

Healing in the key of “C” the joy in music for cancer survivors

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Opinion

I've been a song writer and musician for as long as I can remember. In my youth I made a meager living for a few years playing banjo in pizza parlors before graduating to night clubs. The city of Seattle once asked me to travel with a big band to Moscow, to introduce the 5-string banjo to Russian audiences. I dabbled in writing radio jingles for a while and as electronic music became more sophisticated and affordable I fell in love with composing orchestral pieces on the digital synthesizer.

This all took place long before cancer was discovered in my left breast. Music, the universal language, has filled cathedrals and concert halls, high school gyms and old time theaters, auditoriums and opera houses since the beginning of recorded time. But the place where music seems to resonate most lyrically and everlasting is in the human heart.

It's through music as a songwriter that I have always recognized my avenue of self-expression and it's in music that I've found deep comfort in my waltz with breast cancer.

*“Music gives a soul to the universe,
wings to the mind, flight to the
imagination, and life to everything.”*

Plato

To my ear, there is no instrument more compelling and magnificent than the human voice. We are able to express every emotion in such profound ways; to celebrate or grieve, to comfort or stir with a simple breath in and an exhale.

Nobody really knows if music is found anywhere outside our own planet. Technically, sound does not exist in space. It needs a medium such as air or water to vibrate and expand. But planets and stars and the solar wind shimmer in an elegant and primordial fellowship with all that is life, and just because we can't hear it does not mean it isn't there.

I feel that way about cancer. We can't see the work our physical bodies are doing in their effort to eradicate cancer cells, but I believe our intrinsic human drive is to keep on living. We are not separate from the cellular symphony inside of us. The discord of our cancer is only a wrong note in the score of life as we express it. And I believe that with due diligence and conscious camaraderie with our own bodies, we can live in harmony once more.

The unanswered question seems to be in the way we orchestrate our healing, and that appears to be different for all of us. I didn't start

trying to learn piano until I was sixty. But the electronic synthesizer allowed me to compose with 500 instruments at my fingertips, and I created my musical pieces one note at a time, since I am unable to read music. It was slow going but I managed to write a complete Broadway musical in this way. This too is how I approach my cancer recovery; one note at a time, listening to the music of wellness, which sounds so much sweeter than the fear of recurrence. “Music Therapy” is actually an established health profession in which music is used within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals.

During chemotherapy, while recovering from surgery, when things hurt and our bodies ache, a little song in your heart can be as relaxing and stress reducing as a kitten on your lap. Heck, on a really bad day why not try that little song and a kitten on your lap at the same time. You just may make some beautiful, healing music together.

Khevin Barnes is a male breast cancer survivor, speaker and song writer. His song, “What Good is a Breast?” is a respectfully irreverent and humorous salute to the human breast. You can hear it at www.breastcancerspeaker.com

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