Dallas YACS-A-LOT

Newsletter

I've been writing these newsletters for a full year now. Which, in typical pandemic fashion, has felt like an hour and an eternity simultaneously. I'm attributing that to the erratic flow of life—a flow further fragmented with the introduction of COVID.

I think it's safe to say that, as cancer patients, we experience the ebbs of life differently. Waiting for test results, making time freeze as if it was caught in the Antarctic. Sitting in the MRI machine, the anxious energy building up as we attempt at listening to muffled music that can't quite reach our eardrums over the hum-bang-ticks of the machine at work. The blur of time as we recover from the surgeries—one minute in the recovery room, the next in a hotel room, and somehow ending up in your own bed with a cat curled against you.

Life is a paradox: it's riding in a jalopy on an 80mph road while it barely holds together at 60, and it's having to go three times the speed limit to reach the ER in time.

You're mixing this reality with the reality of jobs that are sometimes remote and sometimes not. Of whether or not there's a mask mandate at your local grocery store. Of having to wait to see if anyone is going to address the person breaking this mandate while you're immunocompromised from your cancer treatment. Of politicians debate over how much your life is worth when observed from an economical standpoint. Of panicking over whether or not you can afford the rent that just went up 50 percent.

I suppose the point I'm getting to is this: you're not alone if you're longing for the times when there was a more consistent and calmer flow in life. Unless it's just me, in which case, I'm just going to pretend
that someone reading this feels the same.

This is the beauty of our support group, because while there are these inevitabilities of life with cancer, we have each other. A flux of people that meet monthly to be there for one another—literally laughing and crying through our emotions. Openly facing these brutalities of reality and creating cathartic spaces to vent out our thoughts on how unfair everything is. Knowing this group exists for me is my safety net. I hope you view it in a similar fashion.

Anyway, because I decided to poke at these anxiety-inducing thoughts, I’m going to mix things up today and include Alex’s meditation up here.

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In our support group the last few months, we have talked about the ability to feel joy and the obstacles that can get in its way. Joy is an intrinsic feeling of contentment and fulfillment in the present moment in a way that goes beyond happiness. Happiness depends on external circumstances— we often wait for something to happen that makes us happy. Joy is a natural capacity we have and can train— it is essential for finding purpose and compassion throughout whatever life throws at us. When we experience a trauma like a cancer diagnosis or other event that overwhelms our coping, it is hard to stay with joy. We turn to control, over-functioning, or numbing, and joy becomes scarce and dangerous to trust. We can also get tangled up in a myth that joy is a luxury for people who have a peaceful mind, and if you’re coping with hypervigilance, peace feels out of reach.

If we can’t tolerate joy, it is easy to start a dress rehearsal for tragedy and let the flood of stressors, anxiety, threats, and fears consume us. Instead of falling into despair or trying to ignore these feelings, we can find the path back to joy by cultivating an acceptance that these deeper feelings are appropriate reactions to what’s happened to us. The word equanimity may be helpful here and can be defined as “having space within for everything”. We can sit with what feels like sorrow or sadness even on our path to joy. One way to approach this is to use an exercise called Welcoming the Opposite of Joy, which
allows you to invite these feelings in as messengers that help you lean into healing and resilience. The goal is not to create a feeling of joy but to build a reservoir over time so that joy becomes part of who we are and our well-being.

Welcome the Opposite of Joy

With your eyes open or closed, welcome the environment and sounds around you: the touch of air on your skin, sensations where your body touches the surface that’s supporting it, your body breathing, and sensations present throughout your body.

Now, locate a feeling of joy in your body. This could be a feeling of connection, well-being, peace, happiness, or any sensation that feels like joy to you. If it’s helpful, bring to mind a memory of a person, animal, place, or object that evokes joy. Notice where and how you experience that joy in your body—perhaps it’s a warm feeling in your heart or a glow in your belly. Welcome and allow the feeling of joy to grow and spread throughout your body.

Now, pair your joy with an opposite, stressful sensation, emotion, or cognition, or with a particular stressor in your life. Feel how this stressful thought, emotion, or situation affects your body and mind.

Now, alternate between experiencing the feeling of joy and the stressor.
Go back and forth, first feeling joy in your body, then the stressor. Then, feel both at the same time, letting joy spread throughout your body even as you feel the stressor. When it feels right, relinquish the stressor and just feel joy radiating throughout your body. Rest here for as long as you feel comfortable.

When you’re ready, let your eyes open and close several times as you encourage the feeling of joy to accompany you into your daily life.

Thank you for reading through that maelstrom of emotions. This has been your monthly insight into and from the mind of Samuel Snow.
Onto the news.

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**DALLAS YACS CALENDAR**

**March 18th, Friday, 6:30pm** — Dallas YACS @ Top Golf (In-person!)

**March 22nd, Tuesday, 7:00pm** — March Virtual Support Group

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**More YACS Merch?**

Soon...

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**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.

Share your milestone!

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**Knowing The Group! Feat. Cody Holt**
Welcome, Cody! In May of 2021, at the age of 37, he was diagnosed with Clear Cell Renal Cell Carcinoma and Papillary Thyroid Carcinoma. Here's his story:

"I went for a free body scan offered by my fire department when I am employed as a Firefighter/Paramedic. The results showed two spots, one on my kidney and the other on my thyroid. Went to my family doctor who sent me for more testing. I ended up choosing to find my own doctors at UT Southwestern in Dallas, where I became a patient of Dr. Margulis and Dr. Tillman. Had partial nephrectomy on August 17th and total thyroidectomy on September 14th, 2021.

The diagnosis has affected me a little in that I do feel as if I get tired more easily than I did before. I have a ton of anxiety from constantly being afraid I’m going to forget to take my medicine daily, and even more in thinking that it is going to come back. All I can think about is how I lost both my mom and dad at a young age, and I have a 10, 8 and 5 year old who are my absolute world."
Aside from cancer, here's what else Cody added:

"I am definitely known as the funny person. I enjoy making people laugh, and I can become friends with a tree branch. I love meeting new people and get along with everyone."

I need more submissions!

If you'd like to be featured in a future newsletter—and let's face the facts, if you're reading this, we want to feature you—then send us an email through THIS LINK, bolded so you won't miss it.

As we receive your responses, they're added to our supply and we pull one per month for the newsletter.

Have Some Feedback?

If you have anything you'd like us to know that isn't covered in the survey or milestone link, tell us here.

ROBERTO'S JOKE CORNER

Did you hear about the toad that had a rip in his jeans? I asked him how that happened, and he said he'd tell me after you read the next section...

ALEX'S GUIDED CULINARY MOMENT
Oh, did you think we'd leave this space blank? Well, that was my plan, but Alex had the foresight to add something else to include in the newsletter this month: a recipe!

It’s National Nutrition Month, and this year’s theme is Celebrate a World of Flavors. Our friendly neighborhood dietitians, Michelle Hamilton and Kathryn Kanter, provided the below recipe for you to try!

- Featuring Za’atar
  - In Arabic, za’atar can refer to a specific herb (Thymbra spicata); to several herbs that are related to thyme, savory, and oregano; or to a blend of spices that contain these herbs, along with sesame seeds, salt, and (tart, sour) sumac. Za’atar (the blend) is traditionally sprinkled on kebabs and vegetables. To get to know its earthy, pungent, floral flavors, dunk bread in olive oil and then dip it in za’atar. To make the blend at home, combine 1/4 cup dried thyme (ground), 1 Tablespoon sesame seeds (toasted) and 2 1/4 teaspoons ground sumac.

- Recipe: Roasted Cauliflower and Chickpea Salad
  - Serves 4
  - Prep time: 10 minutes
  - Cook time: 30 minutes
  - Ingredients:
    - For the Salad:
      - 1 large head of cauliflower, chopped into florets
      - 1 can of cooked chickpeas, drained
      - 1 Tbsp + 1 tsp olive oil
      - Salt and pepper to taste
    - For the Dressing:
      - 2 Tbsp tahini
      - 1 clove of garlic, minced
      - 1/2 lemon, juiced
- 2 Tbsp water
- 1 Tbsp za’atar

- Instructions:
  - Preheat oven to 450F. Line 2 sheet pans with parchment paper.
  
  - Spread cauliflower onto one of the sheet pans. Drizzle with 1 Tbsp olive oil. On the second sheet pan, spread out chickpeas and drizzle with 1 tsp olive oil. Sprinkle both pans with salt and pepper.
  
  - Bake chickpeas on the top rack of the oven for ~ 20 minutes and bake the cauliflower on the bottom rack for ~ 30 minutes, until brown and crispy.
  
  - Meanwhile, combine tahini, garlic clove lemon juice and water. Stir to form a paste. If it is too thick, add a bit more water.
  
  - Remove cauliflower and chickpeas from the oven and combine in a large serving bowl. Drizzle with tahini sauce and sprinkle with za’atar. Salt and pepper to taste

- Adapted from Healthy Maven website:


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So, after the toad rudely told me to wait, I again asked him how he got a tear in his jeans. He said, "I ribbit."
PROMPT OF THE MONTH

Celebrating a year of this newsletter, here's our prompt this month:
You're gazing into your crystal ball and see yourself a year in the
future. What are you seeing?

If you'd like your response featured in next month's newsletter, simply
include it in an email to the group's email, dallasyacs@gmail.com.

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