

Uncertain

I'm sorry to inform you of this, I know you must be very shocked. But there's really nothing we can do, the tumor is inoperable. I can still hear the words ringing in my head. In the last moments of my existence, you'd expect me to have a deep epiphany about what it means to really be a human, or experience a surreal vision of my life flashing before my eyes. But all my thoughts could grasp at was the certainty of the death sentence Dr. Carter had issued me.

I felt numb when the words first hit me. Sitting across the mahogany desk in Dr. Carter's office, I felt nothing. Unconsciously pulling at the sleeve of my blue fleece sweater, I stared intently at the shelf behind the man who had been my physician for almost 10 years now. It contained Dr. Carter's extensive library, a collection that had always consisted of plenty of books on different medical practices and techniques, but in the recent years, had begun to devote an equal amount of space to different self-help novels. I wondered if he owned any that specialized in helping someone who had just had their entire life stolen from them in a single sentence. Following the numbness was a whirlwind of confusion. Inoperable? 3 weeks to live? This couldn't be real. I felt fine. Sure I had been having some stomach pains recently, but cancer? It seemed a little extreme.

"Are you positive it's a tumor?" I inquired, "Don't those things usually take years to develop?"

"That is normally the case, but in a world of medical anomalies, cancer takes the cake. A tumor can take anywhere from years, to a couple of days to develop. Early detection is usually the key to stopping the growth, but I'm afraid you were a different case. Something about this tumor caused it to grow at an unheard of rate, and the fact that it's positioned between your small and large intestine has put me in a delicate position. I could remove the tumor, but this would destroy your digestive system, and ultimately kill you. We could begin Chemotherapy to try and slow the growth of the tumor, but the efforts would be a futile attempt, and would only prolong your life. Without the treatment, I give you about 3 weeks to live."

My head throbbing now, I made a decision. I told the doctor I wouldn't be doing the chemotherapy. If I was going to die, I was going to die intact, and not a radiated, shriveled up version of my former self. As I left the doctors office that day, I thought about the

implications of my choice. At least with the chemotherapy, my demise wouldn't be so imminent. I would still maintain a veil between me and the hour of my death, a time most people think about, but would prefer not to know. But without the chemo, I had an expiration date. I was walking around knowing what most people struggle with their entire lives. I was going to die. I knew when, and I knew from what. I just didn't know what to do until then. I thought back to my days in school, knowing I had only 3 weeks to turn in a final that would decide whether or not I graduated High School. Then I had a choice. I could work hard on the paper, get an A, and move on to the next level of my education. Or I could slack off, as most high school seniors tend to do, and deal with the repercussions later. I now had no choice. No matter what I did, no matter how hard I tried, I was going to die. That was the one thing I missed more than anything, the uncertainty of a choice.

That morning, when I got the call my test results were in, I didn't know what to expect. This was now something I longed for. Now I knew exactly what to expect. Death. And I wasn't sure how I felt about it. In my 33 years, I hadn't accomplished all my hopes and dreams, as one assures themselves they will when they first start out in the world. I had yet to become a famous movie star, I had yet to write that best selling novel, I had yet to have kids and pass off my knowledge to the next generation. All I had accomplished was ownership of a small apartment on the eastside of downtown, a junky 1999 green Ford Expedition, a mid level job as an accountant for a real estate firm, and cat named Phillip, who could care less if I was killed by a cancerous tumor, so long as his bowl was filled and litter box emptied. I didn't know what to do with myself. I stared into a mirror in my bathroom for a good 10 minutes, and everything I saw screamed out average. A plain black shirt, shaggy brown hair, and faded blue jeans I had owned since I had stopped growing, and therefore, stopped buying new pairs of jeans. My skin was pale from the hours spent in front of a computer screen, reading Internet articles, and frantically pulling up a spreadsheet as my supervisor casually strolled by. I plopped down on the stained brown couch in my living room, and decided on what to do next.

There was no need for planning, as one with a legacy to protect might do in the event he had just received the news I had. I had no living family to think of, no heirloom to consider. Living paycheck to paycheck had left me with basically no savings, so there was no point in considering a will or anything of the sort. I would leave behind a messy

apartment, an empty cubicle, and a small feline prone to hairballs and ear infections. I headed to the kitchen to fix myself a drink. I debated whether or not drinking when I had work the next day was a good idea. But I figured if there was ever a time to give alcoholism a shot, it would be now. After a couple of sips, I laid down on the couch and slowly felt myself beginning to drift off to sleep. Shaking myself from this tired state, I decided to get a bit of fresh air. I grabbed my coat, leaving my car keys behind, choosing instead to take the mountain bike I owned, which had never once seen a real trail. I pondered taking it out for a spin on an actual mountain where it was intended for use. As I made my way down the stairs with it, I concluded that I may or may not go mountain biking in the upcoming weeks. It wasn't for lack of time or skill that I hadn't settled on a choice. It was to maintain a small wisp of something uncertain.

As I began to peddle, I took a right down 3rd street and headed towards the neighborhood I had grown up in. It wasn't too far, and I had nothing else planned for the evening. A little nostalgia would be better than the other surges of emotion I had been feeling that day. As I moved down the rode, swiftly avoiding traffic and other obstacles, I thought about my life. Not necessarily about the things I had done, but how I felt about the things I had done. Obviously there were things I still wanted to experience, but another thing that had been made certain to me that day, was that these feats were to go on unachieved. I was no longer waiting to see what new exciting episodes would come my way. I had been dealt my hand. Although I realized the sad nature of this fact, I found myself not feeling down, as you might expect someone to feel in this situation. I was going to die. I had a cancerous tumor, and there was nothing I could do about it. "My tumor is going to kill me." I spoke the words aloud to no one, feeling their weight being carried off by the wind, as they slipped away from my lips. This made the certainty of my situation sink in even deeper. Nothing could change the course of my life now, and the passing moment of me speaking these words reminded me of that. Had the instance occurred or not occurred, my life would be no different. I was the same as I had been before I spoke those words, and I would never be any different. I slowly began to realize this. Most people have time. Time to change things, time to turn their life around before the inevitable that is death. But I had a mere three weeks. None of the changes I wanted to make in my life could be done in this short window of opportunity. And so, I was doomed to be me for the rest of my time on

earth. Again, I longed for something. Not for more time, or a second chance at something I regreted, or anything of the sort. I longed for uncertainty. To not have my fate sealed in a glass bottle, with a specific date to be smashed written on the side. I longed for a life, in which I didn't know the outcome. I didn't know it at the moment, but in a way, that's exactly what I had.

As I approached my old neighborhood, I thought about what it meant to me. The quiet street with 70's style brick houses on one side, and a park on the other, represented a place where anything was possible, Childhood. Free from real world obligations, free from financial struggle and age beginning to take its toll on my livelihood, childhood was a place where I could do whatever I wanted to with my life. I no longer lived in a place like this. I lived a life mapped out for me, without my thoughts being taken into consideration. Having a terminal disease is kind of like being forced by your parents as a child to do something you don't want to. Whether it be take Cello lessons, or go on that road trip to your Aunt Millie's house every summer, you could think of a million activities that would be more fun, but you knew in the end that they held the key to what you would actually be doing. You could either complain to no end, or accept your fate. As I rode along the empty street, I felt no need to complain. Accepting my fate seemed a much better route to take. But still, the overwhelming feeling of certainty wrapped around me, consuming my whole being. The fact that I knew exactly when and how I was going to die, something I had wondered my entire life, was too much insight into reality for me to handle. I longed for the days when the ominous question was swept from my brain with thoughts of "When its your time to go, its your time to go." I longed for it to not be my time to go, or for me to just not know it was time to go. Ignorance is bliss I thought. I can deal with dying as long as I don't know beforehand that I'm going to die. That's the part, which I wished would disappear. The recurring theme of certainty that had clouded my thoughts the entire day. I was so caught up in the certainty of how and when I was to perish, that as I crossed another lonely intersection in my old neighborhood, I didn't even notice the drunk driver with no intention of stopping at the stop sign.

I'm sorry to inform you of this, I know you must be very shocked. But there's really nothing we can do, the tumor is inoperable. The words played like a broken record inside my head. I lay on the sidewalk, my bike a tangled mess about 20 ft. away from me. A

throbbing pain overtook most of my body, while I struggled to stay conscious. As I stared at the swerving taillights, speeding on down the road, I was in too much pain to be angry at the driver. My legs snapped and my head bleeding, I was drifting in and out. I knew it was my time. There was no one around me, and I was losing blood at an alarming rate. I lay on the ground, thinking about the irony of my situation. No matter how hard I tried, it was all I could think about. The irony of the fact that in the end, I had gotten what I longed for the most. Uncertainty.