

Good morning, Happy Father's Day, and Happy Solstice!

Helen Cohen reminds us that today, the longest day of the year, "We stand at the edge of summer."

I picked the title "Ramblings" for two primary reasons. First, I like to walk, to wander, and to wonder. Second, I had so many thoughts I considered exploring for today that I initially couldn't decide which to focus on. As I worked with several ideas, I realized tying them together would require a LOT more time than either you **or** I want me to spend up here.

So, I decided to connect my 9 years', so far, experience with cancers and concerns about a current issue, health care reform. Then, I want to briefly examine human problems in the "rat race" and suggest treatment options, leaving the self-care and prognosis up to you.

Six years ago, in Channing Hall, I presented a sermon exploring my health crises.

Anyone who was not present for this--most of you--and who wants to hear about the first six years of my cancer journey can email me to request the document.

Vickie Girard wrote There's No Place Like HOPE, a sort of emotional guidebook mainly for those coping with their own or someone else's cancer. Girard provides quite a bit of useful information along with her inspiration and encouragement. She strongly believes

"Success stories save lives" and recommends that those facing cancer need to "Celebrate your conquests, both large and small. Within one cancer battle there are many individual success stories--first steps taken, fears faced and conquered, tears shed and dried. Starting today, celebrate them all!" Girard reminds people of the importance of small victories: "Success is sometimes just getting out of bed." **And**, "Success is sometimes staying in bed."

Girard also reminds readers that when treatments are completed, there is no "back to normal. The body has to recover, as do the mind and the heart. Let's face it--this is not like recovering from the flu or the chicken pox. A cancer diagnosis shakes you right to the core." She continues: "Often too, we are left with physical changes that have occurred. Well, of course you are happy that you're alive and, yes, it was worth the sacrifice--but that doesn't make it easy to lose a breast, or a prostate, or a colon, or a lung, or a kidney."

Concluding her book, Girard emphasizes that she embodies survival and hope:

"Always remember, even when it is not probably, it is *possible* to win against this disease--of this I am living, breathing proof." "So, keep wearing the armor of hope....Keep fighting and keep supporting each other along the way."

However, before that triumphant ending note, Vickie Girard reminds us of the current reality of health care in the United States: "I agree that we need more research for bright

new cancer-fighting procedures. My friends and I continue to march, walk and run for more research money. But my major cause over the last seven years has been to ensure that today's cancer patients have equal access to the very best treatment that is *already* available. For those who can't even access what is currently available, future breakthroughs are only a promise of more things they can't have!"

Then, she tackles the bugaboo: insurance. "The trials and tribulations of dealing with our insurance companies are a reality for every cancer patient. Insurance issues and problems brought me to my knees at least as often as the disease." "Filing an insurance claim is difficult enough if you are well. But when you are tired and depleted from cancer treatment, every unnecessary phone call, bureaucratic holdup, or administrative obstacle can feel like a nightmare. I think many insurance companies realize they can wear us out. ...They often try to run us around until we...have a meltdown--until we are too discouraged, too broke, or too sick to fight back. I've seen insurance companies knock the fight out of a person before the disease! This must stop!"

I echo her outrage. Between August 2000 and November 2008, I, though insured, have had to pay over half of my gross earnings on out-of-pocket expenses for health care! And I have yet to meet a deductible. Copays and durable medical equipment do not count toward meeting one's deductible.

I have worked hard writing legislators at the state and federal level, for myself and for several other people, trying to get them to at least **explore** a public option and reminding them that most people like Medicare coverage, a national single-payer plan. I am concerned about the uninsured, the underinsured, and the insured who are facing difficult decisions when they have had to deplete savings meant for retirement during their working years because of inadequate coverage and insurance companies' profits.

Girard tells us we're starting to make progress but have a long way to go: "We must make enough noise so that our legislative bodies can hear us--so that their vote can reflect our voice. We are already making a difference. Notice that virtually every politician now talks about health care reform. Believe me, there weren't many of them doing that in the early Nineties. They are talking now because we are demanding it--but the battle has just begun."

I stress REFORM as opposed to making cosmetic or linguistic changes that do not substantially alter or revamp the entire system. And I encourage you to become involved as well.

If, as I hope we all do, we desire better quality physical, emotional, and mental health for everyone, tuning into Ken Nye's reading _____ might remind us too much of our own situation.

We're all aware of how our culture encourages us to join the frenzy, race the rats, hustle and bustle. Of course, more noise, more technology, more electronic devices, more lights, more signs, more speed, and more distractions, while at times useful or handy, can easily lead us AWAY from our selves, from nature, from relationships, from the present, the moment, the now. Don't we frequently hear that "time is money?" So it's not surprising that we too often feel the need to rush.

Edward Everett Hale provides a fine piece of advice: "Never bear more than one trouble at a time. Some people bear three kinds - all they have had, all they have now, and all they expect to have." Will Rogers' pithier version of the same? "Don't let yesterday use up too much of today." I ask, "Why not let the rats win?"

Humor aside, allow Kathleen McTigue to point out our most important duties. She claims we need to "resist the headlong tumble into the next moment, Until we claim for ourselves Awareness and gratitude." McTigue also remarks on the task of "Taking the time to look into one another's faces And see there communion: the reflection of our own eyes."

It's so simple to forget we're part of nature and that we're a social species.

According to poet and essayist Annie Dillard, "We are here to abet creation and to witness to it, to notice each other's beautiful face and complex nature so that creation need not play to an empty house."

Even Laura Ingalls Wilder of Midwestern fame writes about what's vital to pay attention to: "I am beginning to learn that it is the sweet, simple things of life which are the real ones after all."

Vanessa Rush Southern's book of meditations, This Piece of Eden, includes a section exploring the frenetic pace of our day-to-day lives. "It doesn't seem necessary that life be lived in such a frenzy. Like so much else, how we treat time is a matter of choice. We can choose to race on after some elusive prize, or we can accept the gifts of the present. We can rage against the person who takes a second longer at the check-out counter or we can allow [them] that extra beat of time with grace."

She also provides some possible solutions to the constancy of hurrying. "It may take cultivating a different mindset to live out this sense of time. It requires us to trust that good work is being done in the quiet of a day, or the leisure of a day off." Southern says we must have "faith in the 'enoughness' of what we have, particularly...time," and reminds us the "richest harvests are sown" when "the fields of heart and mind [are left] fallow for even a little while."

Even Ovid, long ago, advised people to "Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop."

And Nehru reminds us that "Time is not measured by the passing of the years, but by what one does, what one feels, and what one achieves."

Wendell Berry's poetic suggestions for handling stress and worry are "to come into the piece of wild things" and "to rest in the grace of the universe."

[Tie in current *DSM Register* article about woman's dad.]

For me, tying social action with community helps remind me what's real.

Returning to the cancer theme, I make myself available for those newly diagnosed. After so many years, so many chemotherapy drugs, and so many side effects, I've become something of an expert on coping with side effects, no matter how baffling. I also try to help others with knowledge, resources, and preventive measures to adopt before, during, and after chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery.

[Mauri - brief descrip. and email]

"In rivers, the water that you touch is the last of what has passed and the first of that which comes; so with present time." -Leonardo da Vinci