Disembarkation

Vacations are great, but it is always good to come home again.

September 4, 2019 By Jeff Neurman

Typically, I like to pen a new post on this blog at least once a week. I find that having cancer, even post-chemo and while in remission, gives me more than enough material to write about. In fact, I wish that there were a whole lot less to say about trying to survive with cancer. And although I had assumed — quite incorrectly — that after I had completed chemo that I would be able to spend a great deal less time thinking about all matters cancer related, this has not been the case in the least. To the contrary, I believe that I spend more time ruminating about cancer now than ever.

Perhaps all of this dwelling on my incurable cancer precipitated the recent events — or, to put it more accurately, the lack thereof. For it has been a few weeks since last I wrote anything new for this blog. Sure, during that span I posted some writings that I had written for other purposes/websites/magazines, but that strikes me as cheating a bit. I'm just getting double the airtime without adding any new content. It's like a re-run (which, for those born after 1990 means a show that is being aired again because we had no DVRs to record it and watch at our leisure). That leaves me feeling a bit hackish and unimaginative. (That's not to say I won't do it again — I can live with feeling a bit hackish and unimaginative from time to time.)

Further delaying my writing of anything new was the interruption of an extended family vacation last week. Negotiating the pitfalls and sensitivities of 40-plus years of built-up, unresolved (and unspoken) family issues can often make cancer seem like a pretty minor problem. To compound the issue, we were on a cruise ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. I barely had any Wi-Fi or other means of communicating with the mainland, as a result of which I was forced to focus even more on the units that comprise my family beyond my own nuclear group. (A question: Is saying "cheers" while clinking champagne glasses a legally binding obligation? I ponder this matter as no sooner had I clunked and cheered then one of our party said "to many more of these cruises." As a lawyer, I feel like I should know whether this is an enforceable agreement, but while my law practice does involve a great deal of contract work none of those agreements to date have implicated maritime law as well. I am hoping there is some type of out for anyone under the influence, which I was since I, out of a sense of self-preservation, purchased the all-you-can-drink beverage package the moment I stepped aboard. Thus there is a question of capacity to consent. If anyone specializes in admiralty law, please contact me.)

All excuses — and excursions — aside, I had to step back briefly from my blogging for a short time as I noticed an unintended trend in it. Specifically, as I thought back over the last several posts

before my booze cruise hiatus, I noted an increasing degree of cynicism in my writings. It began innocently enough about a month or so ago, when I felt the need to explain to the uninitiated the basics of some key cancer terminology. From there, it got a bit more snarky when I wrote about the terms/phrases that those of us with cancer really do not wish to hear and would prefer for those who have nothing else to say to, frankly, say nothing.

From that point was a short step to the frustration — albeit totally justified — that so many cancer endurers feel when forced to try to diplomatically handle unwanted “advice” from people who know not about which they speak but speak on nonetheless. Finally, I reached my most sarcastic when I wrote about how we, those of us with cancer, should take pity on those around us who are cancer-free as they clearly know next-to-nothing, but of course act as if they know everything.

Mind you, I don’t take back any of what I said. I think it is all justified by the circumstances and people swirling around those of us with cancer. Nonetheless, I found that the increased acerbity of what I was writing was not really where I wanted to go. Oh sure, I love making fun of those around us who think they are Google-licensed-oncologists or believe that they can cure my cancer by simply having me eat more turmeric and less soy. And, of course, the whole gist of this blog is to try and find the humor, wherever it may lurk, in surviving with cancer. But there is of course so much more going on than all of that (amusing though it might be).

I recently read online that one of my fellow cancer-travelers had taken a short break from the cancer community. I do not believe that is right for me, but I do believe it is helpful to sometimes step back a bit. Cancer, by its loathsome nature, is all-encompassing and omnipresent. I do not know where I would be these days without my fellow cancer endurers online (mostly Twitter) for they provide me with a sense of community and understanding that the people physically in my life so often, through no fault of their own, do not possess. Yet, too much of a good thing is naturally not such a good thing.

I feel as though my brief hiatus has helped me to refocus by giving me a short — but needed — period away from all that is cancer. I won’t go so far as to claim that I have been recharged — I don’t think cancer batteries are the rechargeable type — more like the lithium ones likely to explode on an airplane. But I do feel energized to reengage with my cancer pals and hopefully be able to contribute something of utility — along with a bit of levity — to their ongoing tussles with tumors, overly active white blood cells and the like.

I think all of this may be summed up by borrowing an expression from the world of leisure: Vacations are great, but it is always good to come home again. I am glad to be back. I just hope next time that I decide I need to take a brief time away from the world of cancer I do not inadvertently commit myself to midnight buffets on the high seas.

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