Chemotherapy Delays and Genesis's "Undertow"

My chemotherapy break soon comes to an end. I will commence it again starting this month.

December 20, 2021 By Robin McGee

This break was supposed to be only three months, but various delays caused it to be twice that long. Although an MRI scan suggested no change at all in my disease, my cancer blood markers rose. That lead to a more sensitive PET-CT scan, which indeed revealed some progression in the pelvis. Thankfully, nothing yet seen in my lungs, liver, bone, or brain.

Before I could start chemotherapy, I needed a minor surgical procedure (otherwise the wound would not heal). But COVID19 factors have meant operating rooms and minor procedures are backlogged. I had to wait 2 months beyond the date I should have started chemo before I could get it done. Then I need least two weeks recovery, a timeline that lands in Christmas week. Because chemo units are on skeleton staffing during the holiday period, I must wait an additional three weeks to access a chemotherapy chair. So I must wait, even though my cancer does not. But there is a silver lining: I will be able to spend Christmas without the unlovely aspects of chemotherapy.

It is remarkable how much better one feels during a chemotherapy break. The fatigue recedes, hair and eyebrows grow back, and skin returns to normal. Food tastes better. Nutritional status and blood parameters bounce back. Those who saw me when I was on chemo previously are surprised by the improvement in my energy and appearance without it. Most importantly, during a break, I no longer had to spend three days every two weeks in an untouchable state.

All that health progress will be sacrificed when I start chemotherapy again. Nevertheless, I welcome resuming it. After all, I have no other treatment path besides chemo-for-life. Recently I attended a webinar in which an expert oncologist said that the survival of those who take chemo breaks is the same as those who do not, and because the breaks are such a boon to general health, it is worth it to experience them even at the cost of some disease progression.

I am chuffed to announce that I was the winning frontrunner in an election to join the

provincial regulatory board for my profession of psychology, leading the pack with 166 of 249 votes cast (66%). Serving on the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology is absorbing and challenging work. It allows me to keep my hand in professional matters and to work towards meaningful improvement in psychology practice standards. So far, it has been the perfect segue away from working full time.

Genesis is touring now. I am an avid fan of this supergroup. Today's song is "Undertow," from their 1979 album Then There Were Three…I choose it for several reasons. t seems appropriate for Christmastime with its images of snow and celebration. It opens with images of comfort, intruded upon by thoughts of the cold homeless. Then it pivots. The song poses the question: If this were the last day of your life, what do you think you would do? Although a tempting complacency flows beneath the surface of our pleasures, we must stop and reflect. There is a force—an undertow—that compels us to face the serious and emotionally overwhelming question of our own death. But by speaking of the defiance of love in the face of that mortality, it nevertheless yields a Christmas message: love now, because life is short.

The curtains are drawn.
Now the fire warms the room.
Meanwhile, outside
wind from the northeast chills the air.
It will soon be snowing out there.

And some there are
cold, they prepare for a sleepless night.
Maybe this will be their last fight.

But we're safe in each other's embrace.
All fears go as I look on your face.

Better think awhile
or I may never think again.

If this were the last day of your life, my friend,
tell me, what do you think you would do then?

Stand up to the blow that fate has struck upon you.
Make the most of all you still have coming to you.
Lay down on the ground and let the tears run from you.
Crying to the grass and trees and heaven finally on your knees.

Let me live again, let life come find me wanting.
Spring must strike again against the shield of winter.

Let me feel once more the arms of love surround me,
telling me the danger’s past, I need not fear the icy blast again.

Laughter, music, and perfume linger here
And there, and there
wine flows from flask to glass and mouth
as it soothes, confusing our doubts.
And soon we feel
Why do a single thing today?
There’s tomorrow sure as I’m here.

So the days they turn into years.
And still no tomorrow appears.

Better think awhile
or I may never think again.

If this were the last day of your life, my friend
tell me, what do you think you would do then?

Stand up to the blow that fate has struck upon you.
Make the most of all you still have coming to you.
Lay down on the ground and let the tears run from you.
Crying to the grass and trees and heaven finally on your knees.

Let me live again, let life come find me wanting.
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