

IT'S A PART OF LIFE

Scene 1

My intention was to write a description of my experience with the dreaded “C” and to say that it wasn’t a frightening thing or a painful one for me, but it has been important. In a way my whole life focus has changed. And the pictures I’m going to show you, they’re from my daily life, I believe they show what’s been important to me.

Scene 2

I’m 86 years old now and it’s difficult to know what fatigue is caused by the effect of the cancer and the operation, and what is just old age.

“Old age” is a definite stage of life. Each year I feel a bit of a decline in energy. But with the cancer, I am even more conscious of my energy reserves; there’s not much to draw on, some days.

Scene 3

Death is not a fear for me at this stage of life.

When I was growing up, so many died, there was a terrible diphtheria went through, and you had all these people that you knew getting sick and dying. It was all around. In fact, it was much more a part of life than it is now.

Scene 4

Well, from the time I was able to go anywhere with my parents, we went every year to the cemetery. And it’s in a sort of woods, there are a lot of trees, a very nice place. What I remember is there were always wild strawberries and, you know, I played in the creek. It’s a part of my life.

Scene 5

And when you die, I mean, as far as I’m concerned, when you die your body dies, and you don’t [laughs]. I’m part of a prayer group. We don’t ask for anything, we just hold the person that we are praying for in the light. You can feel it. It’s lovely for me, to know I can ask for this as well as give it.

Scene 6

It was about a year between the first symptoms and my diagnosis. I had a spell of constipation and then diarrhoea, but it took a while to figure it out. After I found out, it was about three weeks until I had the surgery. By then I could feel it, really, what was happening, it was more difficult in every way.

IT'S A PART OF LIFE

<p>Scene 7</p> <p>I didn't feel well, and I had all this problem with my digestion. When a growth was found by the ultrasound, I was somehow not surprised. It explained so much—the pressure, the discomfort, the difficulty in elimination.</p> <p>What did surprise me was that my doctor said he would get in touch with the surgeon right away.</p>
<p>Scene 8</p> <p>He told me I would have to have a colonoscopy because they thought that the growth had already invaded the colon. It was evident that we were talking about cancer. I had no feeling of fear or reluctance. At my age, something like this is not totally unexpected.</p>
<p>Scene 9</p> <p>I must say that the drinking of the fluid, which cleaned out the bowels, was the worst thing I had ever done. Well, it's for the colonoscopy, they do give you lots of information and lots of warnings, but nothing can take away that it is just a terrible experience. I spent my eighty-fourth birthday sitting on the toilet; I thought, oh goodness what old ladies go through.</p> <p>It was worse than the surgery, believe me.</p>
<p>Scene 10</p> <p>So this operation was wonderful, and I always think of it as having given me an extra year or more of life. I don't think I would have lasted much longer, but there you are. The doctor took the tumor out and the section from the colon. He said that they found a spot on the liver and they took that off, too.</p>
<p>Scene 11</p> <p>He also took lymph nodes—that's how they tell whether it has gone any further. And the lymph nodes were clear; thank goodness for that. I was lucky that they caught it early.</p> <p>My recovery seemed to go in stages. I was like a baby at first; I really lost a lot of weight and I was very hungry, but I couldn't eat.</p>
<p>Scene 12</p> <p>And now I really have to watch what I eat. But I don't always eat the right things. If I eat too much, I pay for it. I'm back to the old rule of small meals more often, and so on. But there are</p>

IT'S A PART OF LIFE

still times when I have this ravenous hunger! Oh my! So hungry!

Scene 13

I have never been able to talk to anyone who was actually going through this. I want to know the stories of those living with it. And I'd like to know is there a kind of general pattern for it, for recovery. I'd like to chat with someone else, someone close to my age, compare notes about being tired, and the change in bowel habits.

Scene 14

I still can't seem to find a pattern to my bowel movements. It's terrible, but it is important to be close to a bathroom, just in case. So I don't go out as much as I used to. Home is the place for me.

I feel different inside. I would like to ask if others feel that way, and about bowel movements and restrictions! I can't go out until I've had a number of them and I still worry if that is normal.

Scene 15

A mentor would be good, someone I could chat with on the phone if things changed. I know there are groups, but I just can't get to them. I've had to take the bus, and that means standing around and that is something I just can't do anymore. And the groups are in the evening. I'm just too tired by then.

Scene 16

One thing I can say is that I have learned more about my body. Things I was totally unconscious about 'cause you just do them, now I have to think about them. For example, I have to think about getting into the tub: is there enough strength in my arms?

Scene 17

And the other thing is, my stomach muscles were always good. The surgery destroyed the muscles in my abdomen. I do exercises but it's still not "my" stomach.

Call me vain about this, but it is an issue for me! I always liked my tummy.

Scene 18

And I lost weight after the surgery, my clothes were falling off. Though now my clothes are too tight; I get bloated from the Metamucil that my doctor says I should take. By evening I am

IT'S A PART OF LIFE

so bloated I have to take my clothes off, but maybe everyone has to.

Scene 19

I could ask my doctor, but I don't 'cause I know how busy he is. Also, it is difficult to reach the nurse or doctor, even when they say "call." It can be impossible to get through. Plus, when you ask the doc, he always thinks he needs to do something, but all I might want is information.

If these side-effects ever settle down, it will be a relief. I was not given much information of these possible problems before the surgery, but I guess that's because these might be quite different for different people. Though again, I'm not really sure.

Scene 20

Even though it's been almost two years I still would very much like to know what the experience of other people is, because I mix it up with my age, you see; I just can't tell whether it's because I'm 86 or what.

But thinking about the cancer and all can also be a bit of a bore. Though like I said before, knowing I had cancer has been a bit of a strange blessing. Finding it was serendipitous; it's allowed me bit of extra time to enjoy being here.