Retirement, Cancer, and Supertramp's "Goodbye Stranger"

Despite many cancer derailments, I was able to retire after 30 plus years in public health education.

July 19, 2021 By Robin McGee

When I was first diagnosed 11 years ago I never thought I would live to see that day. Even at this time last year, I was unsure I would make it.

Another aspect of this this retirement fills me with unchristian glee and satisfaction. The Cancer Olympics described the College discipline meted out to Doctors One, Two, Three, and Four for their diagnostic negligence. When the CMPA settled with me in my concurrent malpractice action against the doctors, they acknowledged that the care I received was indefensible. It took them seven years to admit it. They could not find any expert anywhere in the world able to justify any aspect of it. In contrast, our five experts as well as the College of Physicians and Surgeons pointed out foundational practice flaws in all four. Dr. One was a locum who did not believe she was responsible for the tests she herself ordered in that role. Dr. Two (famous for scorning patients' descriptions of their symptoms) wrote egregiously lightweight referral letters that left out vital information. She also failed to communicate that she was quitting family medicine to become a hospitalist. Dr. Three ignored positive cancer screening tests, taking no action at all over mine because "he forgot." General surgeon Dr. Four had her outpatient surgical triage done by her high-school-educated secretary instead of herself. The theme underlying all those errors is a grotesque avoidance of responsibility. Their grievously flawed approach to clinical work jeopardized far more patients than just me—I will be eternally glad that I called them out for their deep-rooted and contemptable conduct.

I experienced considerable income loss due to my cancer, and the CMPA was obliged to replace some of that in damages. They tried to limit my settlement amount by saying I would be dead soon and therefore did not need the money. If I died before retirement, my family would only get 60% of my pension. However, living beyond retirement has allowed me to allocate 100% of my pension to my spouse Andrew when I die. So by continuing to live and work against expectations, I was able to earn money in addition to the settlement amount, thereby frustrating the CMPA's plan to see us suffer. Heh

Heh Heh.

One of the hardest aspects of cancer is that it took me away from the work and the people that I loved. I feel cheated that I was unable to help those struggling through the pandemic. I lost my chance to help schools cope, not to mention my private patients. Yet I feel so grateful for the marvellous people I worked with over the decades, particularly in schools—it was an honour to be colleagues with those who commit to and cherish children and youth. Their example of dedicated service—hard work driven by values, caring, and sheer grit—will inspire me always.

Given my limited life span, my retirement has few goals. I hope to continue with patient advocacy. I spoke virtually at a BC health conference two months ago. The CEO of the BC Health Authority was so shaken by my story that he invited me to speak to the provincial health board. Zoom makes advocacy easier!

My other modest goal this summer is to train my rescue cat to go camping with us in our little trailer. So far so good. He likes being carried in a backpack (as per the photo) but is not so happy about the car or the leash. I hope to have a chemo break at the end of July for 8 weeks or so, to implement my crazy kitty schemes.

Today's song is "Goodbye Stranger" from Supertramp's 1979 iconic album Breakfast in America. It was a big hit in my final year of High School (another big transition!). Although the actual song is about an absconding womanizer, I choose it today because its snappy tune as well as its many retirement-related themes: moving on, gladness to have met wonderful people, and its no-regrets message. The final guitar solo at the end of this song is one of the most famous in music history.

It was early morning yesterday
I was up before the dawn
And I really have enjoyed my stay
But I must be moving on

Like a king without a castle
Like a queen without a throne
I'm an early morning lover
And I must be moving on

Now I believe in what you say
Is the undisputed truth
But I have to have things my own way
To keep me in my youth

Like a ship without an anchor

Like a slave without a chain
Just the thought of those sweet ladies
Sends a shiver through my veins

And I will go on shining
Shining like brand new
I'll never look behind me
My troubles will be few

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