

“O Fortuna, Velut Luna, Statu Variabilis” by Ernie Reis

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On August 1, I was 70 years old and invincible. After enduring a weekend of abdominal discomfort, possibly made worse by eating a firehouse carnival fried dough and cheeseburger, my PC Physician referred me to the emergency room, and on August 3 I learned I had pancreatic cancer, BOOM!!! “Well, here’s another nice mess you’ve gotten me into.” I thought. I could not put my mind around anything but how my life was being cut short, the anticipated pain, discomfort, expense of treatment, and all the turbulent thoughts that follow.



**November is National
Pancreatic Cancer Month**

I had been thinking about the end of life enough to come to the grips with some of the above in the context of the long and short of your doctor’s prognosis. The question always, what do you do with the time? Being retired helps with being able to attend to your medical and related needs, but what else? I decided to find humor in my situation, and appreciate my luck along the way. Luck? Did greasy fried dough cause the early detection of the cancer which had not affected other organs and blood vessels making surgery after chemo-therapy, a positive solution, if surgery is ever positive?

The second is an unplanned coincidence, my youngest daughter in her 30’s decided to become a nurse and became employed in the oncology unit at the hospital to which I was eventually transferred. She’s pretty good at what she does having won a DAISY award. She connected me with some of the best rated doctors in the Capital District. There was a sense of comfort and trust in this aspect of my treatment. I wonder how others may deal with this aspect of their care.

The preparation for actual treatment had an assembly line feel. Upon arrival, you were walked into a semi enclosed room in a row of many. A swarm of medical staff descended, asking your name, DOB, weight, height, etc. over and over again, as well as taking your blood pressure, applying seemingly endless IV’s.

These worker bees worked from a binder. Staff to perform the procedure stopped by as well. This included the anesthesiologist who flipped through the book and could not find an EKG. She questioned loudly, “We’re sending a 70 year old man with high blood pressure up for surgery without an EKG?”

The nurses sprang into action, quickly attaching electrodes to my body. It was a last minute deal so the readings were not clear, the nurse in charge said they needed to press the electrodes to make a better connection, but not to use fingers. There I was, in a top rated hospital getting a last minute EKG with three nurses pressing the electrodes to my chest with ball point pens. I think Hawkeye would have been proud.

The prep procedures went from one day to another, there was a day when I arrived in a bad mood. When I was asked the questions again, including my height I said I was 8 feet tall. The staff person collecting my vitals, without flinching, wrote the information down and moved on. When inputting my data, the nurse reacted when it came to my height.

“What’s this?” as she looked at me. I explained I was in a bad mood and was tired of the questions. This cracked her up and she announced to the floor that I had gotten the nurse assistant. The laughter increased when, thinking the assistant should have caught the mis-take, the nurse said to the assistant so others could hear, “What did you think he was wheeled in on two gurneys.”

I have been playing these little games with medical folks, friends, and associates, the jokes come my way as well. As each day goes by, I hear positive comments about my attitude and appearance, I begin to believe I may be invincible, but the chemo brings me back to earth. There are other earthly ties like family and friends that help. To all those out there fighting cancer—be well and be strong.

By Ernie Reis

“O Fortuna, velut luna, statu variabilis”, opening lines to Carl Orff’s, “*Carmina Burana*”

“O Fortune, Like the moon you are changeable”