



FEELING MY WAY THROUGH CANCER

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Bonsai

My world is miniature,
A mere shallow dish.

To maintain
Perfect balance
In Bonsai living
I focus on discipline,
Carefully pruning to
Concentrate my energy
On the meaningful,
Simple grace.

As I age, my trunk thickens,
Gnarls a bit.
Reshaping along three
Major branches
In a stable tripod
Sprouting tiny twigs.

Each twig reaches outward,
Sun seeking.
Pushing beyond the know,
Pursuing more—
More self-expression,
More adventure.

I pinch off my childish inclinations,
The naive, the artless,
To encourage complexity, finesse,
Erudition, abstraction,
To grow in wisdom,
Spiritual wholeness.

I wire my tree-tips
To bend,
Conform to the culture
I am a part of,
Respecting the design,
The unified aesthetic
We form together
In harmony.

Leaning too far in one direction,
I offset my
Left brain analytic,
With my right brain intuitive,
My solitary with my social
To achieve a
A humble homeostasis.

I am that tiny tree in a pot,
Intentional, patient,
Forever self-sculpting
Beauty.
Peace within.

2-6-24

The Shopping Bag

In a paper shopping bag I carry
Carefully selected items
That speak to my heart:
My children's giggles,
My beloved's promises,
Memories of family bound.
My bag is always with me
So I can peek
At my treasures,
Recollecting my gold,
Tempering my courage.

In a dream,
My bag tore at its seams,
Collapsing—
Its contents herniating,
A wash of tender emotions
Spilling forth.

I struggled,
Clutching the cascading contents protectively,
Preserving my talismans —
The spiritual viscera that
Rouses my resolve —
Feeding my fortitude to face
Darkness,
Compelling me to
Hold on hard.

—8-18-19

Sandcastles

The sun dazzled;
The sand shimmered.
I squatted on the beach molding
A castle archetypal, sound,
When
High tide came in,
First in teasing foam,
Then more insistently.

Waves overflowed my moat,
Assaulted my ramparts,
Jolting my wellbeing,
Jangling my nerves with threats of devastation...

Ominous inklings,
Pounding waves, pounding heart.

An initial slap.
A wake-up diagnosis,
Sent me reeling.
Opening my mind to mortality,
Melting my candle in rivulets
Of disbelief.

I try to re-shape the sliding mortar,
To preserve, patch my integrity,
But with each raid,
Test, scan, injection,
I weaken,
My turrets fall,
My pennants flap with terror.

Beset by deluge,
Each surge spells complexities:
The rush, retreat of nausea,
The indignity of alopecia,
More treatments, more misery.

Ominous inklings,
Pounding waves, pounding heart.

An eroded Ozymandias I endure,
Frantically, conscientiously,
I follow prescriptions,
Fatigued but resolute,
Researching, swallowing pills, infusing chemicals,
Keeping faith, anticipating grace,
Waiting 'til the sea calms,
Malignant cells recede.

Ominous inklings,
Pounding waves, pounding heart.

—8-22-19

A Snail in Withdrawal

When I heard "bad news",
I wanted to retreat
Into a snail shell,
Curve my body around my navel,
Guard my source of being.

I needed solitude
To process meaning,
The shift, in my world,
The shock of a deadly disease
I knew nothing of...

I needed to extricate myself
From the emotional wreckage.
Order these weighty words
So that I could comprehend,
Face the world bravely.

I sought comfort
That no one could give me,
The cashmere blanket I could clutch,
Cry into privately,
And let my inner voice soothe my trembling.

I sought time
To think, feel, breathe,
Unknot rising tension;
To take charge of the uncontrollable.

I craved seclusion
To cry for myself,
Hide my fright.

I withdrew to protect my thin skin,
Embarrassed by irrational outbursts,
Trauma tremors,
Tears exuding from subconscious depths.
I churned day and night, enervated,
Unable to focus on that outside my shell.

It was just too much, too much...
Too soon.

—8-25-19

The First Weeks

I remember those first weeks
When conversations bounced off
In hailstone pings,
Registering tiny dents,
But no mental impression.

It came from the sky
So suddenly
With no shelter,
No shield,
No time to cover my head.

I short-circuited,
Shut down,
Unable to
Receive or send words,
Intelligibly.

Medicalese,
A language unfamiliar
Made no sense,
Short of parsing Latin prefixes.

Bruised, stunned,
I dissociated myself
In surrender.
Not an option, I was told.

I was dazed, soaked, insensate when
Benign winds finally replaced
The cruel cumulonimbus.
Icy pellets turned to softer graupel.

Given promising prospects,
I gradually grew emboldened,
Feeling paralyzing pathos passing,
Compassion imminent.

—8-26-19

Relativity

Einstein was right about relativity depending
On being on a train
Or on the platform.

Where one stands —
In a modern city, a Borneo backwoods,
In riches or penury,
All is relative to reference.

So I ponder my fortune;
Cancer, the constant.
Research, blindness?
Anticipation, surprise?
How do I process?
What comforts me?

The frame, my perspective:
To embrace a new reality?
Own self-pity?
Deduce, induce coping?
Keep positive, surrender?
My disposition:
A skin-deep persona or
Confident interior me?
Humble, Indignant?
Rational, emotional,
Sliding back and forth?



THIS IS A PERSONAL CHRONICLE OF AN
UNEXPECTED, UNSETTLING DIAGNOSIS OF
BREAST CANCER WRITTEN IN THE MOMENT
TO REFLECT THE VAGARIES OF
UNCERTAINTY DEALING WITH THE DISEASE
AND ITS TREATMENTS.

WRITING POETRY GAVE ME THE FOCUS I
NEEDED TO UNBOSOM THE INNER
RESOURCES I NEEDED TO QUELL
EMOTIONAL TURMOIL AND ENDURE PHYSICAL
TRAUMA. IT IS MY HOPE THAT OTHERS
FACING CANCER WILL RELATE TO MY
JOURNEY AND RECOGNIZE THEMSELVES IN
THE VERY HUMAN TEARS AND TWISTS OF
SELF-DISCOVERY.

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