

Spiraling Down into Darkness

Struggling Up into the Light

By Jarelle S. Stein

Discovery of the intruder in the left side of my brain came on June 21, 2014. That morning, my wife, Zoe, found a confused me on the living room sofa. She stayed home to take care of me. Two hours later, I went into a grand mal seizure. Doctors in the hospital, over the next six weeks, determined that I probably had a tumor. What became clear was the tumor was neither in an easy place nor in confined shape. Unclear was whether the tumor was benign or cancerous; the medical people told me that could not be determined until November, after the surgery had been done on October 30.

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I get lost, lost in time and place, lost in my life, forgetting who I am and where I am. I feel my life has been torn from me along with my mind, for who am I without my mind, my full mind, all of it?

It is not the brain tumor itself, the illness I resent, as much as the loss of my mind and the ability to control my life—as much as any of us controls her own life. I want to stand tall, to run out of the house, to jump in the car, race out of the drive, go, go, go. Does not matter whether it is to the beach, the store, down the coast, to see a friend, a client.

Now I understand, as I never could have before, the pain of losing control of one's life that the elderly feel as it is taken from them day by day, piece by piece, ability by ability. You die a little bit at a time. It is not done by an evil army storming into your home, but by kind relatives (as well as the neighbors and the neighborhood) trying to safeguard you and your person. It is done with love and caring (as well as not wanting anyone to get hurt or any suing to go on). But it still hurts and you still die a little more inside with each indignity, each loss of self-control and autonomy.

“Do not go gentle into that good night, but rage, rage against the dying of the light,” the poet said. (Which one, I can’t remember right now, which is another part of this whole ordeal—or perhaps I wouldn’t have remembered anyway, but I might as well use this as an excuse.)

Enough for now. I have laundry to fold and rooms to clean, fortunately skills that don’t take a superior intellect or a powerful memory.

I keep remembering what my high-school adviser, Mrs. LeSeure, once said to me. “I think you are the best writer in this school, but I don’t think you are a genius.” Now why can’t I forget that one, at least the second part?