

August 2022, Issue 17

Dallas YACS-A-LOT

Newsletter

This is Sam reporting in, and I want to start by thanking Rachel for filling in last month. I was in no state to take care of the newsletter, and I still may not be, but it's a distraction and I am here.

This is a newsletter for cancer patients, but I'm also aware that a lot of UTSW employees and non-cancer patients are also readers of this. So, I'm going to try and summarize the past nine weeks for you—this way you can get an insight into the life of a patient who is actively dealing with cancer. This isn't meant to say that cancer is worse than everything else because everything is relative; my only point is to provide a point for anyone to empathize with us cancer patients. Here we go:

- Moved into a new apartment so I could be close to work.
- Learned that the apartment wasn't near ready for anyone to move it. It was a failed rushed attempt that led to dozens of issues. This was all while I had returned to using Keppra due to micro-seizures which apparently makes you more irritable.
- Had so many panic attacks because the apartment management was moving so slow and I was dealing with a massive German cockroach infestation.
- Had to ask off from work due to this and other familial issues.
- MRIs are taken, and after five years of dormant cancer cells, the tumor was suddenly growing aggressively.
- Had brain biopsy, which included having ten days of needing someone to monitor you.

- Learned that my tumor could be classified as a glioblastoma and went into a downward spiral for 24 hours.
- Started oral chemo.
- Lots of nerve-wracking nothing as I sat and waited to see what would happen.
- Had my first episode of aphasia/loss of right arm dexterity since my original diagnosis eight years ago. Doctors are saying this was a seizure.
- Got MRIs on the 26th showing that the chemo is working.

That's a summarized list of what I've been through in the past couple of months. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that this timeframe is traumatizing for anyone. What startles me is that this is not uncommon for us; the amount of trauma that cancer patients have to go through astonishes me. However, this support group has been monumental when it comes to keeping my head above water, and I'm sure many more of our members will claim the same thing.

You don't emerge from those nine weeks as the same person you went in as. Whether that's good or bad is honestly up to the person, but I'd like to think that, with the people I've chosen to put around me (many from this group), I've learned to enjoy my life a little more.

To deal with this new reality, I've had to adjust my personal philosophies. Reading books like *Tuesdays with Morrie* and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* to learn how to enjoy life better and how to experience life in a manner that best serves people encountering trauma on a semi-regular basis—learning, among other tenets, to live day by day, to take more risks, to stop waiting, to express your gratitude and love to those around you, and to accept that not everything will go your way.

I won't lie and say that there aren't days when I struggle, because struggling is almost synonymous with cancer. But you can choose to sift through the muck and find the truths hiding within. So, that's what I will continue to do, and as I find the truths, I'll try to report them back here.

Until next time, this has been your monthly insight into and from the brain-fogged mind of Samuel Snow.

DALLAS YACS CALENDAR

August 8th & 22nd, Mondays, 7:00 pm, The Brewer's Arm, Dallas, TX — Open Mic night featuring our own Roberto Cowan

August 18th, Monday — Meetup at Pegasus Brewery

August 30th, Tuesday, 7:00 pm — August Virtual Support Group

September 17th, Saturday, 9:00 am-12:00 pm, Lewisville Lake — Dallas YACS Anniversary, Celebrated by Paddleboarding with EPIC Experience | Sign-up at [this link](#)

September 27th, Tuesday, 7:00 pm — September Virtual Support Group

Knowing the Group! Featuring You?

It appears that our archive is empty. Why don't you fill out [THIS EMAIL](#) so we can include you in a future newsletter? Just saying. We like getting to know our members.

We are here for you!

Help us recognize your milestones! Do you have an appointment, scan, or cancer-versary coming up? Let us know so we can send you a note of support! Just follow the link below.

ALEX'S MEDITATION MOMENT

This month, I pack my bags for a week to fly fish with dear friends in the mountains of New Mexico. As I've been thinking through everything I need for the trip, I realized how much I really need time in nature- time to be in awe of the natural world around me. Like we all do, I get lost in my thoughts, start to over-identify with my feelings, and cause myself more stress in the process. Stress is the gap between what is and how I want things to be. The more I "live above my eyebrows" stuck in my own narration, the more I disconnect from my embodied life, my senses, and what's in the here and now. Nature can, when immersed in it, support a sense of mindfulness and become a portal to presence. Presence is a word, as often used in my spiritual traditions, that refers to the part of us that is most unconditioned, immediate, open, spacious, naturally accepting, knowing, and in touch. Presence is strongly associated with a sense of fundamental well-being and a feeling that everything is OK now, even with the understanding it might now always be OK.

What role does nature play in your life? What places do you go to, to resource yourself? What were the influences that shaped your relationship with nature as you grew up? We can get curious about our relationship with the natural world and open up a reflection on our lifestyle, our habits, where we focus our attention, and what we spend our time doing. Nature is a catalyst for mindfulness, for presence, stillness, pleasure, interconnectedness, and self-soothing. It's a pretty amazing teacher when we let it guide us, and in meditation, we can use nature as a symbol or metaphor.

In the Leaves on a Stream meditation, the script helps us visualize how we can tenderly create distance from thoughts and feelings as a way to reduce the power they have over us. When we can teach ourselves to take a step back and observe our thoughts and feelings from afar, we can see how they are affecting us. They give us clues

about ourselves and what we are currently experiencing, and just as nature is constantly seeking harmony, we can find harmony in knowing we can let thoughts and feelings flow, especially those that we know are not true.

Leaves on a Stream

I invite you to sit in a comfortable yet upright position in your chair, with your feet flat on the floor, your arms and legs uncrossed, and your hands resting in your lap. Let your eyes gently close, or fix them on a point in front of you.

Take a couple of gentle breaths in and out. Notice the sound and feel of your own breath as you breathe in and out.

Now, I'd like you to imagine that you are standing by the bank of a gently flowing stream watching the water flow. Imagine feeling the ground beneath you, the sounds of the water flowing past, and the way the stream looks as you watch it. Imagine that there are leaves from trees, of all different shapes, sizes, and colors, floating past on the stream and you are just watching these float on the stream. This is all you need to do for the time being.

Start to become aware of your thoughts, feelings, or sensations. Each time you notice a thought, feeling, or sensation, imagine placing it on a leaf and letting it float down the stream. Do this regardless of whether the thoughts, feelings, or sensations are positive or negative, pleasurable or painful. Even if they are the most wonderful thoughts, place them on a leaf and let them float by.

If your thoughts stop, just watch the stream. Sooner or later your thoughts should start up again. Allow the stream to flow at its own rate. Notice any urges to speed up or slow down the stream, and let these be on leaves as well. Let the stream flow how it will.

If you have thoughts, feelings, or sensations about doing this exercise, place these on leaves as well. If a leaf gets stuck or won't go away, let it hang around. For a little while, all you are doing is observing this experience; there is no need to force the leaf down the

stream.

If you find yourself getting caught up with a thought or feeling, such as boredom or impatience, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, “Here’s a feeling of boredom,” or “Here’s a feeling of impatience.” Then place those words on a leaf, and let them float on by.

You are just observing each experience and placing it on a leaf on the stream. It is normal and natural to lose track of this exercise, and it will keep happening. When you notice yourself losing track, just bring yourself back to watching the leaves on the stream.

Notice the stream and place any thoughts, feelings, or sensations on the leaves and let them gently float down the stream.

Finally, allow the image of the stream to dissolve, and slowly bring your attention back to sitting in the chair, in this room. Gently open your eyes and notice what you can see. Notice what you can hear. Push your feet into the floor and have a stretch. Notice yourself stretching.

Life on Pause Podcast is available!

Have a listen to our collaborated effort Fork in the Road with Penn State. https://open.spotify.com/episode/2Yoiae08Mc1NJzRjY2WPZK?si=aS_417J2Q7KZjPjwPC7dwA

That's it! You've reached the end of our newsletter. Until next time...