

# The Asian Reporter

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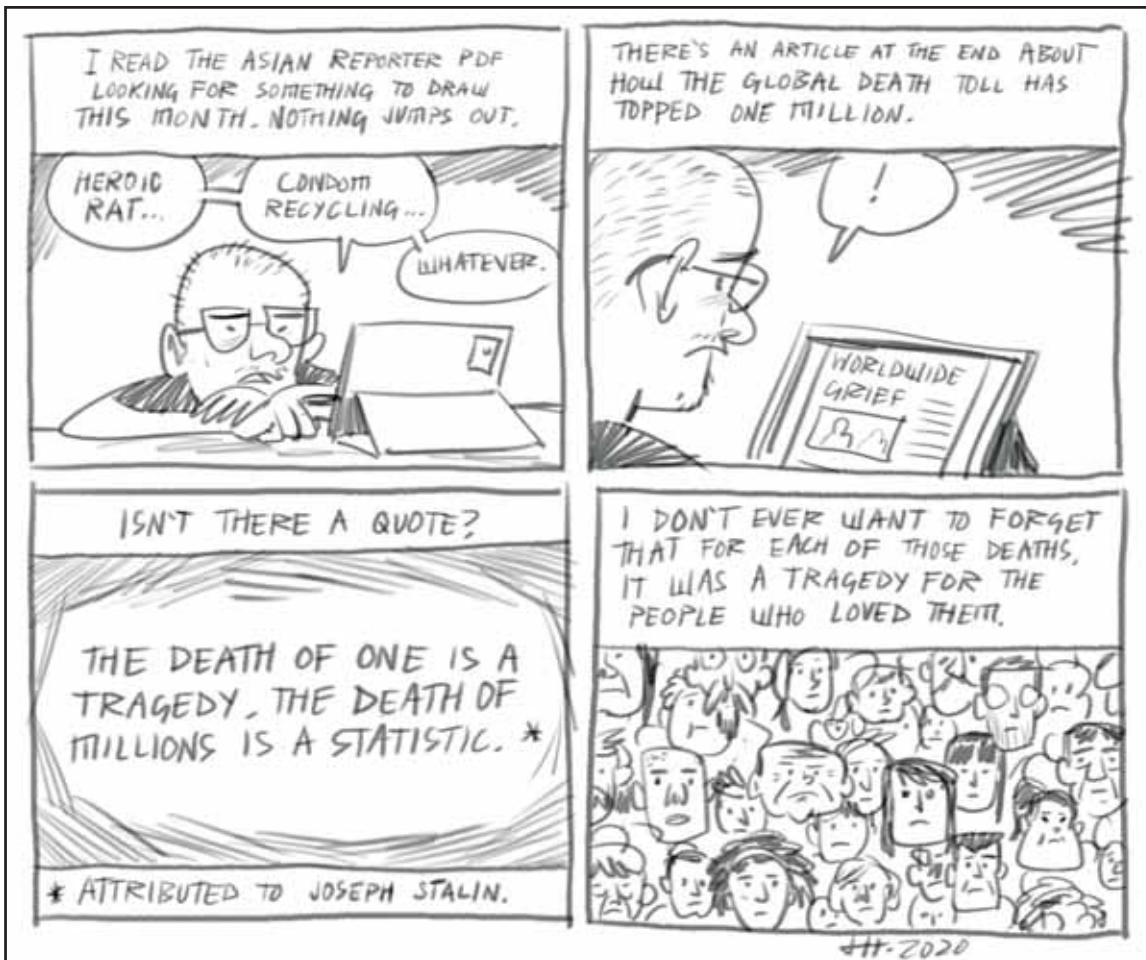
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### MY TURN

■ Dnae Roberts



## Mammogram scares

I started having mammograms in my mid-30s because my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer in her 50s and later died at the age of 69 from a recurrence. In my 40s, I finally got tired of getting called back to have another mammogram after my routine one because the radiologist saw something “unusual.” My breasts have always had fibrocystic lumps, so after years of second appointments, I decided to start waiting for a radiologist to look at my films to save another trip. And it cuts down time spent worrying.

Four years ago, I underwent a needle biopsy, which involved a needle being stuck into my breast for a tissue sample. The radiologist who performed the procedure caused enough internal bleeding that the test was inconclusive and an internal hematoma formed. A surgical biopsy followed. The surgeon cut out the hematoma, which left a dent in my breast. Shortly afterward, I developed a breast infection. The biopsy results were negative, of course. The trauma and infection remained.

Last month I went in for my yearly mammogram. Because of coronavirus restrictions, I couldn't stay to have my films looked at by a radiologist. The next day they called me to say I needed to return for more detail on “some dark shadow.” I scheduled an appointment for five days later. I clicked off the phone and tried to cook lunch, but started crying. My husband hugged me as I repeated, “I'm so tired of this.” It's hard not to feel the call is a prelude to a cancer diagnosis.

The facility I'd gone to for the needle biopsy previously had felt like a safe and caring place for a mammogram. But now — in 2020 — the comfy chairs are gone and patients wait in a dressing room the size of a closet before the screening. As a woman with a family history of breast cancer, radiation concerns me. Every dentist, family doctor, specialist, emergency room doctor, and mammogram technician always say the “amount of radiation is low.” Yes, but it's cumulative. If I had to lowball an estimate — four x-rays each year for the last five decades — that's 200 x-rays. I believe it's likely double that number. Just the mere idea of radiation adds to the stress of exams.

When I went back to the clinic, they performed a second mammogram to target the area for the

ultrasound. I was told to gather my clothes and take them to a different room. When I entered the new room, I realized it was the one in which I'd received the needle biopsy. Then the technician could not locate the area, so I gathered my clothes again for another mammogram.

Anger slow-boiled within me. For male readers, imagine if your private parts were squashed between two plastic plates like a drill press. Needless to say, the procedure isn't fun and it's often painful.

After the third mammogram in five days, I grabbed my clothes to go back for another ultrasound. When the radiologist entered to conduct it, I thought, “Why didn't she come in the first time?” Then I recognized her as the one who'd performed the needle biopsy that caused the hematoma. I tried to remind her; she didn't recognize me.

After the ultrasound, I again gathered my clothes to wait in the dressing room. Maybe 10 minutes passed before a nurse told me the radiologist wanted to see me in a “consult” room. I felt my eyes well up. So they found something? The nurse put on a smile and said, it doesn't mean that. I went into the small room to wait another five minutes. I held back tears.

When the needle biopsy radiologist came in with the nurse, both stood over me to say I was fine but they'd like to see me in six months, just to be sure. I exploded. Why didn't you say this in the first place? Now I just want to take the damn BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene tests so I can cut them off and never have to go through this again.

I still feel the anger and fear. October is Breast Cancer Month. I believe in mammograms. I know many women who have not only survived breast cancer but are thriving. The statistics haven't changed since 2003, though, when I produced a documentary about breast cancer. According to <[www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org)>, about 1 in 8 women in America (roughly 12%) will develop invasive breast cancer over the course of their lifetime. During 2020, an estimated 276,480 new cases of invasive breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed in women in the United States. I'm still pondering returning in six months for another mammogram. Just to be sure.

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