Seven Years

November 11, 2017 By Dan Zeller

It's been seven years since my prostate cancer diagnosis, and the fact that I'm still alive and kickin' seven years later with relatively minor side effects from the surgery makes me realize how good that I've got it when I compare my situation to other prostate cancer patients. I say that not to boast or gloat; rather to acknowledge how blessed I am.

With an ever-so-slowly-rising PSA in my recent past, I know that the path ahead may become increasingly rocky and that my situation can change for the worse in the not too distant future. Or it may not.

As the navigator of the USS *Brewton*, I planned ahead and selected the best route for our ship to meet its mission. Now, in my current predicament, I wanted to take some time and reflect on what's next for me and how I want to navigate my way through it all. (And I'm not talking treatment options; I'm talking *life*.)

Life is filled with competing interests and obligations and, if this silly cancer shortens the number of my days remaining, I want to make sure that those interests and obligations are prioritized. I don't think that I've squandered the last seven years by any stretch of the imagination, but I'm not sure that I've gotten the most out of them, either.

The best way for me to evaluate my priorities and map out a course was to escape my daily routine and go on a trip where I could be alone with my thoughts. So I do what I always do when I need to clear my head of the daily noise: I get in my car and drive.

My road trip last month through the Sierra Nevada mountains was transformative for me.

Once I started climbing over the boulders of the Alabama Hills in the pre-dawn darkness in hopes of capturing the sun illuminating the face of Mount Whitney, my photography became my singular focus of the trip (excuse the pun). It was refreshing to concentrate on something *other* than cancer. Not only was it refreshing, it was *fun!*

There was also something rejuvenating about being surrounded by nature, even on those brisk 24° F / -4° C Lake Tahoe mornings. You couldn't help but feel alive.

Through all of it, I never directly tackled my self-imposed homework assignment. I never sat down and wrote a list of priorities (as I'm usually wont to do). In the end, I didn't need to. Just the act of being, of playing, and of focusing on something other than cancer did that for me in a way that

was far more powerful than had I sat down and created a spreadsheet. And *that* is what has been transformational for me.

As I enter my eighth year of this adventure, rather than worrying about the latest study on defining biochemical recurrence or what the results of my next PSA test in the first week of December will be, I'm going to worry about how, where, and when I can push myself to be better at my photography, all while enjoying the great natural world around us (except, of course, those rocky shoals us navigators avoided at all costs).

There are some other professional and personal goals that I want to tackle as well, but I'm going to keep those to myself for now.

It also means that I may be stepping away from some things that, while still meaningful to me, just don't carry the weight that they used to. There just aren't enough hours in a week to do it all.

That trip reminded me that there is life outside of cancer. I needed that reminder. Badly.

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