

# If You Give Your Love Some Chemo...

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By Chelsea McGartland

My boyfriend has cancer.

With cancer you can never say, “had”, because even after you complete your treatment and your scans come up clear, you never really get to be called “cured”. After that diagnosis the best you can ever hope for is “cancer-free” and I suppose that’s accurate, because after having cancer your life and the lives of those around you are never the same.

Being in love with someone and watching them go through cancer treatment will have one of three effects. One: you will acknowledge that cancer sucks and that this person you care for is suffering and try to help, but your daily life won’t change much. Two: you will become impassioned by watching your loved one suffer and take up the appropriately colored ribbon and “join the fight”; or three: you’ll become a cynic, like me.

I had gone to visit a friend for her birthday, while there I found out my boyfriend was in the hospital for a cough he’d had for several months. The doctors found a tumor roughly the size and shape of a thick slice of Canadian bacon that was beginning to wrap around his windpipe (hence, the cough). Initially my reaction fell more in the “two” range. I mentally prepared myself to do battle against the evil my new arch-nemesis, Lymphoma; the ribbon is neon green in case you wondered.

But, as I attended rounds of chemo and watched, helpless to do anything other than be physically present, I started to take notice of different advertisements about cancer. Cancer research, cancer awareness, thus and such cancer awareness month, cancer events, cancer, cancer, cancer. And then came the day I admitted that I was irritated by these ads.

Here’s one example: A white wall stands in front of a group of people including several celebrities. They all take turns walking up to the wall with a big black marker and drawing an arrow pointed up, the number two and the word cancer. The commercial tells me to “stand up to cancer” with a catchy little tune. I’m shocked, the cure for cancer finally dawns on me. See this whole time I’d been thinking of cancer as a group of invasive cells preventing different parts of the body from functioning properly and eventually killing the patient when really I should’ve thought of cancer as the bully on my middle school bus. All I have to do is “stand up” turn around to the back of the bus and tell cancer to knock it off and stop being such a jerk and then it will miraculously go away... seriously people?

I even became cynical of the word “awareness”. Being “aware” of cancer doesn’t stop it from happening. Is there really anyone on the planet who doesn’t know about cancer? The most “Awareness” can do for cancer is to help you catch it earlier and try to stop it from killing you.

In the midst of my cynicism I became lonely. Surely I couldn’t be the only one experiencing this reaction to cancer. If literature has taught us anything it’s that no idea is purely original. In my search for comrades I was directed to another dissenting view; Barbara Ehrenreich’s “Welcome to Cancerland”.

In it she meditates on her own diagnosis of breast cancer and the effects of cancer merchandise.

I'm not sure when it was determined that the best way to raise money for cancer research was to convince people to buy something that said that they donated. Lance Armstrong, for example, has given the world two important things through his yellow Livestrong bracelets. On the one hand he's found an effective way to raise money for cancer, and on the other he's given us a way to easily identify every bro at a college party, because we all know chicks dig guys who support cancer research.

Wouldn't it make more sense to take the money that one would spend on merchandise where some of the money goes to production, packaging and transportation instead of having all of that money go directly to the researchers.

When does it stop being about where the money goes and turns into what new piece of flair we can show off to our friends to prove that we've donated to a cause?

Ehrenreich says: "In the harshest judgment, the breast-cancer cult serves as an accomplice in global poisoning — normalizing cancer, prettying it up, even presenting it, perversely, as a positive and enviable experience."

Cancer is not pretty, it is a harsh, ugly disease and the treatment is uglier still. There is no cure for cancer, at least not yet. I think the best solution is to be there for the ones you love, and help others by donating to charities that don't give you anything in return but the knowledge that you've helped. It's about the cause, not showing people that you donated.



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## One Response »

1. **Teleportation « Desperately Seeking...** on **May 4th, 2012 at 1:57 pm:**

[...] would be at a reception for the University Campus Writing Program receiving an award for my essay "If You Give Your Love Some Chemo." I wrote this essay as a reaction to my boyfriend's diagnosis with Lymphoma in 2010. My goal [...]

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