

Enough charity sparring, already

The human mind is a funny thing - what scares the ever-lovin' heck out of some folks, means nothing to others.

Hence, The Lady does my taxes, because nothing will give me the heebie-jeebies as much as all those numbers, while I, in turn, deal with the spiders who seem overly fond of convening meetings in the bathtub prior to The Lady's use of same.

Cancer, as many know, has a strange power. To this day, I still credit cancer as being a powerful positive force in my life. Prior to my cancer diagnosis in 1992, I could never translate grand dreams into reality: my get-'er-done-itivity didn't get much done.

After cancer, and the shift in perspectives that came with it, I could plot, plan, envision long-term projects, and, more importantly, get things done. I became focussed, grounded - and, in my mind, a better human as a consequence.

In the same vein, the emotional impact of the whole shebang has damaged a corner of my soul.

It's been 20 years since I heard the delightful "all-clear" from the oncologist, 18 years since the last barium milkshake. (I still can't go to the dentist comfortably: the fluoride treatment goo they use triggers bad barium milkshake flashbacks.)

I'll talk about cancer to others, but at the same time, I hadn't been anywhere near any cancer-related events, like the Relay for Life, until Friday.

Clearly, whatever heebie-jeebies were once there no longer have the same traction as they used to. Instead, I found myself stepping out from the role as "bald guy with camera" and speaking with, well, speaking with

Borderlines



Vern Faulkner

yellow-T-shirt-clad survivors.

Funny thing about cancer: most people think of it as a destructive force, because it is. It destroys families, lives, futures and dreams.

But it also provides great power, and creates bonds where none existed.

On Friday, I spoke freely with a few survivors. Some of them may have known who I was, others clearly had no idea they were talking to the local newspaper editor. But we spoke, we bonded.

We have our own lingo.

"Breast, stage 2, eight years ago, tamoxifen and radiation. You?"

It's the speech of "we've all been there," a language of understanding borne from a common experience.

Survivors are bound by this dread disease, this common experience. It defines us, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill or - as in my case - a blend of both.

Which brings me to something that's been lurking at the corner of my being for years, now: the Charlotte County Cancer Society.

This local group doesn't like to be in any way confused with the Canadian Cancer Society - the beneficiaries and orchestrators of the Relay for Life.

Entirely different is CCCS (their organizers prefer "Char-

lotte County Cancer," without "Society"), which holds "Walk 'Cause we Care," in the fall. That agency uses most of its money to help cover costs of things like transport of financially challenged chemotherapy treatments to Saint John Regional Hospital.

It's a noble calling. I applaud it, and the work its organizers do.

The CCCS sees itself as at odds with the Canadian Cancer Society, with which it holds no affiliation, and loudly declares same.

Moreover, in the weeks leading up to the Relay for Life, CCCS once again took out ads in both The Saint Croix Courier and Moneysaver, declaring that the Relay for Life did not benefit the local charity.

Now, I don't mind people buying ads in this newspaper. It helps put food on the plate, and therefore I generally tend to encourage the practice.

Yet by my calculations, assuming ad rates for the Moneysaver are the same as ours, CCCS spent at least of \$400 of donated money (if not more) that would have - and should have - paid for at least a score of trips to Saint John for chemotherapy patients per the CCCS mandate.

Speaking as one cancer survivor, it is an insult to the survivors' camaraderie to witness this kind of sparring among cancer-related charities. I hope in the weeks leading up to next year's Relay for Life, the CCCS will show a little class and spend its money on those who need the help - not attack ads against another charity many of us can credit for helping save our lives.

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