



This Much I Know Is True

I am nearly 48 years old and I do not know whether I have months or seasons, years or decades, hours or minutes remaining to my life. There are a thousand ways I could die this very morning...a hundred without ever leaving my house.

Most of us push such thoughts to the dark fringes of our mind and do not go there unless forced by the discovery of a suspicious lump...soapy fingers rushing past, before coffee and barely awake...what is that? Probably nothing we tell ourselves as we get on with our day, soon enough swallowed up by the busyness of life. Or perhaps it is the unexpected passing of someone close to our inner circle...death comes knocking only a few doors down and suddenly -- briefly -- we consider our own mortality before convincing ourselves of all the ways we're different from the recently deceased.

We humans have an uncanny ability to ignore the fleeting nature of life, creating the illusion for ourselves that our days stretch out in front of us, a path so long and winding that we cannot fathom where and when it may come to an end. In distancing ourselves just a little too far from the inevitable, precious moments are often squandered on minutiae that in hindsight, at the end of our days, we'll likely regret. And while I would not rather we dwell on the inescapable truth of our transitory existence, I'd prefer we regard our limited time with far more reverence than we do. It seems a flaw to me that only a diagnosis could set us free; that knowing our days are not limitless is not enough...that we must be told the end is very near in order for us to gain clarity and live with intention.

I, myself, have spent precious time, years even, hyper-focused on things that will not matter once I'm gone...things that mattered little, if I'm honest, even while I lived...seemingly important tasks, feeble attempts to control life as it swirled around me, bigger than my courage to embrace it. No more.

Life is beautiful and fragile, difficult and unfair, surprising and unpredictable, and above all...finite. I have no idea what will be the sum total of my allotted days. I don't know if I'll have time to see all I want to see, to do all I want to do. But this much I know is true...

That time spent laughing with someone I love is never wasted...no matter what.

That “why not” is the response that leads me to interesting places and new adventures.

That when I say “yes” I open myself to possibilities and opportunities denied by the relative safety of “no”.

That learning to stay present was worth the hard work, rewarding me with a richness I never imagined existed in daily life...opening my eyes to beauty I had no idea I had the capacity to appreciate.

That every single day holds something for which I can be grateful if only I make the effort to notice.

That “should” is too narrowly defined by our culture and my to-do list would better serve me filled with opportunities to connect and experience rather than with chores of questionable relevance to the betterment of my life.

That my value is not measured by my productiveness but instead by the level to which I enrich the lives of others and leave things just a little bit better than I found them.

That I have been given no promise of tomorrow and what I do each day should be determined by my willingness to exchange a day of my life for it.

That I will not look back in my final moments, relieved that I am leaving behind a balanced checkbook or a clean kitchen floor.

That life doesn't stop ticking down while I tend to responsibilities and obligations and so I'd better make very sure they are truly mine to tend.

These things I know are true. Hard-learned lessons revealed through struggle and tears before I understood that acceptance is not failure...that life is meant to be experienced in full color...embraced, not managed...explored, not controlled. If we're not very careful, our days fill up with a thousand tiny tasks leaving little room for the big things, those things we tell ourselves are important to us. All too often we relegate our spoken priorities to the corners of our life, the left-over bits of time when we're not occupied by the things we believe we “should” be accomplishing. We all have responsibilities of some sort or another and I'm certainly not advocating abandoning them. I do; however, implore you to take a long, hard look at how you spend the hours you've been granted. There is no guarantee of tomorrow. This much I know is true.