

Brainstorms, Lightning Rounds, Sparks, Shorts, and Mystery Melons

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 16 April 2015 22:32

It's been a week now, and I'm starting to experiment with concepts a bit longer than "Guhh," "Yow!" and "Uhh, I'm sorry -- were we talking just now?"

A while ago, my brain decided to take out a loan on my leftover lung cancer account, slowly piddling itself away in administrative account fees, apparently, as approved by some corporate raider gene I never knew I had lurking in my genetic banking system. Those break-out, cancerous seed cells were used to find, and dam up, a slower-moving chunk of the real estate river and eddies in my head. Beaver-like, these cells were made into a cozy submarine-houseboat-lodge -- and jammed right against the part of my well-fatted head's control surfaces for my outer body's motor skills uses.

A week ago, this abrupt cancer-barricading in my mind meat caused a spectacular ground-out, a functional snafu and control loss sometimes called a hot brain mess in some circles, and a bounteous brown-out in others -- and just as accurately tagged as a brown-trouser day in still others.

In my case, some very nice, gentle medical people took me in, showed me around, and referred me to rafters of information regarding the far-gentler sounding circle of events: Brain Seizures.

So, yes: On April 9th, I had my first Seizure Day, as a Leisure Service of my gurgling remnants of non-small-cell lung cancer, and its ongoing philanthropies and niggling conquests throughout the rest of my body, trying to plant its flag somewhere higher up, where it could see, take readings, try to get a clue where it was, see what was going on.

I did the same thing, where and when I could. It was a competition. I always thought I was there first, alone, nobody else home in here. *Imagine that.* ☐ *Surprise!* ☐ *Wrong!*

After the mutiny, I am still learning to trust my body again. After all, it's the first time in many decades where the trusty, rusty vessel of me suddenly broke our silent agreement that the part I think of as Me, was the actual part driving the vehicle I also call Me.

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(This is a provincial western civilization and cultural thing, I know. But, I am as much a part of that tradition as I am part of the hinky, hilarious notion that all insurance forms must be properly filled out, received, approved, and fully processed before any pre-or-post-death medical services may be issued or granted or spoken of or intimated as actually existing. Death, you see, is simply too expensive to go around handing it out willy-nilly to those without coverage. We'd all go broke in seconds flat!)

But, my paperwork life raft floated by reasonably well, without too much delay, while the boatman on the Styx and I chewed the fat some, out in the lobby, while an ER slot was prepped. Reaper stopped in for a sec, too, just to pull my chain a little and see if that whole face-twitch-arm-lock-breathing-jag thing got at least 4 stars from me.

I had no embarrassing stains in my garments, but I gave him the full five stars anyway. It's not often you should cheap out when you get your very first Lightning Round of Sudden Death, curled up in the fetal position on the floor in front of the couch, trying to suck air through orifices and pores never intended by nature for breathing, while claspng ball lightning to your chest, counting sideways dust bunnies under there, trying to remember to turn off the electric coffee maker, hoping no one you love will have to come scrape you up from the floor with a spatula and slide-drape you into a long, narrow bin with a spongy, wood-like top on it for transmission to The Next World.

(The mind does strange things when it has its gala, premiere ride on the This Might Be The Big One Here Everybody parade float, and the mind is casting around everywhere for confetti hints of what may be next to roll down the curlique brain paths and insist on some more manic surprises.)

So, for me, hey -- *this was all pretty standard after a week of camping at the coast.*

Corrective Sidenote: No, I'm just saying that as humor relief, about camping. There's always a shaggy-dog story interruption along the way. We hadn't had it yet, and it was due. We've done it now, and so, we can move on. Onward.

Here's what I'm really saying: My seizure was a 4-minute doozy and it followed some straightforward ground rules previously approved by the National Council of

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Brain-and-Tuna-Melt Standards -- standards later adopted by people who were trying to help patients, and not just put together a very sophisticated, sultry but ultimately only solipsistically-spectacular coffee table book.

The seizure I was served? The plain vanilla-and-pistachio version: *simple partial motor category, complete with jerking facial spasms trying out for the mile run, stiffening arm and hand muscles trying to break themselves in their unstoppable, single-minded efforts to transplant themselves on the opposite sides of my body, or on the fridge, or down on the car, or whatever.*

And there was the breathing thing, the trying to get air in through firmly sealed passages -- somewhat like trying to milk an accordion.

Now that I'm done with the passing inner earthquake and assorted faults and schism, I'm OK with the outcome. For example, as a matter of convenience, I am pleased my bladder and bowels behaved themselves. I was not thrilled, though, to discover a right arm that hung at my side like a slab of listless summer sausage -- one requiring separate piloting by a combination of a good arm and a great deal of harsh cajoling, some petty insults, and a whole lot of wobbly body english.

(If you're playing the home game right now, please award yourselves 15 points for each myoclonic, clonic, tonic, and atonic symptom spotted -- then, please make a giant gin and tonic and down it for me. Thanks to restrictive Calvinist medical policies -- a cautionary recessive trait in all doctors, perhaps -- I'm still verboten on the booze, despite the need for fortitude, celebration, commiseration, *something*, and I could frankly use the knowledge that someone, somewhere, is doing the right thing. It's a matter of universal balance, not just my need for a pit stop and some smelling salts.)

However: I would like to forget portions of that particular period, actually, if enough gin and tonics could be mustered to appear magically within my air space. There's not much one can do with the memory of discovery, for *The Day When Your Body Went AWOL and Stopped Listening to You*.

It can be very off-putting, realizing that everything you knew up to the moment was completely wrong, and now proven to be outmoded -- and that you had previously had no clue, not ever,

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that this was the case. It's the sort of thing that'll make you suspect you're not paying attention very closely.

Of course, I was thinking of ancient old jokes at the time, too, for some damn reason. Like feeling my face quiver and my arm and hand trying to quake and wrench free from me -- and me laughing that I'd just washed my face and arm, and now, I couldn't do a thing with them. *Ba dda-bing*.

In the Moment: First the urge strikes to re-muster control, to refocus the dialing-in effort, as if your DSL just became dial-up, and you try to mentally scurry around and invisibly pilot connectivity solutions somewhere in your personal ether. When that doesn't work, it's time for a small verbal tone from your system to itself, with the ping tone notifying you that your locus and focus of control are, *ta-dah*, currently off line, *you are no longer in charge*.

- **Free fall.**
- **Free fall.**
- **Free fall,**
- **And you pray the chute opens at some point.**
- **... or just that the ground coming up fast won't be too hard.**

(But, you know: It may be that this very same warning ping tone is the identical one featured in the Monty Python sketches -- from the machine that goes *PINNNNG!* in the hospital and doctor sketches. I am uncertain about this part, though, as I kept hearing that bloody bazuki from the Cheese Shop sketch the whole dang time.)

Massaging areas of the body does not work. The muscles are fevered and free-wheeling, and will pay you about as much mind as you'd likely pay to a carny barker dressed as a huge and shabby leek, smelling of tea tree oil and extolling the virtues of the broken-down Rascal scooter he's trying to repair, there on the platform featuring Lola, the Woman of a Thousand Sensuous Snake Scales.

Lola, though, come to think of it, might get a passing glance, in between wind sprints of my eyelashes trying to evolve rare new breathing capabilities in no time flat while I lay there gasping and gurgling, but I'd still pass on the paying any heed to the dressed-up leek mechanic.

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I mean, there have to be standards, even in times of crises which make no possible sense whatsoever and when gravity has been split apart, coated with bits of coconut, and sold as mukluks to the Valdurians of Leventeen-Thureeh -- a nice little spot, off to the side of a really amazing little, impossible little, slice of the infinite universe. But good people there, good people.

Respooling now: It happened, I got treatment, I was parked for a while and stabilized, I was medicated with anti-epilepsy medications in which everyone absolutely swears they don't know how the drug holds back seizures -- except that it might have something to do with, um, protein interactions. Maybe. No promises, no quotes please. *Move along, nothing to see here. These are not the seizures you are looking for....*

So, while I reacquainted myself with my old host body, and poked at it some in my hospital bed, there among the IV drips, the oxygen sensors, and the machine that goes *PINNNNNG!*, I prodded at it with suspicion, daring it to go rogue again on me, the swine.

For a while week now, my body has kept the old, uneasy truce so far. Our age-old bargain appears to be holding, thanks to the giant horse tablets of mysterious anti-seizure meds which work for no agreed-upon or authenticated reason, apparently, unless you have the eyesight, and the insight, for very small wrinkles and crinkles in the genetic chain link fence of the hot cyclone enclosure of our souls.

For a while now, I have entertained my fried and frazzled nerve endings in this smoldering cranial socket on my shoulders by *thinking*. (It's pretty low grade entertainment, without some of the bells and whistles most people insist on these days, but many phenomenal things keep happening in there, in here.)

My first coaxes of post-sparking, high-arcing electricity within my own head again rode along free with the Cosmic Carrier Circuit on My Big Day. It's an inside joke, I guess. My seizure had me call Thursday, April 9th Seize Your Day, **not** Seizure Day.

Seizure Salad, with croutons and fresh pepper, no less, it suggested.

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Brain salad surgery, cavorted some part of me.

Carpe deim -- a hiccup looking for a gin and tonic.

And: *Carpe denim* -- **seize the pants!** □ **Always seize the pants!** (I must admit I have now forgotten exactly why this is important. I'm hoping it will come up again, just like everything else that's important but temporarily forgotten or mistakenly off-loaded.)

The internal dialog went on like this for a little while, as I calmly cross-circuited to B, there in the Charred Bulb Healing Wing of We're All Electrical Beings Memorial Neon Chapel and Tesla Experimental Lighthouse Station.

Now, my assorted tote bags of consciousness have emerged from a heady, accidental lick of the Central Transformer -- the hottest, wettest, most smoldering, follicle-creasing French kiss ever planted on my mind via the Cosmic Circuit Breaker -- to emerge as, well --

... as a schlump who absolutely, positively understands something extraordinary and very real happened in the interrupted exchange, when the door on the far side slipped sideways and parted for a moment, then resealed as it became apparent I would be staying on this side a little while longer.

I know it is sometimes inevitable to pause the story at this point, in all accounts of such scope and scape, and admit an impossibility. OK, here it is, and it is admitted: There are some who experience unexplained events and create constructs in which something grandiose and mythological occurs -- the stuff of fever dreams and of holding a hot, arcing and sparking electrical line in one hand for far too long without protective wear.

In these cases, I do not blame those who are stunned or stunted by holding a single shaft of stellar light and becoming beguiled by it -- I would simply ask they take a moment, take inventory, look around, consider options, and pick up the remaining shafts all around them, and

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start threading and knitting an entirely new tapestry. One that leads to the new world. One strand stuns, many strands weave entire paths. And paths are what's needed, in replacing old ruts.

And getting rid of old ruts is what this whole journey is about -- nothing less than reshaping its entire being, and us with it, as its architects and its wards, its shapers and shapees.

This place is where I find myself now, a bit numb and more humble than holy or hubris-filled, now that some of the collision energy has been bled off in the rumbling trigger to jettison a lifelong inertia and shatter a long, self-induced coma.

The possibilities are astonishing, even though I now see two very different worlds in my mind's eye: The Surface World, as I have come to think of it, where interface in the usual world occurs, there, along with meeting physical needs and wants -- the body sustenance branch, if you will -- and The Real World, where the deepest, most meaningful, and centrally important parts of life, persona, and preference reside. This is where the good stuff is -- everything that makes life worth the doing and the dying.

I would be tempted to call Real Life the Holy Places, but I know better than to do that, as religion has as much to do with this area of existence as fish have to bourbon or bicycles, apples to ocelots, or barbells and dumbbells to bar tabs for dummies.

I'm also not courting a cult, nor trying to divine a new way to separate gold from any flock into any coffer. These are games of no interest, no life, and much pain. No more.

Nor am I dying to write a bad science fiction opus and have loopy followers spin it up into a stack of never-fail catch phrases of self importance, hard-of-thinking truisms, or diminutive, self-congratulating, bravado baked in its own stale clothing.

Instead, I have felt the Universe pass through me for a moment. I am still trying to recollect what was said, what happened, where I went, where I want to go now, what it is trying to tell me, show me, what it would have me consider.

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I can only tell you one thing for sure, so early in this process: I have no idea where this will go. I have simply been taken by the shoulders and awoken, and the dream has slipped and broken. I realize the choices I made in life were layered on as actual, individual choices, over a long period of time, and allowed to harden, calcify, and corrupt.

Old gray pipes are glowing with new light, and the dark, crunchy, metal scales are flaking and dripping from the new, orange-warm pipes.

I realize -- maybe for the first time, the very first time -- how much layered choice has helped, hurt, hindered: me, you, us -- all across time.

It is a great honor to have another chance to try to get it right. It is an unspeakably beautiful light in the sway, tucked away for safe-keeping, and for navigational solace, in the corner of my mind's eye memory of Seize Your Day, the day everything changed.

Again.

I say *again* because I am convinced a near-death experience carries with it some faint embrace of whatever is next, on the other side of the door separating This from That, the Now from Next.

It is here that something always crosses between when doors part, and something crossed here once more. Doors open, part, close -- how can nothing pass both ways, but only one way? And who is to say what has passed? It is simply the small hairs along your chilled neck that define what passes each way. To know what has passed, ponder -- patiently.

But there is a passing. I know it. I have felt it, each and every time.

In my own life, I have had seven near-death experiences. Three of these have come within the

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last dozen years, with the others sprinkled here and there earlier on. While a bit superstitious in baseball lore -- you have to have some fun now and again, right? -- I am not generally so in other areas of life.

If I did not know better, and I admit I do not, I might be tempted to say that a heart attack, lung cancer, and a brain seizure, and all squeezed into a bit more than a decade, were the Universe's way of urging me along, suggesting I start wrapping up things around here.

This NDE feels kindest, in many ways, but this path also feels more weighty, even warmly welcoming. I like that it is a path that seems intent to let my thoughts slowly unspool, unwind, and unfurl at their own pace, at my own pace of discovery, using within the special conditions of a hurried path as seen from The Surface World and from within an endless ocean of time from The Real World inside it.

How real are these awakenings, these bits and bytes of electricity swarming in and all around us, constantly, linking all life to all other life?

Some people will tell you stories of gods and religions.

Me? I will tell you this: Each time, I have gotten something from the other side, from the door opening. Nothing tangible, most would say -- except that the most tangible trinket in time is the thought of time itself, made up by bodies of human meat, those bodies free to invent themselves and the idea of these thoughts and stories, and to increase them, to go on and invent an infinity of universes --

-- so many universes that there are so incredibly many to spare, forever onward, and more, and more still, and that some of these universes have as their only differences? Two grains of sand sifted one micron apart, otherwise *same*.

Which, tallest of all the intangibles, means that in some untapped, hidden section of ourselves, all things are truly possible -- as possible as the infinity of universes we each carry and are free to inhabit, with some small bit of practice.

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The key now is to figure out which choices need to be redetermined and remade, a long process of ancient reconstruction by the self, requiring contemplation unhurried by The Surface World. First, though, we need to remember that whatever thing we layer on here as new, we are doing so by the matter of our conscious choices, and for very particular points and purposes. Then, we allow them to harden and cool to full strength, and this is the new world made again.

We would do well to take care in what we layer on as our choices, and to remember that we *are* choosing when we choose, and what that act of choosing really means -- for me, for you, for us,

now

, and for everyone else,

as we go

.

Some choosing is very sticky, and it is not easily removed, if ever. It is an essential thing to know and remember, especially if you are weary of constantly having to rebuild over the top of your old works.

It is a mammoth undertaking, but lean well on patience, kindness, observation, consideration, and know that the task is worth the doing, worth the adventure, worth the attempt, and worth the journey, because it is the only journey one might make and also be made from.

The really fun part? There's plenty of room for a playful imagination. I also have a hunch there are no extra pieces in this puzzle, that each one of us is needed.

I may have a lot to do, but I'm not hurrying this time. This time, I want to try to get it right, the first time, for my *last* time. This time.

Besides: I may not be able to survive past the next near-death experience if I sleepwalk through this one now. Something tells me the first few NDEs went that way, when I was young and immortal, before I felt age, pain, loss -- those great teachers, the great awakeners, the

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great callers to the Central Halls, those voices we start to hear right about when we need to, and barely before it's too late, when we become deaf and leaden.

What to pack? For the mind: A love of music, a love of words and humor, and some very comfortable brainclothes for wandering and spiritbags for rest. For the heart, kindness. The rest I leave to you, depending on the current size of your portmanteau, and where you intend to stash it.

Life is again The Large and Amazing Journey now, thanks to a brain seizure, and thanks to it snapping some mouldered dust out of the cracks of unfortunate habit and the aches of knee-jerk pilotage.

This will be big, it will take time, we will go slow. There is so much to know, and so far to stretch and grow.

The cool, green season of grace has returned. Welcome to summer. It is sunny, and we have another chance to make it right.

Oh, and: Don't forget to breathe. Remember to laugh. *Baby steps to start.*

We begin.