Dancing After TEN
by Vivian Chong and Georgia Webber.

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Dancing After TEN is a graphic memoir by Vivian Chong, whose life was forever transformed by a near-fatal skin reaction known as TEN (Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis). In late 2004, Chong was hospitalized after experiencing a rare allergic reaction to medication which left extensive scar tissue all over her body that eventually blinded her and caused hearing loss.

Two years later, after a cornea transplant partially restored Chong’s sight, she rushed to depict her story through hastily drawn illustrations that were completed while her vision quickly faded away again. This original draft languished on a shelf for twelve years until Chong started working on an autobiographical dance-theater production. Encouraged by her dance-theater director to share her entire journey, Chong teamed up with comics artist Georgia Webber, creator of her own graphic memoir Dumb: Living Without a Voice, to complete the narrative and integrate Webber’s illustrations with Chong’s initial sketches.

The story sensitively captures the agony, isolation, and confusion that Chong felt in the early days of her catastrophic illness but does not wallow in self-pity. Chong’s memoir is full of vulnerability and strength. It is inspiring to see Chong courageously adapt to her disabilities, rediscover her artistic talents, move past painful relationships, and fully embrace a life of creativity. The urgency of Chong’s drawings reinforces the poignancy of her experiences and Webber’s artwork harmonizes well with this style. Reading the epilogue about how they collaborated to develop Chong’s sketches into a more coherent, impactful story was one of the most interesting aspects of the book.

This title will be an excellent addition to libraries interested in the graphic medicine genre, biographies, and/or graphic memoirs.