain descriptions of visiting friends and family, gifts and food she received from well-wishers, family vacations, and her desire to return to her normal life. The journal details her travel between Florida and Georgia for treatment, prominently between Hope Haven in Jacksonville and the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation in Georgia (now called Roosevelt Warm Springs Hospitals). While it focuses on Edna's day-to-day life, details of her recovery are often sparse. However, the entries do provide direct references to her struggles, including the initial

infection, relearning how to sit up, her therapy at Hope Haven and Warm Springs, and adjusting to the wheelchair, crutches, and braces.

The most fascinating element of this chronicle is that while the entries are entirely written by Edna's mother, Goodbread Black, they are

written as if from the point of view of the then seven-year-old Edna. Both the preface by Edna and the foreword by contributing editor Nina Stoyan-Rosenzweig acknowledge this choice but do not speculate on it. This creates an entirely different narrative for the reader: What elements did Lassie deem important to discuss? What was excluded? At times, Lassie's point of view takes the forefront, such as an extended paragraph about a stressful bus ride where Edna was not present, or statements such as, "now I know mothers are most always right and tell us not to do things for our own good."



Alongside the journal entries, there are multiple family and historical photos interwoven throughout the scrapbook, giving the reader a visual glimpse into the life of a midcentury southern family fighting illness. Unfortunately, while chapters attempt to divide the entries by major life or treatment events, they are often divided arbitrarily, with missing entry dates for some journal entries. While *My Scrapbook* is not a research book, it would have benefitted

from a few informative additions, such as the inclusion of notes or footnotes on topics or facts of interest. For instance, certain terms that may be unfamiliar to modern audiences are left unexplained, such as the “Kenny treatment.”

This book is suitable for public libraries and academic history collections interested in first-hand accounts of epidemics or local Georgia and Florida history.

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