

Present, in the Land of the Surreal

Written by Alex Baer

Sunday, 08 July 2012 12:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 08 July 2012 12:46

You know the expression: If it's not one thing after another, it's the same damn thing, over and over again. The over-and-over part: being on deathwatch, then losing another family member. The damn thing, in this case: Cancer.

It's the way these things go for those who survive: Too many events are suspended in the fog of the surreal. The sequence of events rubberizes and freezes clocks, stretching out and shrinking time. Gravity is too variable, but almost always heavy-handed -- trying to run, or move quickly, makes one feel submerged to the neck in bread pudding.

This deathly period boils it down, right down to bare-bones existence. Life, living, or feeling alive might come later. For now, I am able to merely vote "present."

At one point, a macabre thought occurs: A little Death, where it touches Life, can be good for you. This notion seems both a simple truth and simultaneously out of place, more Poe than Thoreau, more Carlin than Darwin.

But here's the thing: Death forces you to compress all remaining time, experiences, and life events, down to the minimalist's most sublime achievements and aches. The clear advancing of Death forces discarding of chaff, encourages gorging on wheat.

Unfortunately, this compression produces only waste heat and little beneficial light. There is no added understanding or insight brought to the gorging table, only resentful acceptance of the forced dining.

We sometimes think of math as being a cold, distant arbiter of facts, as a tyrant of logic -- but, math is only the child to the parent, Death. It is in Death where cold and tyranny are perfected and mastered.

In the West, Death receives as warm a personal, conversational welcome as would one's tales of first-hand encounters and entanglements with mental illness, clinical insanity, leprosy, or

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ebola viruses.

There is no suggestion here to strike up a tango from the orchestra, clutch one's partner tightly around the black robe and scythe, stab at the dance floor of Life with purposeful feet.

However, as Death will be with us, despite our personal opinions or beliefs, we may as well try to face it down, wring and wrest from it any good that might be suspended within it.

Life might even encourage Death to brush past, now and again, knowing its mere presence automatically, immediately, and spontaneously sorts chaff from wheat. There are no procrastinators in Death's swath. Life's fullest business is tended to beneath Death's blank gaze.

These lessons are cruelly expensive to learn in crisis and calamity -- then abandoned and forgotten in calm and cornucopias. Death is very Zen in at least one way: Death demands attention upon arrival, in the Now, and always gets it.

It appears these lessons need to be refreshed. It could be from too much time within the surreal lately, but, Death appears to be slowly closing its death grip on us all -- from family to extended family of man, the country, the planet.

There's no insistence here to grab that skeletal hand, grip it warmly, welcome its carrier back into our midst. This is a sidling reference to a wake-up call, and reminder to brace for impact.

A new Dark Ages threatens. Forces of proud ignorance, religious superstition, hate speech, racism, sexism, propaganda, and fears of all kinds, are bearing down on us, threatening us with their calamitous fruit.

Perhaps these death-masks-to-be provide enough warning for us to awaken from our nearing death states -- country, species, and planet -- forcing and focusing our attention enough to

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trigger a new and veering course off the jagged rocks.

Perhaps our country will roll back its corporate domination and facism. Maybe we will break our addiction to fossil fuels and prevent a planetary, circulatory collapse. Could be, that we will break free and recoil from the predations of unchecked, unbalanced capitalism.

I do not know any answers, and my questions have all lost their finely-honed edge with age. I can only submit I am weary of being on deathwatch -- over so many, over so much.

Impending Death, I do know, has a 100% perfect track record when it comes to focusing the mind, forcing us to pick out only what is vital.

It will be a while before I can personally appreciate or thank cancers of all kinds for that enforced focus. But, maybe we all should thank cancer, whether that cancer threatens to devour whole a family member, our extended family, our society, our country, our home planet.

In any light, thanked or not, cancers are not fussy: They will consume you raw and whole-bodied, even while we diners are distracted, our focus lost, eating out somewhere momentarily pleasant.