

Finally, some good news- Keytruda has brought Karen's cancer to a stand-off

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CT SCAN ONCOLOGY (Karen)
Address details:
Results:
Impression:
  Mediastinum:
    Mediastinal changes related to left upper lobe tumor debulking
    with stable appearance of the anterior mediastinum in the left upper
    lung zone. No evidence of disease progression.
  Hilar:
    CT CHEST ABDOMEN PELVIS WITH CONTRAST
    ** HEPATOMA **
    8.1 cm x 4.1 cm large hypodense enhancing lesion cancer status post
    lung resection. Follow up.
    ** TUBERCULOSIS **
    CT images of the chest, abdomen and pelvis acquired with 75 mL
    Omnipaque 300 intravenous contrast.
  CERVICAL:
    C5/6 DISC:
    C5/6 DISC:
    C5/6 DISC:
    C5/6 DISC:
    C5/6 DISC:
    C5/6 DISC:
    C5/6 DISC:
    C5/6 DISC:
    C5/6 DISC:
    C5/6 DISC:
  CHEST:
    HEART: Heart size normal.
    LUNGS: No significant abnormalities.
    MEDIASTINUM: No significant abnormalities.
    HILAR: No significant abnormalities.
    PLEURA: No significant abnormalities.
    SOFT TISSUE: No significant abnormalities.
  ABDOMEN:
    LIVER: No significant abnormalities.
    GALLBLADDER: No significant abnormalities.
    PANCREAS: No significant abnormalities.
    SPLEEN: No significant abnormalities.
    ADRENALS: No significant abnormalities.
    KIDNEYS: No significant abnormalities.
    BLADDER: No significant abnormalities.
    RECTUM: No significant abnormalities.
  PELVIS:
    UTERUS: No significant abnormalities.
    OVARIES: No significant abnormalities.
    BLADDER: No significant abnormalities.
    RECTUM: No significant abnormalities.
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Not been a great week for me, but we got a great cancer scan for Karen, and there's no way to spin that as anything but a good trade.

Me? I went boom, a zero-speed fall on my bike, in a parking lot of all places, that sent me to the ER to make sure I didn't break any bones in my hand. Fortunately not, but the x-ray came with a description reading "severe degeneration" of a joint in my thumb. I really didn't like reading the word "severe." It's the only spot in my body where I feel arthritis, and it's not pleasant (definitely interferes with work too!). It came out of nowhere about 4 months ago, although it had been noted on x-rays that there was an issue, some time back, but no symptoms. I enquired about it with my GP and she asked if I wanted cortisone injections. Um... no, I want it to stop getting worse, and maybe get better! I don't want to just cover up the pain and have to take ever-stronger measures (pain killers?) to deal with it down the road. Well, we'll get this story updated another day.

Karen's story is by far the more-important one. Almost exactly a year ago, last December, her cancer decided it was time to run wild and did a number on a lung, messing up the airways, even causing that lung to collapse completely. She got so weak that the treatment scheduled for her was put on hold... it was looking like she might have weeks, maybe even days in early January. Fortunately a brilliant pulmonary interventionist at Kaiser Oakland figured out the collapsed lung (which apparently just looked like a big blob of cancer) and restored her lung function to almost-normal by getting rid of the cancer where it had intruded into her airways. She's gone back for one "tune-up" since, and the current scan will be sent to him to see if there's benefit to another.

But for now, we've got a full CT scan that appears to show no cancer spread whatsoever, nothing progressing for the past 9 months or so I think? Keytruda, a crazy-expensive immunology drug (\$191,000/year) plus two types of chemo... it seems to be working! There's no cure for Stage IV cancer, but it's not unheard of for some Keytruda patients to show no evidence of disease (cancer) for years at a time, and that's obviously what we hope for. Until something better comes along that might get rid of cancer entirely!

But for today, the vacation we scheduled August 5th, if full-on! Most people schedule big vacations far in advance, and for cruise ships, sometimes years. Thankfully that was never my style so having to look for last-minute opportunities, taking advantage of windows in health where things look good, isn't that unusual for me. In fact, our very first cruise vacation, in October/November 2021, I didn't even have an idea of doing a cruise until I was off at a bicycle business function and something caught my eye as the world started struggling to get back to normal (due to Covid). That was late July if I recall correctly. And yes, it was way way WAY cheaper back then, because people were so scared to travel.

We leave on Sunday, November 17th, flying into Amsterdam via Denver and Munich, arriving Monday afternoon. Tuesday morning we see Anne Frank's house (which has been on Karen's bucket list forever), then a canal tour (covered boat since November isn't a great weather month for Amsterdam!) and then the main art gallery, the Reik-something or other before getting on a train to Paris. One full day in Paris, then the next morning a train to LeHavre cruise port (about two hours away).

The cruise itself wraps around Portugal and Spain and will allow us to visit Gibraltar, a port that was skipped on a prior cruise, but most importantly, the port of Cadiz (Spain) where we've scheduled a tour of a goat cheese farm! We finish in Barcelona, which is now one of Karen's favorite cities. Have already got tickets for La Sagrada Familia, the huge cathedral that's been in the process of being built/finished for... how long? March 18, 1882. That's just crazy!

But not as crazy as Karen passing up another expiration date soon. For her particular cancer, the "norm" statistically is about 8 months past diagnosis. That's it. 8 months. Fortunately those statistics don't seem to be up-to-date! Before Keytruda, there really wasn't much hope. Now, I'm thinking there ought to be a different type of calendar, one where you celebrate each anniversary of life, every 8 months.