(Almost Live from) The Greatest City in the World

Our lives are experience-rich, and I would rather focus on the experiences of love, friendship, support, and balance.

December 31, 2016 By Adam Hayden

“Good afternoon, passengers. Your Airbus 380 is equipped with four emergency exits: two located in the aft of the aircraft and two over each wing. In the case of seizure, pill bottles will fall from the overhead compartment and passengers seated in the exit rows will be administered 2,500mg of Keppra and 100mg of Vimpat to keep from accidentally dislodging the emergency exits. Remember to swallow your own dose before helping with the dose of the person seated next to you. If you require use of our seat-side CT scanner, please press the call button and a flight attendant will assist you. Don’t forget about our complimentary peanuts and IV saline.”

I often forget that I have cancer until I am reminded by the characteristic head-tilt, “How are you?” that presents more often in the patient’s friends than the patient. Adam’s inner monologue, “What’s wrong with this person’s awkward expression and head tilt? Ohhhh, right, the cancer.” “I’m doing okay, thanks.”

Unfortunately, these past several days my diagnosis has not been so easy to forget. I mentioned on Christmas night that it had been two years since my first seizure, and that I had experienced one that day, Christmas, of this year, too. Seizures are the common feature of my glioblastoma that (so far) escapes management by medication. At their peak (pre-cancer diagnosis), I was enduring three or four seizures daily; now, I experience one or two weekly. My seizures are not convulsing, loss-of-consciousness episodes (well, once or twice they have been), but often these events are more subdued. I experience a light-headedness I describe as two helium balloons inside my head, one balloon positioned near each temple, and my head floats along pulled this way and that in a sort of new age interpretive dance. (It is to the best of my knowledge that I am not actually dancing—only feeling that way. Whitney says I look “twitchy.”)

The light-headedness often turns to dizziness, a sensation that starts at the base of my skull and wraps toward the front of my head. (Strange, no?) It is not every time that my seizures lead to loss of consciousness, but the times that they have, this stepwise progression of light-headedness and dizziness have been precursors. That is, not every time do I lose consciousness, but every time that I do, I am first light-headed and dizzy. Hence, I take my light-headedness rather seriously (a good rule of thumb for all of us, I reckon), and I experience increased anxiety, fearing this event

will be one, which I lose consciousness.

“I do not do well in big open spaces with fluorescent lights,” I reported to Whitney, “You know, like airports, huh?” she replied. The airport is where we were today when the unmistakable light-headedness struck. We were on our way to visit two of our best friends in New York. On the hit list: ramen, deli, pho, Dante and Wolf and Deer to visit my (practically) brother Michael and his beautiful wife, Brooke, behind the stick at each bar, respectively. Spending time with B and O, our friends, is a highlight of our day/week/month/year/other incremental time slices. B and O balance each other, and this makes their relationship similar to ours, me and Whit. For B and O, and me and Whit, our friendship is so close; our experiences worlds apart and yet intimately connected. I miss them. We miss them. It is a real bummer that I wasn’t well enough for the flight.

Sitting at gate A11, Whitney stood up to inform the Delta gate agent that the Haydens in seats 8A and 8B would not be boarding this flight; moreover, may we request a wheelchair to get us the hell out of here.

Here is something terrific: I have already forgotten my cancer again. Thinking of our good friends, bringing to mind the special qualities of close relationships, sharing a piece of my experience with you quickly replaces any distractions brought on by light-headedness or feeling bummed out.

Our lives are experience-rich, and I would rather focus on the experiences of love, friendship, support, and balance, rather than light-headedness and dizziness. This is the walk of cancer, isn’t it? Dizziness and balance, light-headedness and support.

Still, that ramen, pho, and pastrami has to wait, and I am not sure what positive spin I can make of that.

Many of you know Whitney is running her own blog over at Faith, Hope, and Wine. Click to read her take on today’s events.

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