

So grateful I'm not dead

By Katy Yoder
Columnist

As May approaches, I can't believe I'm coming up on the one-year anniversary of finishing cancer treatments. I don't go back to see my oncologist until July, when he'll do more labs and see how I'm doing. These landmarks appear and recede from memory, making time move deceptively fast.

During recovery from my surgery and starting chemo, fellow cancer warrior Bill Valenti told me about an idea he had for a benefit concert called, "So Grateful I'm Not Dead." Being always the optimist, Bill wanted to have a group of singer/songwriters who had all survived cancer put on a Grateful Dead-inspired evening. He invited me to join them once we both had made it through the cancer maze.

I agreed, not really thinking about how my beginner mandolin playing could ever measure up to real musicians. Not to mention, at that time, I didn't know how this would all turn out. So I said, "Yes," and decided I'd worry about the reality of it later — if there was a later.

We both made it and Bill,

a man true to his word, asked me to join him at Dudley's Bookstore in Bend for an evening of song and fundraising for leukemia and lymphoma research. I tried to resurrect a few of the songs I'd written prior to my diagnosis and knew right away that I had no business, on even the smallest stage, singing and trying to play the mandolin. It was time for plan B.

During my treatments, I began writing poetry to release deeply buried fears that kept me up nights. Reading through some of them, I was surprised to find I had no recollection of writing them at all. It was like someone cracked the door into a time that felt more like a long-forgotten dream than my life.

So, I let him know that poetry would be my way of contributing to the song circle. Bill asked that I read poems that were upbeat, and after looking over my recent poetry it was clear I needed some fresh material. Let's face it: digging deep during chemotherapy isn't fodder for light reading. So I wrote one that dealt with my love/hate relationship with sugar and another that reflected on how important the little things become when you're dealing

with the big stuff.

We did a songwriters-in-the-round format and I read poetry after Bill's hilarious songs. We were all wearing tie-died T-shirts, and as I got ready to speak I was amazed to realize that the moment we'd talked about so long ago was happening. Reading my own work in front of people I don't know is not something I'm comfortable or used to doing. But a dear friend taught me something that has proven to be true over and over again. She drew a circle and wrote "Your Comfort Zone," inside it, then she drew another circle and drew an arrow to it. In that circle she wrote, "Where the magic happens." I often look at that piece of torn paper and use her wisdom to encourage me to take new risks and see where the magic will take me next.

I really enjoyed reading my poetry to an audience, and I want to do that again. Listening to the other musicians, I realized my delivery may have been different from theirs, but our intentions were the same: enjoy telling a good story and if you can bring a little laughter into the world all the better. There's so much to be serious about, whether

it's managing our shaky health situations or embracing the countless tragedies happening around the world. Laughter and frivolity are a wonderful antidote to all those dreary realities.

It was great to focus on cancer and find something to laugh about. Bill has been an inspiring example for me as I watch him take on his health challenges with a generous heart and a will as strong as steel. I can't wait to hear his next song; I know it'll be full of witty turns, fresh perspectives and twisting prose.

Bill is one of many sterling examples of how to face adversity by speaking your truth, listening to your inner voice and always looking for a reason to laugh. Sometimes dark humor is the only humor available. It may be hard to understand to someone who hasn't fought this particular battle, but it sure helps those going through it. So if someone going through cancer starts telling a joke about how many cancer patients it takes to screw in a light bulb, just take deep breath and laugh until your sides hurt. It's a great release and a way to shed tears of joy when tears of sorrow are lurking around every corner.

Agenda

Sisters City Council
Sisters City Hall, 520 E. Cascade Ave.

Thursday, April 9
6 p.m. joint workshop with Deschutes County Board of Commissioners

- Sisters economic development manager sustainability plan and funding
- Economic vitality summit
- Deschutes County centennial celebration

7 p.m. regular meeting
• Amendment to the McKenzie Meadow Village annexation agreement

- Planning commission appointment
- City Parks Advisory Board appointment
- Budget committee appointment

7:30 p.m. Convene as Urban Renewal Agency

- Consideration to award façade improvement grants

Quality Truck-mounted CARPET CLEANING
Quality Cleaning 13 years in Sisters!
Reasonable Prices

ENVIROTECH
541-771-5048
Licensed • Bonded • Insured • CCB#181062
RESIDENTIAL • COMMERCIAL

FURRY FRIENDS CAN USE YOUR REDEEMABLE BOTTLES AND CANS!

All bottles & cans MUST be labeled with OR 5¢



carbonated soft drinks • water • beer/malt beverages



We CANNOT accept milk jugs, wine or liquor bottles, etc...



Help us raise funds by dropping them off (in closed plastic bags only, please) at The Nugget office, 442 E. Main Ave. For information, please call 541-549-9941. Thank you for your donation!

www.FurryFriendsFoundation.org

Sisters Pet Food Bank • Spay/Neuter Sponsorships • Emergency Medical Assistance