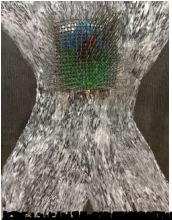


I'm a few days late getting this traditional birthday blog post up this year, because there was a lot going on for my birthday and then I got sick (which I refuse to take as an indication that I overdid it around the birthday shenanigans...it is after all seasonally appropriate and I have been around a lot of people). Today I'm finally feeling better though and ready to contemplate this dual anniversary as I do every year and see what it feels like this time.

For those just now coming to the party, my birthday is also the day I got diagnosed with cancer...the first time, back when I was 23. That makes this year my 25th anniversary of the day my relationship with my body and my mortality abruptly changed. 25 years is a nice round number and worthy of celebration, though it would feel nicer (and more victorious) if there hadn't also been this new diagnosis and cancer saga part 2 that I have been dealing with for the past year-plus. It's become interestingly complicated to do this yearly philosophizing now that there are two cancer-versaries to contemplate, but I still like the dramatic dichotomy that this day of transitions from one state to another (from unborn to born, from healthy to ill) presents.

I do still feel a sense of victory, of having made it this far after the initial shock and upset of that first diagnosis. But that sense of victory is tempered now with the reality that life is complicated and the lesson that victory often comes at a cost (which sometimes takes a lot longer than expected to manifest). I can no longer see my life as divided into only three phases, pre-cancer, cancer treatments and post-cancer survivorship—my survivorship status is now no longer something I can confidently assume will not change, since it already has changed once, from cancer survivor back to cancer patient and then back to survivor again. Don't get me wrong, I'm humongously grateful for and pleased at being back in the survivor identity after a tough second go-round, but the very fact that the pendulum has swung back and forth between having and surviving cancer an additional time makes me have to acknowledge that it could certainly do so again. (In fact, it is more likely to do so again than it once was.) I have to constantly be able to hold two possibilities in my head and heart: on the one hand, that I am free, that I have fought the good fight and triumphed and cancer has once again vanished from my body, never to return because we have salted the earth quite thoroughly (and will continue to for years to come, just in case); and yet on the other hand, that treatments for cancer can sometimes cause cancer, as they did in my case, and that my body seems to be a fertile ground for cancer (as evidenced by it popping up at least twice now that I know of), so even though we have done all we can to prevent recurrence, I cannot be certain that it won't happen. Holding two opposite things simultaneously and being comfortable in that "gray area" of uncertainty is something I learned to do back in the first go-round with cancer, but now I've had a chance to repeat the lesson and it is even more nuanced and complicated. I would say that the ability to live in the gray is one of the hallmarks of maturity, so I guess I would also say "yay me" that I have made it far and long enough to even mature.



[REDACTED]