

NOW WE WAIT

Scene 1

May 22

That's me, staring out at the streetcar tracks. It's funny watching them. Makes me think about how they all go along the same path every day. It's reassuring. Over the past year and a half, all of my routines have gone astray. My whole life changed after I was diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

Scene 2

May 25

About a year and a half ago I was sitting in my chair, looking at this same land. I couldn't see the beauty that I see here today. I wasn't able to smell the air after the rain.

Over the past year, I've been through radiation, surgery and chemotherapy. And now I'm waiting to hear what the latest tests have to say. I'm feeling a bit more optimistic, more able to see the beauty surrounding me. But still apprehensive. I hope I'll feel better next week.

Scene 3

May 26

I tire quicker than I would like to. I can still do most of the things a 64 year old does, but unfortunately I need a bit of a nap afterwards. I've just come back from taking Hope for her evening walk. She's quite the pup, grown up a lot over the past months, but still a handful. She's one of the best things for me, frankly—when I look back over my days I can usually say she has been one of the blessings.

Scene 4

May 27

A day of routine chores. Putting away the dishes, getting lunch ready. All the stuff I used to groan about now seems like a pleasure.

While making lunch, I thought about the diet that I was put on because of my hernia operation; it is in the news again. Indirectly, it was the cause of my getting diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

During a check-up after the surgery for the hernia, the doctor questioned my weight loss saying things like, "No way was the hernia that heavy" and "No one loses that much weight that quickly on a diet." So he asked a few more questions and said, "I think I'll be sending you for a colonoscopy."

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Scene 5

I didn't understand what he was sending me for. I certainly didn't think about cancer. It was never anything I thought would occur in my life. But it did. The speed with which the diagnosis and surgery were carried out made me aware that it was serious. The visit with the surgeon made me aware that it was a third stage of colon cancer. I had never even heard of this kind of cancer.

Scene 6

May 6

The weather's been up and down and so am I. I know I have to shift my focus when all I can think about is cancer. Those thoughts keep out all the good ones, they crowd out especially the important ones of my wife and friends. I'm going to try and turn those thoughts away, push out the negative ones by thinking about the great dinner we're going to have tonight and the walk I am about to take with Hope. Let's pray it works.

Scene 7

May 30, evening

A few words before bed. Great walk. I love to look at construction sites. They've been putting up another building and, well, each day it changes.

The side-effects from treatment are slowly going away. I am starting to feel like I can leave home without knowing exactly how far or where the next bathroom is. This MPS (multiple poop syndrome!) has been the worst. But, it's not gone yet. What's strange is that not everyone has the same side-effects from treatment, so it's not like they can tell you beforehand what to expect.

Scene 8

It's like you never know what to eat or even if you can eat. During my first bout with chemo, I usually had all the spicy food I wanted within about twelve hours of the chemo then had bland food until I really didn't want to eat anymore. This was followed by chocolate bars and butter tarts until my system settled, which was usually just prior to the next chemo session. Once people learned I was on butter tarts, we were showered with them. I certainly never complained and I'm happy to report I managed to use them quite effectively.

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Scene 9

June 5

I am a spiritual man. My work as a volunteer pastor brings me into contact with more serious illness and death than the average person. I wonder if people who have some kind of faith cope better in these situations? I know I pray a lot, and I know others pray for me. I try to stay in the present and not to think too much about the future. I'm coming to believe that either through meditation or prayer or some other means, one can refocus one's mind and keep the negative stuff from crowding out the things that matter.

Scene 10

June 7

Woke up to rain again, the tail end of a storm. Guess I'll wait until I take Hope out. It seems that I'm always waiting for something. The bus, for a good report, for strength. At the hospital I wait for tests and treatments. When I went for the first tests, I remember putting on the gown and being able to hear other people. Someone being sick, the quiet sobbing of an elderly woman waiting by herself. That's when I said to myself, no matter what, I will never go to the hospital alone. Never. It broke my heart to hear her cries and not be able to provide any comfort.

Scene 11

June 8

I remember the colonoscopy. I didn't want to see it on the TV screen. And when they saw it the doctors began to speak, like in a foreign language—"medicalese" is what I call it. There were a bunch of young doctors watching, learning about the tests. And they were talking, too. I didn't have a clue what they meant.

Scene 12

Later my wife asked the doctor doing the tests if they had found a tumour or whatever, if it was cancer. "Yes, in my experience I'd say it is cancer, but we'll only know for sure when we get the pathology report, he said." So we left. It was only in the moments by the elevators that my wife wept. I'm not really sure why, if she was thinking about the future, or the present, I don't know. When we got home, we just looked at each other and it was like, "Well, this is it, now we wait."

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Scene 13

June 9

We traveled today to find out the results of my tests. Sitting in the waiting room was the usual agony. I've always been one to talk and that's what I did while we waited. My wife's been more reserved. But the hours spent in that waiting room have made her a bit more ready to chat to a stranger. I think that people coming here want to share; it takes part of the burden from them.

Scene 14

Anyway, the great news is that my doctor said the report was excellent. Well, to be honest, I could have kissed him! He's always been there for us. The second time we met we went over these charts to help us understand what he was going to do, what we were going to do. Together we made the decision for chemotherapy, radiation and surgery. I've become a great fan of getting as much knowledge as you can handle. And even then, going back for more.

Scene 15

June 10, evening

This morning I sat in the living room looking across the fields and I sipped my coffee and thought of the number of times I had been in that same position, wondering what my next medical-report would say. Today was different. I had to pinch myself to realize that maybe we can visit Ireland or take a cruise. It was a day to relax with my sweet wife and to dream of our future together without the pale of cancer hanging over us. There are flowers to be planted, a basement to clean, but today is a day of thankfulness and togetherness.

Scene 16

It is said that feelings and thought make up our mind. Today the feeling of peace permeates me, and I don't want to think, I really just want to dream. To put away all those concerns of daily living and enjoy the moment, the freedoms, the opportunities that lie ahead. I think about those things. I am probably healthier than I have been in the last six years and I am going to develop a new long-range game plan and start to do some of the things that I have, frankly, been foolishly been putting off.

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Scene 17

June 13

Today I feel a certain joy in being able to do the same; knowing that my life was a bit more normal than a couple of days ago. It's hard to explain the different attitude. When friends tell you how healthy you look, I can now respond that indeed I am healthy without that little nudge at the back of my mind or that twinge that says, "Well, I am today."

Really, I am like everybody else, with the same risks and the same probabilities now. Yes, my cancer could come back, but I could just the same trip on a banana peel.

Enough! It's just every time I sit to write I am overwhelmed with the journey of the last 20 months and I can't help but think of how I have been blessed.

Scene 18

June 13, evening

As cancer patients, we're subjected to so much probing, poking and testing. We've had the thin veneer of privacy and modesty stripped away. Medical professionals, they really don't think twice of asking us to "drop them" and bend over. I've been inspected so many times over the past year, I'm wondering where the stamp is! So, what the heck, might as well try to see the humour in all of this! It's there, we just need to let ourselves laugh at it instead of cry or stress out.

I just keep reminding myself to take it one day at a time, but I know that's easier said than done.

Scene 19

June 15

I'm having another one of "those" days. Where my ostomy is just a pain in the ass. The term is appropriate given my internal plumbing. And this is reality. I know, I know, having an ileostomy requires patience and a positive attitude. However, when I'm away from home and I'm always aware of it and guard against any kind of accident, it causes a certain amount of stress in my life.

Sometimes it just becomes wearing. I never forget the alternative is a six-foot plot of land, but I can still feel total frustration. I know I will feel more positive tomorrow, but that's how I feel tonight.

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Scene 20

June 14

Going to sleep last night, I was thinking how much I let my ostomy control my life. It not only controls my life but it controls our life, something my wife never really complains about. Maybe it's time for me to be a bit more adventuresome. I still have some sexual dysfunction because of the radiation, but modern medicine can help us there. I've learned so much, the most important thing being that having colorectal cancer isn't necessarily like having a death sentence.

Anyway, for the most part, I've adapted to these changes. Yes it was a bit difficult for me at first to adapt, but the home nurse told me I did it quite quickly. Once you get the hang of it, it's not so bad. You can swim and do anything you did before (well, except for go to the bathroom the old way). They do not stand out or smell where others can tell you have one.

The hardest thing, at least for me, is the mental part where I can slide into negative thinking. So I remind myself: try to find the bright side of things. In every cloud there's a silver lining—sometimes you just need to look for it. Remember, today you are here and can see the flowers, the birds, children playing in their yards.

Scene 21

June 15

Today I am a birthday boy. Yet, there were times over the past months that we never thought we would be here. The weather continues to be overcast, in our hearts we are happy and thankful. I have been blessed with health, supportive friends and, of course, a doctor who was willing to stay the course and not give up on my cancer. What can I say? I'm one lucky guy.