

Five Bucks Says You Won't Take This Bet

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 06 February 2013 19:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 06 February 2013 20:12

I'll bet you five bucks you'd react differently than you think you would, once your doctor tells you that you've got lung cancer. And that it's been using your body as a combination playground and nursery for four years. Or that it's possible you might not be here this same time next year.

No, wait -- scratch that idea. The only way I could collect on such a bet would be for your doctor to actually break that same news to you, and I wouldn't wish that pronouncement on anyone -- not even on lower life forms like brain-damaged Teabaggers, deluded Ayn Rand supporters, those struggling with the selfish demons of religion, or any other member of the helpless, hopeless, and hoodwinked.

Believe me when I say that the news, when it breaks, is filled with puzzling, aqueous cartoon moments involving stopped time, suspension of gravity, and immersion into a sluggish, slow-motion world usually reserved for filmmakers' shorthand, where someone's ambushed drug state, psychotic episode spike, or some other sudden lapse from reality is conveyed.

Yes, when this sort of news breaks, it breaks right over your head like a two-by-four wielded by a rampaging Hecules, with an extra assist by Zeus: You'll never see it coming, you'll never feel a thing. If anything, you might be left wondering how it is all those splinters of wood wound up in your hair. Or why it is your head feels so tall on your neck -- like one of the old *Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots* whose block was knocked off.

As with all those wood chips in your hair, the only thing to do is pick *out* the pieces, and then try to pick *up* the pieces, too. Along with your jaw, heart, brain, stomach -- all down there somewhere or other, down on the floor.

It's the best five bucks you'll *never spend*, trusting me on this one, that this is the kind of news you'd take far more differently than you think you would. Without any false bravado or heroics, I can tell you I took the news calmly, quietly, while waiting for the elevator I was on to stop dropping, to stop hurtling through space.

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Somewhere in there, I remember my tongue discovered *slow* *babbling* as a possibly-meaningful and appropriate response.

Slow babbling

is my phrase for any occasion in which one feels the need to fill the empty spaces in air with easily-ignored commentary and various vacuous, vainly verbalized fillers.

If you've ever felt a bit nervous or out of place at some huge, showy social event, one important to you or your partner in some way, and felt a heated need to carpet-bomb the general area with small talk, then you'll know exactly what I mean.

Usually, I'm a muller-over, with some initial, fairly good-sense questions mixed in with some immediate action, if need be. Early training taught me to get the lay of the land and respond to a crisis first. Falling apart came later on, when there was plenty of time for such things, and after permission to do so had been granted by others -- and the self.

This particular tear gas canister of news ricocheted off my forehead, causing me to step on the clutch as well as the gas. This was probably a lame attempt by some part of my brain, casting around for a jump start -- trying get the system up and running by getting up some speed, popping the clutch, and coaxing the ol' brainbox into a start with a shudder and a jerky lurch.

Once back in gear and running, I may have subconsciously figured, I might know what to do with all these small parts completely blown out of the system by this news. All these bits and pieces must surely belong somewhere.

These odds and ends of half-assed thoughts and partial ideas haven't always been here under-figurative-foot, embedded in the walls, and sunk halfway up into the ceiling, right? Kinda looks like an exploded diagram around here, after everything else has exploded, too.

You know, in time, I may find the screw-top for my head and the pull-tab for my mind. Until then, I plan on keeping myself saturated with two of humanity's saving graces, humor and art -- in this case, music. Probably keep the *slow babble* going, too, to keep the the balloon juice flowing in my head, until the standard operating system kicks in: You know, the regular one that knows just what to do with a cancerous news flash. The substitute on duty now hasn't a clue.

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I guess in the interim, I'll be turning thoughts around inside, trying to think of my body as something other than a turncoat and traitor. This is the cue for meditation of Really Big Life Issues, probably. I've already been around that steeplechase course a few dozen times in a handful of days. As I routinely ruminate about such stuff anyhow, the journey has not seemed particularly new.

Thank the stars for the clunky good fortune of shock, paired with the bottomless pail of self-deception -- capacities humans prove to be almost endless. Once the pain ratchets up even higher and the medical visits, procedures, and paperwork all pepper the calendar more than they already have, this will start to be a little too real.

Coming up next, as carnivorous, carnival-style teasers to this impromptu carny medicine show about my diseased meat: □ the fascinations of trace radioactive elements of a PET scan, the whirring magnetic intrigue of MRI machines, the beginning edges of counseling sessions broad, wide, and deep -- treatment plans, available therapies, support available, financial considerations of many sizes and shapes...

Meanwhile, this is what it is like to be stuck in a Dali painting, with all of your clocks draped, rubbery, over gnarled and wizened tree branches, blackened by winter's hand, unable to stop its sketching and drawing in hard charcoal until the spell is broken by an impossibly faraway spring.

This is not exactly what I had in mind for this life, not exactly what I planned...

This is the zone where visions play across mind and eye, where the similarities of my own condition are obvious matches for ailments and diseases in my own country: □ the stealth by which the malignancies have installed themselves cell by cell, adding to their numbers in heady bursts of reproduction, the wild growth disrupting the larger body, the feeding mass oblivious to the oblivion overshadowing the whole...

Take your pick: stock brokers, banking tycoons, mortgage analysts, Wall Street financiers, investment specialists, risk managers, venture and vulture capitalists, millionaires wanting to be

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billionaires, billionaires toying with daydreams of their impending trillionaire-dom...

Republicans of all kinds, fancies, and flavors: How can any one group consistently on the *wrong* side of every issue continue to be called the *right* wing?

Racists, sexists, bigots, and religionists aplenty: It's not often one finds entities in the wild able to exist solely on purified hate and condensed ignorance.

How many cancers are embedded in our cultural bedrock, abundant in number and type, sourly splendiferous in their parading array?

What do you do when the colossal swarm of capitalist leeches interrupts their feeding to critique the lackluster flavor of the host? What happens when the monumental mob of money-maggots pauses to criticize the corpse for its menu preferences when alive? What does it say when the privileged pack of jackals ripping at the underbelly of the country feels especially entitled to their dining rites and rights, over and above all others?

Through a small march of tests, day by day, from x-ray to CAT scan to bronchoscopy, I was keeping happily busy imagining what else the mass could be, holding out in my boundless human capacity and reflex penchant for self-delusion, thinking it might be pneumonia, someone else's tests accidentally slipped into my file, even a rare tree moss that could be expunged with a spray.

Semi-petrified cotton candy, maybe. □ A cloud of pollution partially solidified within me because of my unique body chemistry. A teddy bear lost long ago as a child. □ A bird's nest somehow inhaled without my memory or permission. □ Those car keys that disappeared mysteriously, without a trace, back in 1984 -- the set of keys with the purple-haired troll doll for a fob...

It's so easy to willingly fool ourselves it's pathetic. We know ignoring the truth is dumb and

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unhelpful, but can't wait to nod and play along.

If we can go to such lengths to keep ourselves from admitting to ourselves -- and everyone around us -- we carry the diseases that seize us in bear-trap jaws, how much easier for all of us to admit that mortgage thieves, corporate cutthroats, and bankster buggers are not real, either -- despite sheer, overwhelming mountains of evidence, the unending numbers of victims, and the crushing amount of suffering, year in and year out?

Oh, sure, there are early detection kits for everything. I happened to slip through the cancer cracks, way back when my coverage slipped, along with my job, most likely.

The early detection kit for whole countries is equally available, and is available all the time: It measures the amounts of truth or propaganda in the air, the levels of fairness or abuse in the system, the gaps in income between high and low, how many hundreds of times CEO pay is of their average worker, the microscopic amount of fines levied against large-scale polluters and banking thieves...

Right about now, I imagine a few more people will consider cancer screening today than would have normally done so, which is a good and pleasing thing to contemplate.

As far as the country goes, and all its cancers -- bet you five bucks we'll let that go on and on.

In too many ways, we already have. We already are.

Your randomly-drawn daily bonuses, from the list of 9,438 possible choices today:

Laughter:

<http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/15865-2013-political-animal-awards>

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Music: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVUPAXDPFpg>