

11-01-19 Growing

We live in an age of medical miracles and still, so many medical mysteries remain. We don't always know why some people survive and others do not. We do know that at some point we will die, and we hope for happiness while alive and we hope that ordinary can continue amid extraordinary. Appreciating the ordinary is important. Some of us complain about the aches and pains associated with ageing, while others worry they won't see old age. In both scenarios, appreciating what we can do helps us to be grateful for what we have.

My daughter has finished her chemotherapy for breast cancer and has had her surgery. She is doing well. She has a great sense humor and that helps in so many ways, including the immune system. As we visited her before going into surgery, she joked about having to wear a hair net, when she had no hair and laughed!

Hopefully, the biopsy results of the removed tumor area and the lymph nodes will say All Clear.

Waiting is difficult and worrying is wearisome.

One of her worries is that the cancer will return, and she will not have the opportunity to grow old. She has met so many nice people during this cancer journey. Most of the people receiving chemotherapy were decades older than my daughter and they felt badly for her because she is young. She heard too many stories, though, of people returning. They had cancer twenty years earlier and now it had returned. My daughter worries about that. I can only hope that worry diminishes with time, replaced by growing happiness.

Ordinary growth has continued for her son and daughter with school and sports and that is good! Her twelve-year-old daughter, Taryn, also has a good sense of humor. As she opened the gift bag for my daughter, at home after the surgery, she pulled out comfy sock-slippers and smiled. My daughter announced, "Oh, she'll be taking those!" Then, my granddaughter reached for the next item, a soft bathrobe, the short kind you can wear in bed. Taryn looked up with a smile and a twinkle in her eyes and announced, "Sleep over essentials!" I cracked up laughing! A couple days later, my daughter told me, "Taryn has stolen the bathrobe."

There is another grandchild in the family now and he spent his first week in the intensive care unit so that fluid in the lungs could subside. All the nurses loved holding him, as he was full term and weighed over eight pounds. They were

accustomed to tiny babies, some who could not even be held. My grandson is grand and growing and beginning his life surrounded by love, after receiving his medical miracle.

On the other end of the life spectrum is my ninety-year-old friend who is near the end of his life. He and his devoted partner have dealt with the sometimes bizarre and often frustrating maze of rules regarding insurance, hospice, and social workers. I think my friend would not even be alive at this point if it were not for his beloved taking him out on almost a daily basis and fighting every fight that needed to be fought to maintain his rights and dignity.

Recently, when it was once again determined that he would be in hospice care, my friend's friend declared they would skip that if it meant they would have to stop seeing his much-loved oncologist. They were assured that was not necessary and he could continue his monthly visits with that doctor. (All parties involved had been down that road previously and learned how fiercely my friend's ally could fight!) Having an ally, an advocate, a true and loyal supporter is a lifesaving and life extending miracle.

Now, the care of my elderly friend has evolved in a wonderful way. He has been in a nursing home long enough that they know his quirky sense of humor. Months ago, as a young nurse was leaving his room, she said, "I will see you later." My friend responded with, "If I am still here." That exchange of words was reported as a suicide concern and he was not allowed to leave the building, as planned, until the psychiatrist could evaluate him. His partner was furious and stormed out of the nursing home! Now, they know him better.

While he jokes about death, he has always been afraid of it. He now seems less afraid and more accepting. He tells us (and himself) that he has a good attitude and he does.

The nursing home staff have also come to realize that in their midst and in their care is an accomplished and highly intelligent poet, artist, philosopher, writer, cartoonist who won't be with us for long. His partner is now relieved that our friend is appreciated as a whole person, a unique person and not just a number or dollar sign.

While he sleeps more and more, a medicine has finally been found to eliminate the nausea he had suffered daily. When someone special visits, such as his daughter or a friend he hasn't seen in a while, he surprises us all by rallying,

staying awake, enjoying a meal and enjoying himself. At those times he is still enjoying life, growing with life . And that is wonderful. So very wonderful.

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