

GRATITUDE: the state of being grateful, thankfulness

Thanks a lot, Cancer

"Thanks for being my wakeup call;
for reminding me how precious life is..."

(excerpt)



Life is Good

By Stephen Rusiniak

Thanks for being my wakeup call; for reminding me how precious life is...

I awoke this morning as I do most mornings—several minutes before my clock radio would rudely announce that my time beneath blankets and sheets was coming to an end. I turned off the alarm so as not to disturb Karen, who even after all these years still doesn't like to get up as early as me. Before throwing back the covers and allowing my toasty-warm feet to make contact with the chilly oak floor, I laid there in the semi-darkness and began making a mental list of some of the things for which I'm thankful. And as improbable as it may sound, my thankful thoughts this morning were the result of something that in and of itself is certainly not a blessing.

I should probably explain.

We tend to take for granted all for which we should be grateful, but sometimes, when unforeseen circumstances suddenly interrupt our lives, it's these same circumstances that quite often cause us to recognize and eventually reflect upon our blessings rather than to dwell upon life's unexpected intrusions.

Not so long ago one of these unforeseen circumstances intruded into my life. I learned that a cancer had come to live with me.

As to be expected, I wasn't thrilled by the news, but after learning more about my *unwanted visitor*, I quickly arrived at the realization that it could have been worse, much worse in fact. But to be honest, the news briefly caught me off guard and brought me to a place that I would have preferred not to have traveled. Just the mere word *cancer* was enough to cause me to become momentarily morbid—only then did I briefly consider my own mortality.

Oddly enough, the consequence for having such thoughts almost immediately gave way to a far better and totally unexpected epiphany.

After some early morning contemplation it occurred to me that of all the other *unwanted visitors*—the cancers that could have invaded my life, my intruder was by far the



I've so much more
yet to accomplish,
and quite frankly,
there's no room
in my life for
unwanted visitors

(but there will always
be room for Maui)

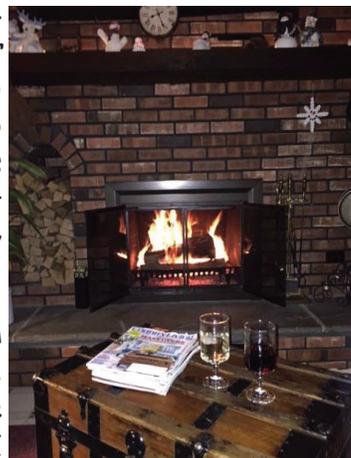
lesser of the bunch. All things considered, the choice it made by moving in with me will soon prove to be its downfall. After all, before being allowed the opportunity to become acquainted with the neighborhood, my *visitor* has been put on notice; our time together is growing short. It has to be this way too because I refuse to allow this uninvited thug to become the barricade blocking my future journeys along life's greater highways. Additionally, my *visitor* has become the catalyst that has caused me to reexamine and ultimately reconsider my blessings.

And so I awoke this morning several minutes before the alarm on my clock radio would rudely announce that my time beneath blankets and sheets was coming to an end. As I lay there in the semi-darkness I began making a mental list of the things for which I should be thankful—little things mostly—things like:

- Banana bread baking in the oven and filling our home with its awesome aroma.
- Sitting with Karen on our couch and sipping some wine while watching the blaze in our fireplace on a snowy-cold winter's night.
- Having my spiritual batteries recharged, renewed and sustained for another week after attending Sunday morning services at our church.
- Happily discovering that the traffic signals and I are apparently in sync—both of us magically arriving at each and every intersection simultaneously.
- When my kids take a moment to contact me—briefly, electronically and via our various mobile devices. I'm thrilled to know that no matter where they are, I'm still in their thoughts and they take the time to tell me—even if it's in just 140 characters or less!
- Snuggles suddenly received from my best buddy, Bailey, our ten year old rescue puppy!
- Early mornings spent with a steamy-hot mug of coffee in my right hand while I'm flipping through the pages of my newspaper with my left.
- For having Karen in my life. I'll never know what she ever saw in me, or come to think of it, what she still sees in me today, but whatever it is, I hope I never lose it.
- And of course, I'm thankful that even after I first noticed the telltale signs and then became convinced that something was wrong, I wasn't penalized for my procrastination. My *visitor* was discovered in time so as to deny it the opportunity to further flaunt its squatter status.

I suppose that what I'm about to say will seem as absurd to you now as it would have sounded to me a few weeks ago, but of course, a lot has happened since then, and so I'm just going say it anyway: Thanks a lot, cancer.

Thanks for being my wakeup call; for reminding me how precious life is and for helping



me to recognize so many of the blessings in my life—blessings I've too often overlooked or have simply taken for granted.

But above all, thank you for taking the cue to leave after being ordered to do so. I've so much more yet to accomplish, and quite frankly, there's no room in my life for uninvited visitors.

So goodbye then. And don't take this personally, but nobody's going to miss you.
Especially me.

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the backstory:

Write what you know. Ernest Hemingway once said this to his young protégé, Arnold "Maestro" Samuelson. It was good advice for the Maestro, and come to think of it, for me too.

Almost all of my pieces—especially my earlier ones, concerned family—my children: Michael and Tracy, (and eventually my wife Karen too). My pieces were about parenting and about being a dad; they were about my parents and about being my parents' son.

And to be honest, all of these pieces were personal—some more so than others ie: Christmas Wish and For better or worse—both fairly easy enough to write. Both harder to share. (Each can be found in my "in books" page if you'd care to read them).

Today Thanks a lot, Cancer makes this short list.

Write what you know. I always have. I always do. And like the previously mentioned pieces, I've done so without providing any specific details, after all, you needn't know them. They're not the story anyway.

What is the story is how my "unwelcomed visitor" became my wakeup call; for reminding me how precious life is.

My brother Paul gave me a hat some years back with the now popular saying, *Life is Good* embossed above the bill. Those three words say it all; they mean much more to me today than they did yesterday.

Chicken Soup's tentative publishing schedule includes a new book for later this year: **Chicken Soup for the Soul The Power of Gratitude**. Shortly after completing this piece on my "visitor," I submitted it to my Soup friends. Maybe it'll make the final cut. Maybe it won't. Either way, I followed Hemingway's advice. Either way I wrote what I wanted to write, shared what I wanted to share and now it's time to move on to something new.

Write what you know. I guess I just did.



An update on my piece:

***Thanks a lot, Cancer &
Chicken Soup for the Soul
The power of Gratitude***



Hey readers,

While I never write specifically for any one Chicken Soup for the Soul book, I was, nevertheless, convinced that something I'd written, **Thanks a lot, Cancer**, was a perfect fit for their planned book on the power of gratitude. After all, it certainly seemed to me to have met the story guidelines for the book which included: silver linings, counting one's blessings, and of course, well, gratitude! Anyway, that's what I thought.

So much for my opinion!

I mentioned in the backstory that I'd submitted this piece for the new book—sharing what I've done with a piece pre-publication is something that, by the way, I've never done before.

But this time—this *one* time, there was just something about this one that convinced me it was so right.

I was, however, so wrong!

To everyone who either read **Thanks a lot, Cancer** on Facebook, my newly christened webpage or received it via somebody's share and then took the time to tell me how much they liked it—believing, like me, its inclusion in a book on gratitude sounded like a good fit, my sincere thanks.

As it says at the conclusion of the piece's backstory, "I wrote what I wanted to write, shared what I wanted to share and now it's time to move on to something new."

I suspect this piece will turn up somewhere, some day, but for right now I'm done with it. Besides, there's a bunch of other little writing projects vying for my attention.

And remember, *Life is good*, (whether shared in a book or not!)

June 22, 2016