



To be at the edge. It seems we exist there without even knowing it. The next step, a leap, a dive, a fall, an escape, an exodus. Maybe it is the brink of success or failure, the fringes of health or sickness, or the boundary between life and death.

The jumping off point can be exhilarating, frightening or shrouded by uncertainty. We may be moving forward, staying still, backing away, turning away, or running away. Are you at the edge of something in your life? What is it? How are you coping? What will you do? Jump? Are you powerless or in control? Do you need to accept, surrender and just let go?

I am witnessing changes in myself and others that have my mind in a kind of roll, like a wave making her way to shore, soft and powerful, slow to crest. A reoccurring theme for me these days, and not a good one, is family, friends, and neighbors battling cancer. And without medical confirmation, there is a suspicion that Toby, my beagle, may be incubating some strain of mutant cell. With an emotional position I have on few other things, I can say, with no doubt, that I hate cancer. Hate. Big hate. Vehement hate.

Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee has named cancer “The Emperor of All Maladies” and rightly so, but bestowing the title of emperor on cancer seems too honorable, too respectful. Instead, I am considering buying and wearing the tee-shirt, “FU** Cancer.” What I know in witnessing my parents pass away in hostile cooperation with the disease is that cancer, along with a multitude of health issues, invites us to dive in, experience, fight, question, live, die, or humbly survive. There is no expectation to RSVP. For this current quorum of cancer hosts, especially those that I love, all that I have to offer is my heart, my hands, prayer, and words that tumble out of my mouth or take shape in a written note. I consider the possibility of stealing a glance over the metastatic edge discovering my reflection in the Emperor’s hungry eyes, so I store his lessons deep, deep, and away.

In a different direction, more hopeful, there are sparkly edges on the verge of each success. Every final exam passed, at graduations, in each triumphant business venture, and with every slow step my beagle takes, there are small victories and big triumphs. Failure presents as nothing more than an opportunity to get up, stand again, and rise as Maya Angelou so beautifully exclaims in her poem “Still I Rise”.

The edge can summon us to take a curved leap from one place to another. Friends and neighbors are returning north to be closer to family or moving to the mountains to escape unforeseen encounters with the likes of Matthew and Irma. The exodus is not surprising. Just when we think we have settled in to home and community, we pack up, pull up roots, and replant in soils fertilized with our hopes for stability and contentment.

For me, what is over the edge is unclear. I am adrift in my post-professional life versus the daily control I presumed to have in my work routine but I am okay with this. Retirement is more of a new beginning than a fading away but I am doing it without the gentle guidance of parents. This is foreign to me even in my advanced years. When a stroke stole most of my father’s ability to speak, he could still say *yes*, *no*, or *go*. My mother never lacked encouragement, and despite the many times I discounted her suggestions wondering if she was right, I still heard them. Her voice was something to hold on to. My health and I are on a teeter-totter, laughing today as we launch from the ground, giddy in the ups and downs of diet, exercise, and heredity. Most days my lottery ticket is a wellness winner but I wonder how I might handle arthritic joints, diminishing sound, and the slower flow of thought.

The edge can be razor sharp or fast and slippery, like skidding down the slope of a sliding board inside a playground where you are lost. It can feel like hard, hot concrete under your bare feet as you push forward into a dive in the deep end of life’s summer swimming pool. We don’t always get to choose the adventure but once we are in free fall, there is no going back, only forward. A life without regrets, one day at a time. Maybe that is when you look up and try to hold on to a cloud. Maybe looking up helps to make the landing easier, more gentle and less scary, and falling over the edge is more of a release, where gravity is slowed by the dense and viscous fog of wonder. Happy landing.