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An Evangelist on Cell Block PC and more

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AN EVANGELIST ON CELL BLOCK PC

THE SET UP - Though I love my local oncologist dearly, his forte for cancer patients is really Quality of Life. But five years back I met a prostate cancer specialist, Dr. Stephen Strum who stepped into my case in the nick of time as my PC had mutated and was no longer producing much PSA but was producing a huge amount of CEA another cancer blood marker. It turns out that I now have de-differentiated neuroendocrine carcinoma which would never have been detected in time without the attention and diagnosis of a prostate cancer specialist. So this one's for you, Steve!





lived experience
 has taught them most of what they know
 so MD's treating men
 diagnosed with androgen independent
 advance prostate cancer
 automatically put us on death row

and taking the past into account
 this negativity is understandable...
 these good hearted doctors watch us come and
 go
 honestly doing what they can
 like kindly prison guards
 attempting to make the life we have left
 as pleasant as possible
 to be otherwise a physician
 would have to be a bit delusional
 evangelical even...
 to work so diligently for
 and believe so fervently in the concept
 of the last minute reprieve
 for those of us
 confined on cell block PC
 doing time with an executioner stalking
 it is exhilarating to find
 an oncologist
 willing to fly in the face of history
 refusing to call the likes of me
 "Dead man walking."

PUBLIC APOLOGY

Last week my sense of humor got me into serious trouble. The last thing I intended to do was defame Carmel Publishing Company and I humbly apologize to Ray and Barbara March for suggesting that they changed the title of "FROM THE SHORE an answer to Stevie Smith" back to "Who's Wavin'?" The mistake was entirely mine. The song was called "Who's Wavin'?" originally on an LP I recorded. Then fifteen years ago I changed the title to "FROM THE SHORE an answer for Stevie Smith" because that is why the song was written in the first place. But when I submitted the poems to Carmel Publishing Company it was I who wasn't paying close enough attention when proofing and it was I who let the mistake slip through.

Furthermore Ray and Barbara March of Carmel Publishing have been good friends and were instrumental in helping me bring the book LET IT BE A DANCE out in the first place and without their unflinching help and expertise that project would never have gotten off the ground.

THE SET UP - I have spent the week being twelve years old again caught in a foolish needless untruth. One that even slopped over into my personal life – the apology above should also extend to Billie Barbara, my wife. Who knows I never lie.

For me the "pain & puzzlement" always needs to be corralled in words — to be written about for clarity and understanding. It is my way, as Robert Frost put it: "To do a 'think' on something." Putting a line of language around a demon is how I have handled cancer, marital problems, addiction, even my emotional breakdown. So here is the "think" I've have been doing all this week.

SCAPEGOAT



what was I doing
conjuring up a scapegoat
when the fact of the matter
was quite sufficient
albeit not as clever and cute

how could I allow myself
to be caught in such an unnecessary lie
helplessly dodging and weaving
trying to rationalize myself
out of this dumb fabrication
this intricate maze of my own making

oh to be Catholic
to slip into the confessional
whispering "Father I lied."
emerging supplied
with a thousand Hail Mary's to do
but not being that kind of believer
there is no place to hide
no place to go
except
into the confessional of self
a most unforgiving place

so let the truth be told
and this having been done
the shame will slowly disappear
and I can go to bed and sleep again

not lie awake flagellating myself
for telling such a bold face fib

in the grand scheme of things
one's self esteem is but a grain of sand
yet to the grain of sand
it is all there is

THE SET UP — "Oh," says I, with the back of my hand to my forehead, "Why do I continue to stand up in public and suffer the slings and arrows that continually plague a 'performance poet'?"

However, I caught a horrendous head cold a week or so ago and last Wednesday evening at

our local PC Support Group, all during an excellent lecture on Cancer and Nutrition, the shoe was on the other foot. Or perhaps I should say, the tickle was in the other throat?

A HUMAN MOMENT



according to Webster,
to cough "is to expel air suddenly
and noisily from the lungs
through the narrow opening
between the vocal cords
and the larynx,
this as a result of an involuntary
muscular spasm in the throat."

it happens most often at poetry readings
music recitals
and/or other dignified public events

there are coughers and coughees
the cougher (usually singular)
is the one who engages in this activity...
the one struggling to keep the mouth
clamped over the sound while desperately
looking around for an easy way
out of the auditorium

the coughees (usually plural)
are the ones who bend forward pretending
that nothing is happening
but whose interest
has left the front of the room
and is now down deep in a pocket
wondering if that stray lozenge
is still in there somewhere
but even if it is
it will have gathered so much lint
as to be an embarrassment
and like a teenage son
with too much hair
go un-introduced

and all of the above is happening
while Pablo Casals gallantly
tries to play cello in a kennel
and it is such a truly human moment
it is beautiful

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