Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy and Bowie-Queen's 'Under Pressure'

The Cancer Olympics Adventures

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At last, I have started my hyperbaric oxygen treatments.

I have moved into the Halifax Lodge That Gives, where I will live for the next 7 weeks. My husband, Andrew, will fetch me home on weekends.

The chamber resembles a great big yellow submarine. (So I wore my Yellow Submarine socks in celebration). I arrive at 7 am. I get into scrubs and have a plastic seal put around my neck. I and two others and a nursing attendant enter the chamber. Once inside, a clear plastic dome is placed over my head and attached to the seal. I am seated in a rolling chair.

Then, we "dive." The chamber is pressurized, mimicking the pressures of a descent through ocean depths. My eardrums bend inward, requiring blowing out to equalize. Once at the right pressure, pure oxygen is funnelled through to my helmet. I breathe it naturally. We go through three cycles of this, finally 'resurfacing" after 90 minutes.

No electronics are allowed in the chamber, so I happily catch up on my reading. I feel quite well afterwards, although tired from rising so early. I am usually all done by 10:15 am. Then back to the Lodge, to get through the rest of my day.

The Lodge is comfortable and conveniently located directly behind the hospital. Breakfast is buffet style, lunch is soup and sandwiches, and dinner is provided at 4:30 pm each day. I hope to spend my long hours of downtime exercising, emailing, walking, and visiting with friends. Having raised funds for the Lodge for many years, through Relay for Life and through sales of my book The Cancer Olympics, it is both pleasant and curious to personally enjoy its benefits.

I am so happy to have this show on the road. Any step on the journey to healing of my burdensome dysfunction is so welcome. The intent of the treatment is to better oxygenate my radiated tissues, to help them withstand future surgery. I have waited a long time to get this far. Although there is an enormous distance still to travel — through surgery and recovery and beyond — I am cheered by progress. Oddly, being focused on this intervention takes my mind off my terminal cancer.

What is the song for today? Because I will be breathing oxygen under pressure each day, I have chosen the Bowie/Queen 1981 collaboration "Under Pressure." Popularized by the recent movie Bohemian Rhapsody, this song was rated by Rolling Stone to be the second greatest collaboration of all time. The video was likewise famed. The scat singing, the colliding imagery, and the appeal for another chance seem to me to echo the strange cacophony of my life, so upended by all my cancer treatments and adventures.

It's the terror of knowing what the world is about
Watching some good friends screaming
'Let me out'
Pray tomorrow gets me higher, high
Pressure on people, people on streets

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