

Cancer Coming Back: Diary Entry, March 3, 2006

Brock Evans

Last night, trying to get to sleep, I tried to find my way down deep inside myself, to talk again to my beloved body as in the old day.

But somehow my mind would not let me go to that old familiar campfire deep in the forest, with the cells all wounded and bandaged, sitting up on their bleachers, the heart and lungs, stomach, liver, kidneys, ect., ringed around the great trees (bones) arched above the flickering light. The old familiar place that I haven't spent much time in since my broken ankle, the old place where all my "troops" were always there for me, always could be rallied to go out and fight again. Somehow I just could not get down there this time.

Instead, my mind took me to another place, and quickly. It flashed a scene before me: a graceful long boulevard in a city, tree lined park on one side, flights of steps rising up into imposing government-style buildings on the other side. My capital. I am President, or some kind of leader, and I am there. It is a bright lovely breezy September kind of day. Flags are snapping in the breeze, and crowds are gathering, cheering,

waving little flags. Our flags, flags of the nation I am leading.

I realize that it is because I have just proclaimed a national emergency that I am here in this place at this time, and that is why the crowds are gathering: to show support, total support.

A Parade begins, and I stand there watching, sort of like on a reviewing stand, but not too high up or far removed from the people. We are all the same it feels, in this together, sharing the call to rise to the national crisis.

I hear drums beat down the avenue, and then the veteran regiments swing by, one after the other. I recognized them, gave them names, Armies I think I called them. There were so many, and these were the veterans of the previous five campaigns when we – together – fought for my life when the cancer came.

The Fifth Army swung by first, 100 abreast, there were so many. Veterans now, these were the ones who took over after I was pronounced to be in "near-total remission," in May 2003. These are the ones who stayed with me and used the new weapons of steroids and Thalidomide, suffered the bumps and ups and downs of those two rough years (interrupted by the broken ankle, too),

carried me up until a year ago. When I was pronounced on total remission last May, I was told that I could stop taking the Steroids and Thalidomide. They had won.

Then came the Fourth Army, not so many. These were the ones who came on after my second transplant in December 2003, suffered the beatings and pains of regrowth, experienced the worst days of depression, and slowly nurtured me back to health and some vigor during those long months (December 2002, until the fourth and final round of chemo, April 2003). The Fourth Army.

Then the Third Army swung by, not so many either, but just as proud, heads high, eyes straight forward. These were the veterans who took over at the time of my first transplant at the end of September 2002, after the Second Army, which had saved me, was mostly wiped out by the chemo infusions, especially the liquid mustard gas (melphalen) preceding my first stem cell transplant on September 29-30. The Second Army had done its job. Now, the Third Army took on the task of defending me against infections, regrowing me to health again, restoring me, binding up my mental wounds, and soothing my extreme anguish. They enabled me to enjoy a precious Thanksgiving and sent me back to Arkansas on December 9 for the next round, willingly sacrificing

themselves (despite my tears) to be killed again. They had done their job proudly and well.

Then, the few remaining veterans of the Second Army came. These were the heroes. They are all heroes who joined the battle with me at my command, after we had finally gotten to Arkansas, and after we had realized what we were really up against. These were the darkest days, after the doctors had told me I wasn't going to do very well, and I vowed to fight anyway. I organized everyone into my favorite regiments from history: the Iron Brigade, the Golani Brigade, the Fifth Red Guards Shock Army, the Red Devil paratroopers. I organized them and sent them down the valley with flamethrowers and bazookas, to root 'em out, kill 'em all, go, go!

And they did, these brave ones of the Second Army. They moved out and down, fought fiercely, and knocked the cancer back so far and so hard that 90% of it was gone. "A miracle," said the doctors, said everyone, said me and my wife. We had won, their sacrifices were what did it, but the casualties were high. The Second Army had given my life back to me.

So what was left of them swung on by down the avenue that bright afternoon, me watching, tears streaming down my face, drinking in the cheers of well wishers all around. It was time to go.

But—no! Here come a few more. A small tattered band. The First Army, veterans of those first terrible weeks in June and July, when no one knew what it was and the pain just escalated and escalated, worse and worse and no one knew what it was and my fever rose and the pain worsened, and only later did anyone realize it was a deadly cancer raging through me. These are the First Ones, the ones who fought back against a terrible enemy, without even knowing what they were up against. Very few left: kidneys, heart, lungs, bones, spleen, liver, stomach, intestines, throat, brain, eyes, ears, nose. My dear ones, the essence of me, still you are hear. My old guard, then, now, forever.

And yet, still not over! I glance down the broad avenue, hear distant drums and shouts, and from around the bend they emerge. Hundreds, then thousands. Young people, men and women; cheering, waving flags, singing. The New Ones, recruits to swell the ranks, to be trained by the veterans, to join with them, to march on and fight, to take up the banner! The refrain from the

Civil War song, "We are coming Father Abraham, 300,000 more"
flooded through me and I wept. We cannot be beaten now.