September

I really have no idea how one should properly celebrate the month of one's cancer.

September 12, 2019 By Jeff Neurman

I know everyone says this every single year, but I am going to state it again anyway: I can't believe it is already September. I really can't believe it, as evidenced by the fact that the month is almost half-over and I am just now coming to terms with its arrival and complaining about that fact. Part of this disbelief, or at least suspended belief, is that September is the month that more than any other signifies that the party is over and it's back to work time. We learn this early on in school, as at least in some parts of the country — such as New York, where we know a thing or two about good schools — it is the month when the students return to the classrooms. No more lazy summer days or idle parental admonitions about "okay for now, but when school starts . . .!!" September is all back to business.

In addition to never wanting to get back to work, and at the risk of offending everyone bedazzled with sapphires — as well as approximately two-thirds of the Virgos and about half-as-many Libras, I must admit that I do not care for September. This may come as somewhat of a surprise to many who know me as those people undoubtedly are aware that I most vehemently dislike hot weather and did in fact enjoy school. (This may partially explain why I was not overly popular as a child nor, come to think of it, as a parent of school-age children.) Yet September, at least in most of the United States, can still be quite hot and, even worse, exceptionally humid, which made sitting on those wooden deskseats in un-air-conditioned classrooms a rather unpleasant and, as we grew older, pungent affair, thereby cancelling out any enjoyment I might have unpopularly derived from trying to become educated, which I also hear has largely fallen out of favor these days.

In recent years, however, my dislike for September has only intensified. This is due, in part, to the fact that while I did enjoy school, that was only when I was the student. I never realized when I was going through fourth grade or first grade that I would be forced to repeat them again over 35 years later — and multiple times to boot (because I have two kids, not because any of us flunked — not yet anyway). I would not mind so much if I only was responsible for communicating the knowledge that had been imparted to me. But, as anyone with children these days knows, nothing that we learned ourselves is apparently true any longer. The number of planets in the solar system has shrunk, the number of oceans on the planet has grown and math is now totally different — all things that seemed ageless and invariable (to use a math term, I think — we haven't gotten to variables yet so I don't know if they still exist or, if they do, if x and y are still the most common of their ilk). In fact, no greater mind than Carl Sagan himself once said that math was the great commonality across the universe, that which we could use to communicate with extraterrestrial

life forms — some of whom might be here because they are PO'd about our now disrespectful attitude towards Pluto — but apparently even Sagan, the esteemed visionary though he was, did not foresee the coming of Common Core.

Yet, my hostility towards this ninth month — which, just to compound its problems, begins with a prefix that suggests it should fall two months earlier than it in fact does — is not principally due to changes in pedagogy. Rather, in the most recent years, my distaste for this month is rooted in what September has come to be the month of. Stated directly, September is Leukemia Awareness Month.

I really have no idea how one should properly celebrate the month of one's cancer. Do I have to do something special? Should I wear some kind of a sticker on my lapel, perhaps one shaped in the form of a drop of blood, to truly get in the spirit? As a side note, I don't think a t-shirt, which is my standard September uniform, has a lapel. Plus, a blood drop sticker would probably just make people think I donated blood, and if there is one thing I know no one wants from someone with leukemia it is that person's blood. Perhaps just a tee with the letters A, B, AB and O — along with some scattered plus and minus symbols — might be the ticket? It would at least get others to thinking (which, to reiterate, is not trendy these days).

Another concern I have about September as Leukemia Month is that leukemia's color is apparently orange. I don't know who gets to pick these things, but naturally, if one were asked to associate the color orange with a month, a person would properly reply October. Maybe November. But definitely not September. September is colorless. And wouldn't red — since leukemia is, after all, blood cancer — be a more fitting choice from the artist's cancer color palette? I have had leukemia over half a decade, and as many issues as it is has presented and through the countless blood draws I have had phlebotomized out of me, not a single time was my blood even close to orange. Purple, now that I could see since the blood they take out of me for their mysterious labs and undescribed "research" purposes is lacking in oxygen and on its way back to my heart and lungs (a fact I learned in school one September) and thus rather a darkish hue. But if it came out orange, well, then leukemia might not be my biggest problem. What's more is that I don't think I even own a single piece of clothing that is orange. No school I ever attended had orange as a color (bonus points if you know either WVU's or NYU's colors — a hint about the latter is I very recently mentioned it) and no superhero has an orange uniform. (Technically, Aquaman used to wear orange, but that was back in the '70s and things were just different back then. Now he wears black and drinks a lot — maybe he is NYC schooled?) I mean, who is leukemia's spokesperson? Carrot Top??

All of this aside, I just have mixed feelings about awareness of leukemia. On the one hand, selfishly, the last thing I want to hear about is more talk of leukemia. This explains, of course, why I spend an inordinate amount of my time blogging, tweeting, podcasting, and otherwise going on and on about it. I can never get away from leukemia, despite my best efforts — including months of chemo — and now there is an entire month for focusing on it. On the other hand, and much more importantly (but also, interestingly, still selfishly) I am glad that others are taking note of leukemia. Despite its suboptimal choice of month and rather questionable style choices, it is a

very popular cancer — in the sense that many people are sadly stuck with it. Despite that, it is not one of the more exciting cancers to talk about — almost like it is not even cancer. That might be because it has its own term — instead of being a body part followed by the word “cancer.” People seem to like those cancers better. Plus, leukemia is really hard to spell. I think it might be Dutch.

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