

My Journey with Cancer

by

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This is my own personal experience over ten months. It is not intended as medical advice or to be generic. All cancer is personal and whatever your journey, I wish you the best and hope these tips and tools will help you on your way.
Betsy



This is my journey.

In September 2021, I was in high gear, active and loved sports. I was just off the campaign trail of the 2021 federal election helping women candidates.

Out of the blue, I felt a minor physical discomfort, almost so little as to ignore. Fortunately, I didn't.

Eleven months later, I have completed treatment for ovarian cancer and am now heading into living my life to the fullest in whatever time ahead I have been given.

**SEPTEMBER
2021**



**DECEMBER
2021**

It all began
with just vague discomfort.
A walk-in clinic and an ultrasound



My MD Appointment
She referred me to a cancer clinic



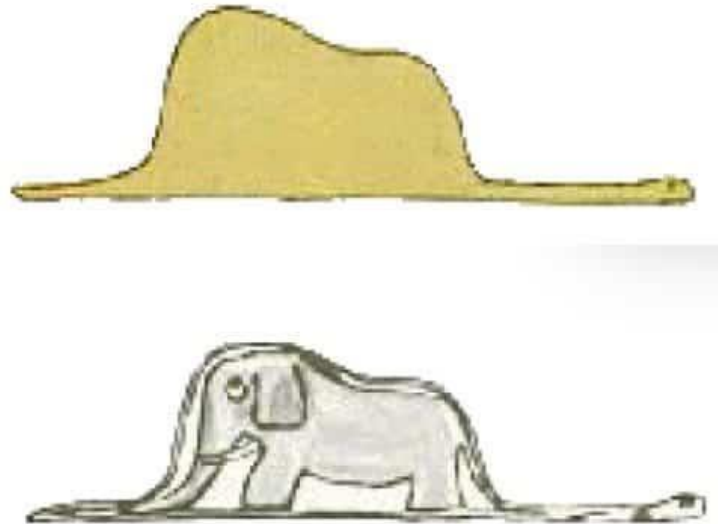
Cascade of tests
Blood Tests, CT scans, MRI, Biopsy
COVID delays
Christmas Holidays
Enter the New Year!

JANUARY 2022

Finally! Diagnosis and a treatment plan.

The Path:

Six sessions of chemotherapy, six hours each, three weeks apart. An operation half-way. 181 days in total



The outward world disappeared. I felt consumed in the world of cancer.

I felt like the picture which 'Le Petite Prince' drew.

I felt swallowed by a Boa!
Consumed in this new world.

Tips: Before beginning chemotherapy...

1. Book:

Appointments

Think of what might be put on hold during treatments
* Dentist

2. Prepare: Handy Lists and Record Keeping Tools

- *Binder to keep test records
- *A pill dispenser
- *Telephone List; (Doctors, After-Hours Call Line, Pharmacy, Taxi, Family Cells)
- *Excel Sheet of Your Own Blood Pressure/Temp

6. Buy: Grocery Supplies

Favorite Foods
Healthy Assortment
Fruits, Veggies, Protein
Good hydration drinks



3. Ask: Family and Friends

- *Drivers for Appointments
- *Note-takers for oncology meetings

5. Reserve:

Assistive Devices

- Rent equipment if needed such as
- *Raised toilet seats
 - *Bed 'roll bar'
 - *Pick-up stick (check at local pharmacies)

4. Purchase: Self-Monitoring Equipment

- *Blood Pressure Kit
- *Thermometer
- *Pill Dispenser
- * COVID masks



*In it together!
My sister Margaret
and I pre-emptively
cut our hair in
January before
it all began!*



Upside-down? A bit out of control?



Tip: Control what you can!

Focus on: Nutrition, Exercise, Hydration and Sleep!

Triage: Yourself first (you may not be used to this), Faith, Family, Friends.

Maintain: a few treasured activities and hobbies.

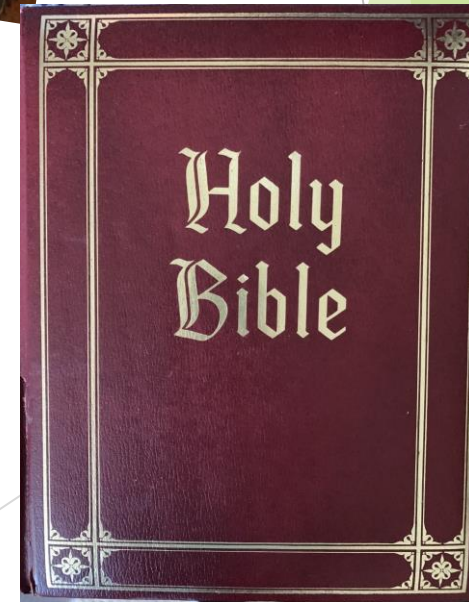
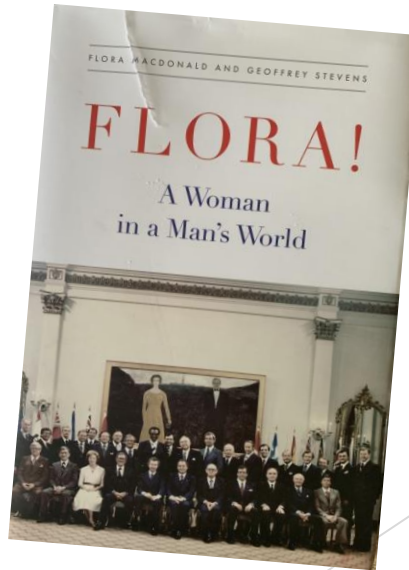
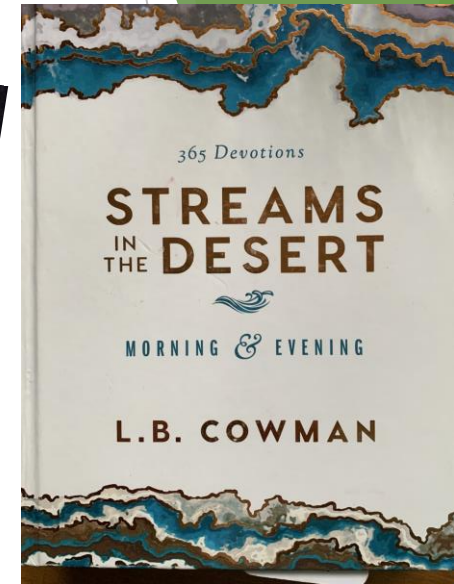
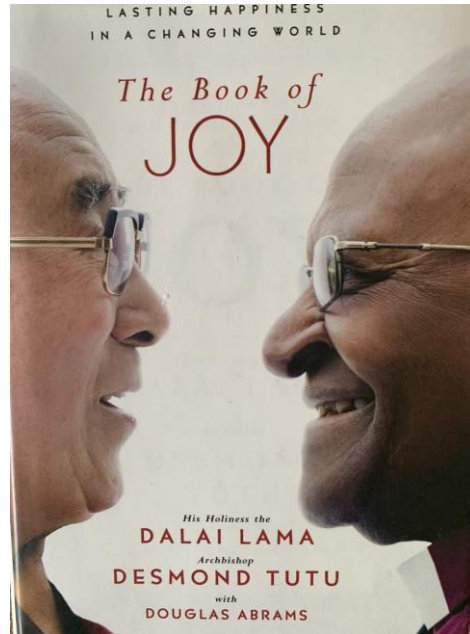
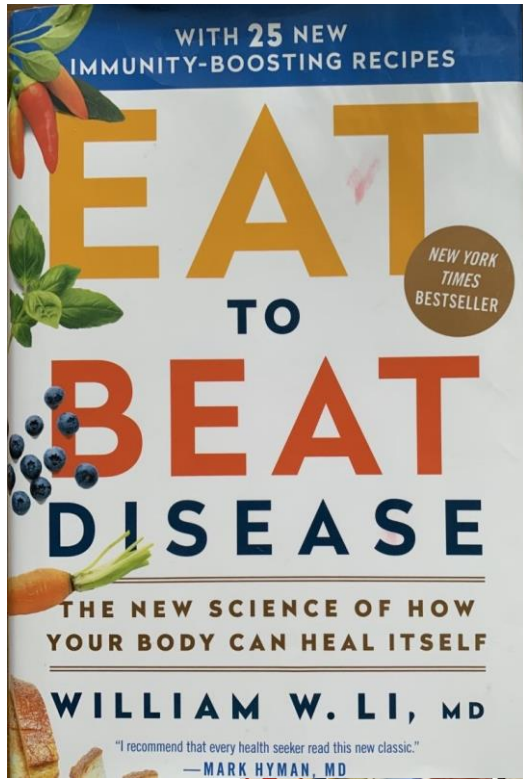
De-stress: Organize Passwords, Will, Powers of Attorney and - Declutter.

Discuss: Advance Care Planning with Family.

Give: Personal Gifts to Special People (scarves in my case).

Hand out Love. Give Faith a Chance.

Some good reading ..and light distractions 😊



FEBRUARY 2022

Finding My Feet



Learning the Routine
The Room
The Chair
The Chemo Meds
The 'Pit'
Then - Rebound
Recover....and
Begin again!



TIPS: Wear comfortable track pants; slippers and take a book in a roll-on suitcase
Favorite fluids - Tasty snack - Cell phone/earphones/charger
- Arrive early - Choose your chair -
NB: Make a list of what to take.



The Oak Tree

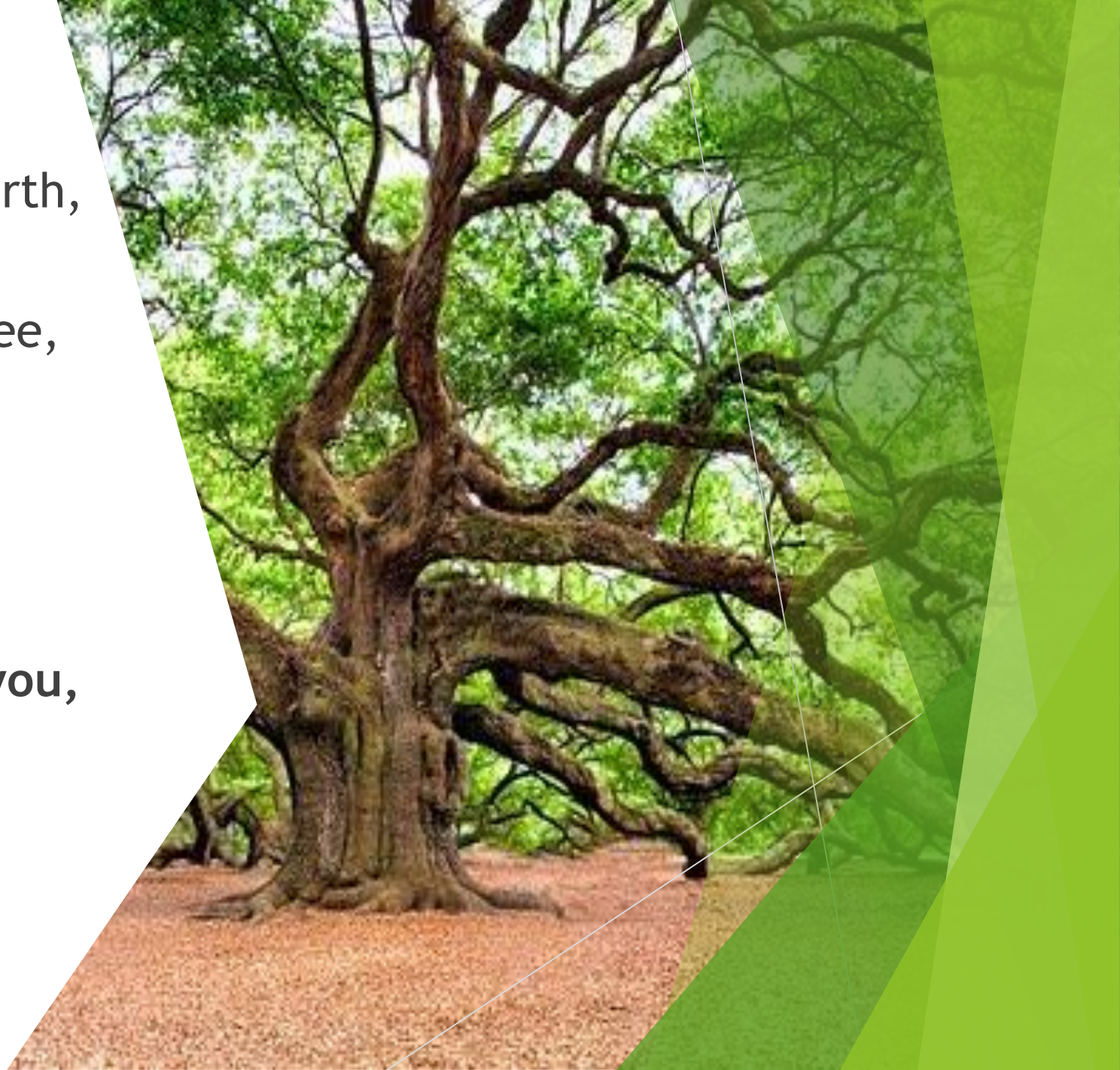
A mighty wind blew night and day.
It stole the oak tree's leaves away.
Then snapped its boughs and pulled its bark
Until the oak was tired and stark.

But still the oak tree held its ground
While other trees fell all around.
The weary wind gave up and spoke,
“How can you still be standing. Oak?”

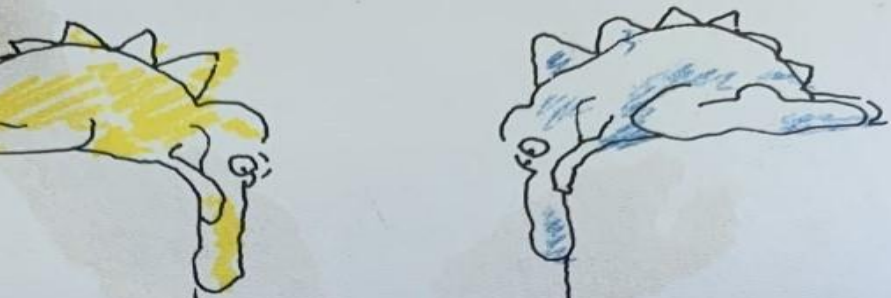
The oak tree said, “I know that you
Can break each branch of mine in two,
Carry every leaf away,
Shake my limbs and make me sway.

But I have roots stretched in the earth,
Growing stronger since my birth.
You'll never touch them, for your see,
They are the deepest part of me.”

“Until today, I wasn't sure
Of just how much I could endure.
But now I've found with thanks to **you**,
I'm stronger than I ever knew.”



HOME FROM CHEMO



First few days - generally fine.
Then - the dreaded "pit".
Day, 3,4,5 a new low.

Prepare for a few of....

Achy Body

Exhaustion, Nausea

Tingling Fingers/Toes

Headache

Taste/Appetite changes



The PIT

I thought I could outsmart 'The Pit'
It didn't work too well!
For me it was
'achy body all over and exhaustion'

MY TIP?

Be prepared.

Let it go!

This too will pass.

Chemo is working!

Foremost: Talk with your doctor

*I checked with my Doctor
about pain control. Then, after
taking my temperature each time,
I used Tylenol Extra Strength -
before and throughout "The Pit".
It helped me.*

MARCH 2022

‘Toe in the Water’

Reaching beyond wonderful support of family.

Weekly Phone Circle
Among Women with Cancer
All ages - all types - all stages
Hosted by Hospice

Psychologist Counsellor
Bi-weekly calls, as a non-family outlet

Outside Activities (when I was up for it)
Ukraine project, Resumed my passion
by moderating national calls with women
putting their “Names on the Ballot” and
potential candidates.



When friends ask you “What can I do?” Be specific.

Could you give me
a drive to my chemo
sessions on specific
dates?

Could you take me to
the hospital for my
tests every so often?

Can you help me do
my grocery
shopping?

Could you pick up my
prescriptions?
My mail?



I'd love 'mac and cheese'
or carrot muffins
and brownies!
Some soups!
(You'd be surprised how many
soups will land on your doorstep!)

Do you have a housecleaner
who can come every so often
to vacuum/ clean?

Help them help you best!
They want to contribute, and you need that love!

APRIL 2022

Sea of uncertainty

Operation:

Hysterectomy. Multiple organs removed.

My body changes again.

Waiting for the pathology revealing extent of disease.

Uncertainty rises again.

Sleep, recover, rebound!





Home from the Operation

Exhausted,
but happy it is done.

Tip? Prepare to stand still.

For me it was four weeks
to recover before
resuming chemo.

Forget any 'To Do' lists!

The world collapses inward again.

Your body dictates your rhythm.

You'll never guess
what's out on the
Barbie Doll market!



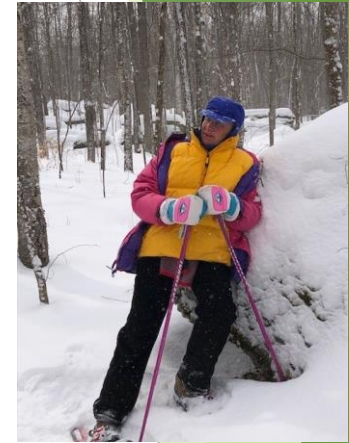


I never could get used to skull caps. Instead, I love colourful hats with scarves!



MAY 2022

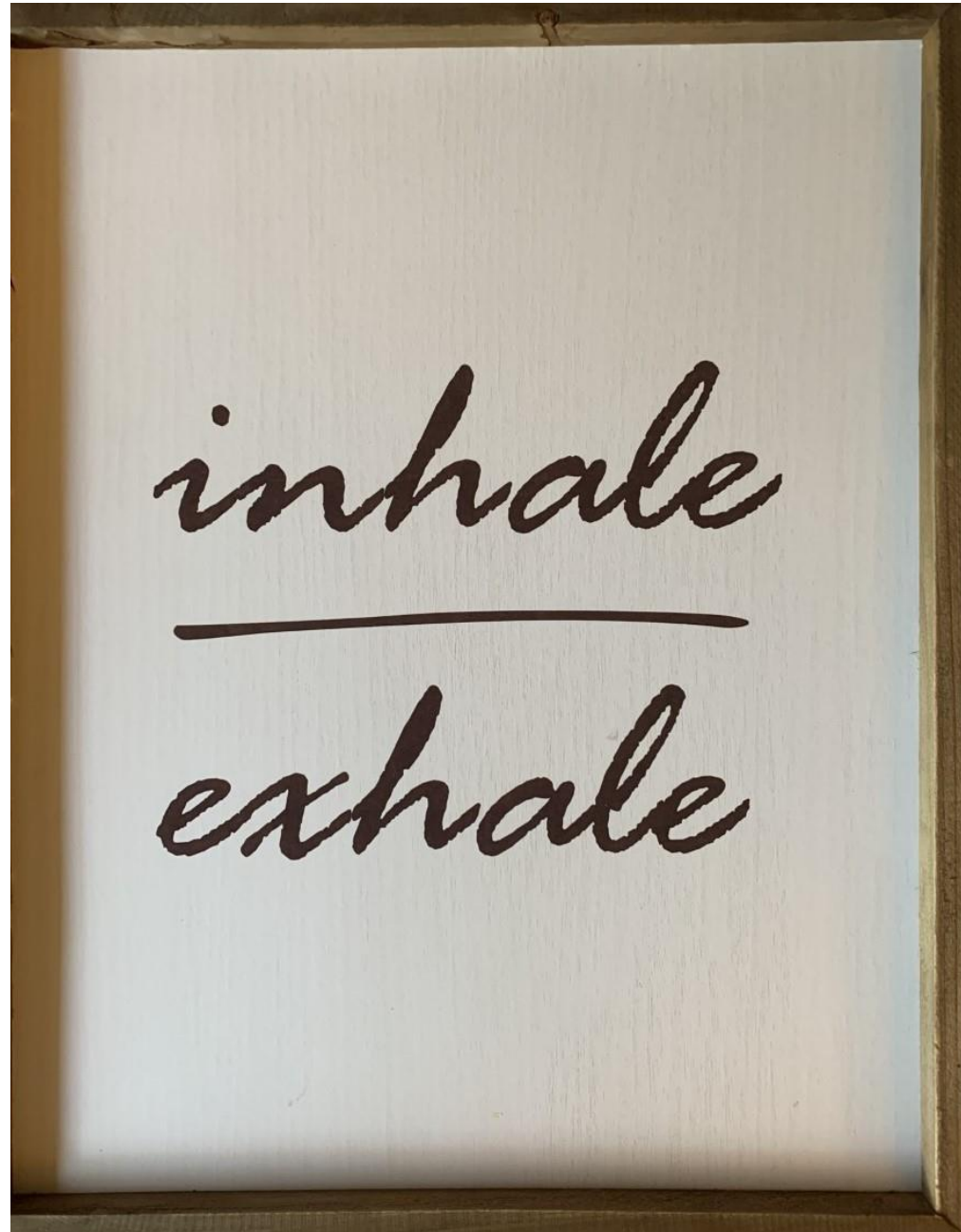
Snow gives way to Spring
Half-Way on 180 Day Journey! Walks in the Healing Woods



Family helped me keep up the habit of exercising every day.
We made funny hand or body signs for the number of days.

**Put this sign
where you
will see it.
And breath.
- consciously!**

*Inhale positive images.
Exhale and let go of any
distracting discouraging thoughts.
Like leaves on a flowing stream
Let them be swept away
Be still.
Let it go!*



JUNE 2022

Heading into a 'new normal'

**Final 6th Chemo.
The 'BELL' rings!**

Started booking forward:
Dentist, mammogram, 5th
COVID vaccine and yes...
pedicure and manicure

Still immunocompromised.
Masking and social distancing
continues.



The Bell -



*There's a Naval tradition
When a ship returns to harbor after a
tough journey
the bell is sounded.*

*This custom is adopted by some
cancer clinics. People
finishing their treatments
'sound the bell.'*

*My hospital did not have a bell.
So, I drew one. Then, coming back home,
discovered my friends in masks had bells ringing
for my return!*

JULY 2022

End of Treatment Check-Up

transition to ongoing monitoring

A: Prepare ahead some questions:

- *frequency and types of tests,
- *availability of after-hours help line,
- *genetic implications for family,
- *prognosis. *best actions to maintain health and live to the fullest.

B: Take your most trusted with you.

My Sister and my Son in my case - to record the meeting. They will hear what is said - I just might focus on what I wish would be said!



“Fork in the road.” I was asked to decide.

#1. Continue chemotherapy.

A daily low dose pill
(likely quality of life impacts)
with frequent monitoring.

Benefit? Potential
extension of
end of life
by weeks or months.

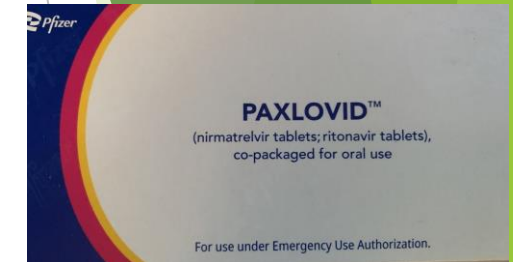


#2. Cease chemotherapy.

Instead opt for
Monitoring
Three-month ongoing
“Check-In” intervals.

Benefit?
Drug free time.
No chemo impacts.

**Then - COVID Struck.
Message? Hopefully you got Vaccinated!
Encourage all whom you know to do the same!**



About two months
after the end of my chemotherapy
I caught COVID!
Thankfully before cancer struck
I had 2 vaccines and 2 booster shots.
My symptoms were mild.
“fatigue, cough, aches”
The PCR testing facility said
“It’s your 5th vaccination!”

**Keep masking!
Social distancing & hand washing.
COVID is a clever virus!**



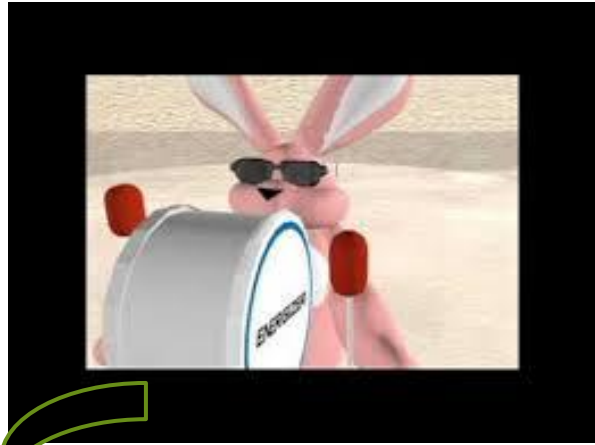
ANOTHER TOOL IN THE TOOLBOX



If your circumstances apply, another diagnostic tool to help pick up very active cells - is the PET scan. Impressive technique. Assist with early-warning. Simple diet preparation. Easy procedure. Like a CT scan.

Surprises and Spin-offs

From high energy
to 'Hanging-in'



I was surprised at some ongoing side effects
even after chemo was over.

Everyone is different
Here were mine:

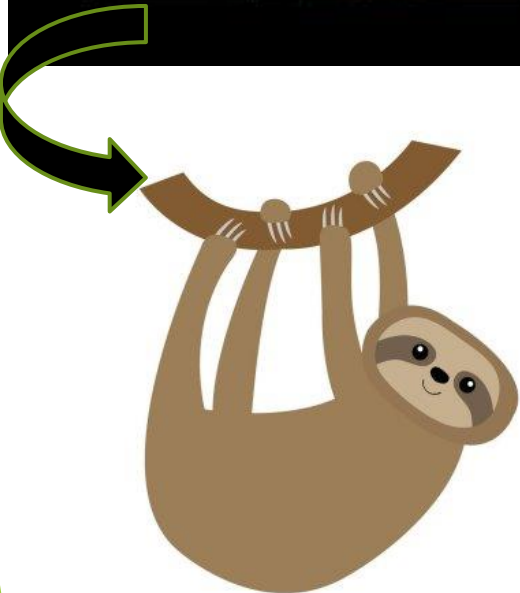
Peripheral neuropathy: base of both feet
Numbness around surgical incision.
Slow transition regaining energy

It remains invaluable having a friend ahead of me
on the cancer path to normalize what is happening.

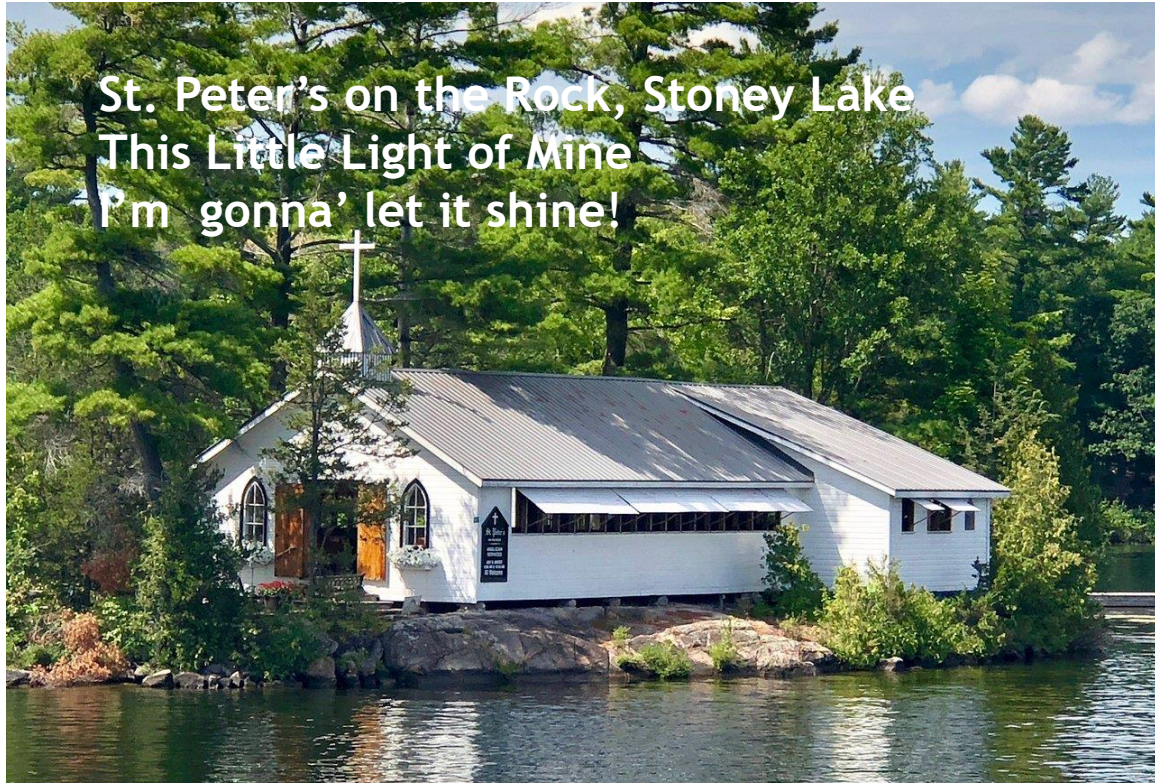
I continue to tap into resources like the weekly zoom calls
among a circle of women living with cancer.
Set of sessions with a psychologist.
All expand my support network.

Family assumed unique and vital support roles from taking
notes, to daily woods walks, cooking, emailing my friends
status updates, painting, and endless acts of kindness.

Virtual Church, Masses and prayer circles
I watch over-and-over the series 'The Chosen'.



St. Peter's on the Rock, Stoney Lake
This Little Light of Mine
I'm gonna' let it shine!



Looking forward: Re-engaging, strengthening,
and seizing the gift of all the time
ahead I am given.

Let your sunny
side shine.
Keep family, friends
and faith
close by.

