



Republic of Korea Ambassador to the U.S., the Honorable Cho Tae-yong strikes the "Peace and Harmony" bell in the Korean Bell Garden, part of Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, in celebration of the bell garden's 10th anniversary; with NOVA Parks, Paul Gilbert; cultural committee president, Jeung-Hwa Elmejjaad-Yi; and minister and consul general, Seijoong Kwon.

Peace and Harmony

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Report: Work Needed On Special Education

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NEWS

Challenges for County's Special Education Students

Special Education PTA president and FCPS respond.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Disparities for special education students in Fairfax County Public Schools, cited in the 210-page FCPS Special Education Comprehensive Program Review: Year 2 Final Report by American Institutes for Research, did not surprise Amanda Campbell. She is the president of the Fairfax County Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA).

Campbell highlighted that the final review mirrored SEPTA's findings to the division. "It was very validating to see it backed by data," Campbell said.

The report was the second of two annual deliverables by American Institutes for Research, which the division contracted in October 2020 to conduct an independent, third-party review of its special education program.

American Institutes for Research presented its Year 1 interim report and presentation document at a session in September 2021, followed by its 2022 Final Report <https://bit.ly/3m3JQpv>. The report's scope did not include special education programs during COVID-19.

The division's four original goals for its special education program to AIR's two-year comprehensive review were: one, design, structure, and processes; two, human capital; three, evidence-based practices; and four, communication. "Restraint and seclusion would be specifically OUTSIDE OF SCOPE for the purposes of this review," according to the division's RFP 2000003084 Special Education Comprehensive Review.

"We are very appreciative of the work that has been done in compiling this report," said Dr. Michelle Boyd, assistant superintendent of Special Services at FCPS. "Our staff has worked closely with students and families, which is reflected in the report's mention of positive feedback from parents on the quality of FCPS instructional staff."

Campbell addressed what she considered the top four important findings of the lengthy review.

❖ First, "Fidelity of implementation is a point that we (SEPTA) have been raising since being chartered in April 2017," Campbell said. She referenced a research question in the final report, "To what extent do schools implement special education services with fidelity?"

Fidelity of the implementation of special education intervention programs is minimal and inconsistent across programs, according to the independent report. And special education services are implemented inconsistently across the district.

Campbell said that programs and best



PHOTO VIA SEPTA.ORG
Amanda Campbell, president of the SEPTA



PHOTO BY FCPS
Dr. Michell Boyd, assistant superintendent of Special Services FCPS



FCPS.EDU/ACADEMICS
Occupational therapists work to address a student's ability to access and participate in school activities.

practices for students with disabilities had been identified. However, teachers and support staff who interact with students face difficulty implementing programs effectively. A poorly implemented program can fail students just as easily as a poorly designed one. AIR's finding was important to Campbell. "If the programs are not implemented with the same evidence-based science, then the outcomes are not going to be the same," she said.

"That time aspect is a critical part of fidelity," said Campbell. The time the program requires is not always what the students receive, according to Campbell. She described scheduling around multiple services as a giant jigsaw puzzle. "It is critical that we get kids the time they need in these programs for them to succeed," Campbell said. To implement a practice or program "with fidelity," teachers should understand how to im-

plement evidence-based practices centered on five elements: adherence, exposure/duration (time), delivery quality, program specificity, and student engagement.

❖ Second was Campbell's concern was that the division's special education services are inconsistently implemented across its five regions and schools (1k.2.). It is "very individualized and dependent on where you live in the county and what school," Campbell said — leading to a question of equity.

The Fairfax County Public Schools division is the eleventh largest in the United States. It serves a diverse population of about 178,635 students from Pre-K through 12. In all, 14.9 percent of the total student population are students with disabilities; 31.7 percent are economically disadvantaged; and 19 percent are English language learners. Approximately 198 schools and centers are

dispersed across five distinct regions within the district, covering 391 square miles.

❖ Campbell's third concern: Students with disabilities disproportionately receive in- and out-of-school suspensions compared with peers without disabilities (1a.3.). SEPTA and the division have discussed this since 2019. The differences are dramatic.

❖ Campbell's fourth concern was how little parent input was evident in IEPs. "Results from the IEP sample review show minimal documentation of parent input on IEP documents. Nearly 38 percent of the IEPs in our sample did not include any written evidence of parent input within the IEP itself," cited the review (1f.4). AIR reviewed a randomly selected, representative sample of 300 IEPs.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, "Each public school child who receives special education and related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Each IEP must be designed for one student and must be a truly individualized document. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a disability."

According to Campbell, parents should be equal partners in the IEP process. "When you have a statistic showing so little parent input, it encapsulates the concerns that families have noted. Their input is not included. That is one of the incredibly validating findings of this report," Campbell said.

Boyd, the assistant superintendent of Special Services, said the division knows "there is work to be done to improve outcomes for students with disabilities." Boyd named areas such as "multi-tiered systems of support, inclusive practices, transitions, communication with stakeholders, and exploring ways to address special education teacher workload."

Among other findings related to students with disabilities, as reported by AIR, FCPS does not meet Virginia state targets for the percentage of time students with disabilities are included in the general education setting (1.e.1.). Access to evidence-based practices for students with disabilities varies. Special education students in some racial-ethnic groups are at a higher risk of being suspended or expelled for greater than ten days than their special education peers in all other racial groups (1a.3.).

The final review of AIR included 54 findings and 19 recommendations for changes to the division's policies, processes, and practices. AIR will engage in three months of pro bono strategic planning with the division's Department of Special Services to support them in the next steps. "We look forward to working collaboratively with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive special education enhancement plan," said Boyd.



Republic of Korea Ambassador to the U.S., the Honorable Cho Tae-yong strikes the “Peace and Harmony” bell in the Korean Bell Garden in celebration of the Garden’s 10th anniversary, with NOVA Parks, Paul Gilbert; cultural committee president, Jeung-Hwa Elmejjad-Yi; and minister and consul general, Sejoong Kwon.



Ambassador Cho, flanked by Sen. George Barker and Korean American Cultural Committee president Jeung Hwa Elmejjad-Yi, prepares to add soil for the tree emblematic of South Korea.



Ambassador Cho (center) is assisted by Raymond Lee (foreground) who served on the Korean American Cultural Committee’s building committee which oversaw the Korean Bell Garden project.



The Korean Bell Garden Pavilion, a significant element of Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, provides a cultural link for the many Korean Americans living in Northern Virginia. The Bell Garden is celebrating its tenth anniversary.

Korean Bell Garden Ceremony Marks 10 Years

Ambassador applauds South Korean-U.S. Alliance.

By SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

In an event brimming with symbolism, the Republic of Korea’s ambassador to the United States The Honorable Cho Tae-yong visited the Korean Bell Garden in Vienna on Oct. 7, for a ceremonial tree planting and ringing of the rare “Peace and Harmony” bell. The Korean Bell Garden, part of Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, is celebrating its tenth year anniversary this year, holding a festival in May and a tree planting this month (see Vienna Connection, May 25). The October evening event was attended by members of the Korean American Citizens Committee, state and Fairfax County officials, NOVA Parks staff, and other members of the community who joined in the ceremonial planting of a Korean Pine tree (*Pinus koraiensis*), a white pine species, emblematic of the country. The pine is a symbol of the national spirit and soul.

Speaking of the tree planting, Ambassador Cho said, “I’m very proud to mark this special occasion by planting of the Korean Pine tree gift from the Republic of Korea government in this beautiful garden. This exemplary collaboration between the people in the two countries led to the creation of this Korean garden in 2012. And now, only 10 years later, as we mark the 140th anniversary of the Republic of Korea and U.S. relations, the garden has become ... beloved for visiting. The tree we are about to plant here today

is also a fitting reminder of the spirit of the alliance we cherish. As evergreen pine trees defy the cold of the winter and remain bright green all year round; as such, they symbolize unchanging friendship, virtue and morality in my country. The Korean and U.S. alliance will defy hardships and remain strong and robust for many more years to come. And just like pine trees, this alliance will stay the course, promoting the values it was founded upon, universal values of freedom and democracy.”

Appointed as ambassador to the United States in May 2022, Cho is formerly South Korea’s Deputy National Security Advisor. When asked if he would have the opportunity to return home frequently, Cho shared that he had returned home the prior week for the visit of Vice President Kamala Harris. Harris’s visit was just four months after President Joe Biden’s visit to South Korea. Cho commented, “That’s a first. Even while our relations are very close, to have the U.S. President and Vice President visiting my country [in a short period], that really demonstrates the strength and robustness of the alliance. We have challenges including the North Korean threat, but as demonstrated by the American aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan visiting on the seas adjacent to the Korean peninsula twice in a couple of weeks time, that really also demonstrates the strength of the alliance.” Cho referred to the USS Ronald Reagan’s trips to the area to participate in joint drills with Japan and South Korea. Cho represented

his country in past years in talks with the U.S. and Japan, along with then Deputy Secretary of State, now Secretary of State Anthony Blinken.

In the peaceful quiet of the Virginia bell garden, the ambassador was welcomed by Supervisor Walter Alcorn (Hunter Mill), Sen. George Barker (D-39th), and delegates David Bulova (D-37th), Karrie Delaney (D-67th), Vivian Watts (D-39th), and Irene Shin (D-86th). Shin, a Korean-American whose parents immigrated to the U.S., was elected to the Virginia’s General Assembly in January 2022. She was the first to wear the traditional Korean women’s formal dress, the hanbok, during her swearing in ceremony. Shin noted that Korean is “the third most spoken language in Virginia, after English and Spanish. I think that’s a testament to the thriving Korean American community we have, especially here in Fairfax County.”

After the tree planting, the assemblage moved to the “Peace and Harmony” bell pavilion to strike the bell in celebration of the garden’s anniversary and the ongoing relationship of the two



Traditional jangseung, or Korean totem poles, stand near the bell pavilion as they would have stood to protect a Korean village.

countries and Virginia. Symbols of unity between South Korea and Virginia are etched into the bell’s surface. Rose of Sharon, the

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national flower of South Korea appears with the Flowering Dogwood, the state flower of Virginia, and other elements such as Vir-

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turtle, mushrooms, and deer. The bronze cast bell, created in Korean by artisan Won Kwang-sik, was made using designs from the



The Korean cast bronze bell, named “Peace and Harmony”, suspended from the beams of the pavilion, is struck by the wooden beam on the side that produces a sound that lasts more than three minutes. The Korean Bell Garden, part of Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

ginea’s State bird, the Cardinal. Also shown are ten traditional symbols of longevity: the sun, mountains, water, clouds, stone, pine trees, the white crane,



The pavilion, constructed the traditional way, without nails or screws, is of a design shown to withstand earthquakes in Asia. The Korean Bell Garden, part of Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

Silla Kingdom, circa 57 BCE through 935 CE, and shipped to the Vienna botanical garden. The “Peace and Harmony” bell is both true to the ancient design and rare; the only one of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. Weighing about three tons, it is rung without a clapper, instead struck from the side using a horizontal wooden beam suspended by a rope. The bell, suspended from the ceiling of

to start the project in 2005.

The bell garden provides a cultural link for the area’s Korean Americans, and owing to a partnership with the Republic of Korea, includes plant species typical in a Korean garden, for a natural plant ascetic with a wilder aspect than other oriental gardens. The Meadowlark Botanical Garden is located at 9750 Meadowlark Gardens Court, Vienna.

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Obituary



James Fredrick Olmsted of McLean, Virginia passed away on September 21, 2022 at the age of 91 at the Vinson Hall Retirement Community where he was a long-time resident.

Born in Des Moines, Iowa, Mr. Olmsted graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Iowa in 1953. During the Korean War, he served in the US Air Force, based at The Pentagon as part of a team that harnessed advanced mathematics combined with modern computing to decrypt and analyze data. He ended his two-year service term as a 1st Lieutenant. He then went on to obtain a Master of Business Administration degree from Harvard Business School in 1957.

After graduating from Harvard Business School, he relocated to Dallas, Texas to work for Texas Instruments in the Corporate Treasury Services office. In 1964, he moved to the Washington, DC area to work for Financial General Bankshares, a merchant banking and investment company where he managed a portfolio of U.S.-based industrial and manufacturing companies based in the Northeast region.

Mr. Olmsted's hobbies included tennis, fishing and conducting scientific research regarding automotive mileage improvement methodology. An avid follower of national and regional politics, he volunteered for the Republican party in the Virginia Senate, Congressional and presidential races for several decades. He also supported the National Association of Olmsted Parks, dedicated to celebrating the work of the noted American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted.

He is survived by his sister Ellen Olmsted Oppenheimer of Ellicott City, MD; daughter Sallie L. Olmsted of Los Angeles, CA; son James F. Olmsted Jr. and his wife Denise Smith Olmsted of McLean, VA; and two grandchildren, Emily Olmsted Pratt of Raleigh, NC, and Sean Patrick Olmsted of McLean, VA.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial contributions be made to Vinson Hall through the Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Fund (NMCGRF), a 501(C)(3) organization.

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SEPT. 24-OCT. 30

Fall Festival. At Reston Farm Garden Market, 10800 Baron Cameron Ave., Reston. The festival will run Friday, Saturday and Sundays September 24 to October 30 with five 90 minute online ticketed sessions. Fall Festival hours are Friday through Sunday 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., and 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. \$28 per child and \$7 per parent, children 2 and under free. For times and tickets visit <https://www.restonfarm.com/fall-fest>.

OCT. 1-30

"Modern Illuminations – Knowledge and Power" by Rosemarie Forsythe. Presented at Reston Art Gallery and Studios. Rosemarie Forsythe's intricately detailed paintings depicting symbols of knowledge, strength, hope and resilience will be presented in a featured exhibit, "Modern Illuminations – Knowledge and Power," at Reston Art Gallery and Studios (RAGS) from October 1 until October 30. Everyone is invited to meet Forsythe when she is at the gallery for the show's opening weekend, October 1 and 2.

OCT. 6-27

Sights and Sounds of Early Herndon. At Arts Herndon, 750 Center Street, Herndon. The Herndon Historical Society, in collaboration with Arts Herndon, is pleased to announce a unique exhibition that will include many never seen before unique photos of the town of Herndon from the 1880-1930 time period. The exhibit will also include artifacts from Herndon's past. Exhibition visitors will experience a special view of early Herndon life, how our forefathers and families lived and worked. Visitors are invited to attend a free reception at Arts Herndon on October 14 at 6:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY/OCT. 12

Fall Harvest Festival. 8 a.m. to noon. At Oak Marr Farmers Market, Oak Marr Rec Center, 3200 Jermentown Road, Oakton. Will feature live music, free samples of warm apple cider, a free pumpkin painting activity, and activities for children and families. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmers-markets

THURSDAY/OCT. 13

Oakton Vs. Madison Fundraiser. At Oakton High School. Dig Pink is a volleyball event for athletes, coaches, parents, and communities to unite in a collective effort to raise awareness and fundraise to support metastatic breast cancer research through the Side-Out Foundation. Link to the story about the Side-Out Foundation: <https://side-out.org/about-us/>

FRIDAY/OCT. 14

Fall Harvest Festival. 8 a.m. to noon. At McLean Farmers Market, Lewinsville Park, 1659 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. Will feature live music, free samples of warm apple cider, a free pumpkin painting activity, and activities for children and families. Visit www.fairfax-county.gov/parks/farmersmarkets

FRIDAY/OCT. 14

The Boy Band Project. 7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234

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The McLean Pet Fest takes place Sunday, Oct. 16, 2022 at McLean Central Park.

Ingleside Ave., McLean. The Boy Band Project transports you back to a time when the boy band phenom dominated pop culture and TRL was appointment television. Delivered with their own special mix of handsomeness, tongue-in-cheek humor and talent from Broadway's "Wicked," "Hairspray" and "Mamma Mia" (and more), these boys recreate the sounds and choreography of your favorite boy bands, from NKOTB to One Direction.

OCT. 14-16

Farm Harvest Days at Frying Pan Farm. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Frying Pan Farm Park in Herndon. Watch the cider press in action, milk a goat, shell corn, peel apples, meet the farm animals and see traditional farm demonstrations. Take a wagon ride around the park or take a spin on the carousel. Have you ever wondered what it was like to operate large equipment? Come see these up close and speak with those that operate them at Big Truck Night, which takes place on Friday, Oct. 14, 2022 from 5 to 6:30 p.m. For even more family fun at Frying Pan, visit the Fall Carnival that runs concurrently. There will be games and rides and tasty food and beverages for sale. Carnival tickets may be purchased online, and an unlimited carnival ride pass is available for use on Friday and Sunday afternoons.

OCT. 14-16

Capital Art & Craft Festival. At Dulles Expo Center in Chantilly. The Fall Capital Art & Craft Festival will feature art in more than a dozen mediums including glass, jewelry, leather, paintings, prints, photography, pottery, wearable art and wood. Friday, Oct 14: 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Saturday Oct 15: 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Sunday Oct 16: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Tickets: \$10 in advance; \$12 at the door. Visit www.CapitalArtAndCraftFestivals.com

SATURDAY/OCT. 15

NVMR Train Station Open House. 1-5 p.m. At Vienna Train Station, 231 Dominion Road, NE, Vienna. Stop by the Historic Vienna Train Station where you can see and hear HO scale model trolleys and trains including Thomas and some of his friends on display and in operation. Great family fun and activity for the young and young-at-heart. Hosted by the Northern Virginia Model Railroaders. See www.nvmr.org.

SATURDAY/OCT. 15

Free Black History Concert. 3 p.m. At 8641 Lewinsville Road, McLean. Historic Pleasant Grove is hosting the acclaimed Washington Revels Jubilee Voices ensemble for a free Black History Celebration featuring traditional African American song, poetry, and dance. This event will take place in a quaint 1895 church setting, now an historic site. Visit www.HistoricPleasantGrove.org.

OCT. 15-16

Pumpkin Pop-Up and Halloween Experience. 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. At Tysons Corner Center, The Plaza, McLean. What better to bring in the fall season and get into the Halloween spirit than at Tysons Corner Center's Fall Festival? The Pumpkin Pop-Up and Halloween Experience invites everyone to engage with the community with a farmer's market, wine tasting, live pumpkin carving demos, food sales, music, and a costume contest.

ter, The Plaza, McLean. What better to bring in the fall season and get into the Halloween spirit than at Tysons Corner Center's Fall Festival? The Pumpkin Pop-Up and Halloween Experience invites everyone to engage with the community with a farmer's market, wine tasting, live pumpkin carving demos, food sales, music, and a costume contest.

SATURDAY/OCT. 15

Fall Book Sale. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Centreville Regional Library, 14200 Saint Germain Drive, Centreville. Bag Sale on Sunday from 2 - 5 p.m. Fiction for all ages; extensive variety of nonfiction, audiobooks, DVDs and audio CDs.

SATURDAY/OCT. 15

Fire Prevention Week. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Vienna Volunteer Fire Department, 400 Center Street, S., Vienna. The Vienna Volunteer Fire Department is teaming up with the National Fire Protection Association to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Fire Prevention Week. This year's campaign, "Fire won't wait. Plan your escape", works to educate everyone about simple but important actions they can take to keep themselves and those around them safe from home fires. Visit www.vvfd.org.

SUNDAY/OCT. 16

LINK Celebrates 50 Years. 2-4 p.m. At Herndon United Methodist Church, 701 Bennett Street, Herndon. LINK, an all-volunteer food pantry providing emergency support to neighbors in Herndon, Sterling, and Ashburn, is celebrating 50 years of service to the Northern Virginia community. LINK, a partnership of 15 Christian churches from multiple denominations, provides emergency food and financial assistance to neighbors facing economic challenges. Visit the website <http://www.linkagainsthunger.org>

SUNDAY/OCT. 16

McLean Pet Fest. 11 a.m.-4 p.m. At McLean Central Park, 1468 Dolley Madison Blvd., McLean. Have fun at the park, see great pet tricks and demonstrations, find valuable pet-related information and get tips on products and services that can enhance the life of your pet and improve your experiences as a pet owner. A variety of exhibitors will be participating. Bring your leashed pets to show off their best costumes and join the fun for the Pet Parade at 3 p.m. Take a picture of your pet and the whole family in the photo booth.

OCT. 21-23

Great Falls Studios Art Tour. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Great Falls Studios represents independent artists in Great Falls; including the 14 artists who rent studio space at The Arts of Great Falls two shared art studios: (1) The Artists' Atelier with 9 artists and (2) The Artists' Loft with 5 artists. This year marks the 19th Annual Great Falls Studios Art Tour from Friday October 21- Sunday October 23, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. each day. Visit <https://greatfallsart.org/>

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CENTRE VIEW

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Each local newspaper's mission aspires to provide greater community service, and we do know that our communities are better off if we continue to publish. Last year's financial support from readers and supporters like you bridged the shortfall before Federal PPP funding arrived, and both made our survival possible. We now await a decision for a grant from Rebuild Virginia in early February that we hope will help us in 2022 and beyond. But we need help to survive the first quarter, always a brutal time for cash flow in weekly newspapers. Thank you.

Please, help save these historical papers. All gifts will be used to fund our printed newspapers and websites and to meet obligations to our loyal and patient employees, writers, contractors and suppliers.

The ongoing pandemic continues to crush many newspapers across the country, and our newspapers continue to be at risk. The Northern Virginia area's best read and most trusted source for community news includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all Connection Newspapers in the metropolitan region.

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Time is Telling



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

After nearly three months of 24-7 focus on my brother's struggle to survive the effects of sepsis (and septic shock), the immediate, imminent danger seems to have passed. Passed into a daily grind of occupational, physical and speech therapies, all of which are monitored six to eight hours a day by a care giver who lends her assistance as well to assisting my brother with his activities of daily living. All of which are improving due to his commitment to get better. No doubt my brother has come a long way since his admission to SICU in mid-July and has progressed further and faster than those original doctors anticipated. Nonetheless, the path ahead is fraught with obstacles (not literally, although there are three sets of stairs inside his house and even two smaller ones outside just to get in).

My challenges are all too familiar to you regular readers: 13 years-plus living with non-small cell lung cancer, stage IV. Originally characterized as "terminal," changed approximately three years ago to simply "incurable" after my diagnosis changed to papillary thyroid cancer, supposedly the "friendly cancer" because of its curability. For my situation, not so much, however. I'll spare you the details, most of which I've relayed in previous columns anyway. Not that I ever expected a health guarantee but given my parent's long lives (both lived into their mid to late 80s), I kind of figured that I'd live into my 80s as well. That being presumed; it turns out the facts are somewhat different. Initially, in Feb. '09, I was "prognosed" for "13 months to two years." After my re-diagnosis three years ago, I was given a new lease on life, sort of, until a procedure to rid the thyroid cancer from my body was unsuccessful and so I received an amended timeline/prognosis: the prescription medication that I have been taking daily since Sept. '19 is effective for three years-ish. I'm now into the "ish" time.

But this is my obstacle, as it has been going on nearly 14 years. Nothing new, but it sure gets old, slowly. A cancer diagnosis upsets every thought/plan you had concerning your "road to find out," to quote Cat Stevens, concerning your future (heck, your present, too). And not that I didn't share this feeling with my brother, quite the opposite in fact. Other than my wife, Dina, he was my go-to resource. But now, given his own health challenges and his own cancer diagnosis to boot, we've sort of become equal partners. Not in crime, but in the methodology of surviving. Now, we're on the same team, if you get my meaning: both having been diagnosed with cancer. And it's this shared burden that binds us together more than we ever imagined. (When you've had two healthy parents who lived well into their 80s, you don't anticipate having your own health problems at younger ages than ever afflicted them. It's a presumption, sure, but doctors will often learn a great deal about your prospects by asking about your immediate family history: mother, father, siblings.)

Even though my brother is five years older than me, I never imagined him dying before me. As an older, big brother, I looked up to him. He took care of me. He couldn't possibly die before I do. This feeling became even more prevalent after I was diagnosed with lung cancer. Now I had a perfectly good explanation/understanding of why I was going to predecease him. Not that I was happy about it. Hardly. It just seemed the normal order of things, in my chronological life, anyway. Yet, after his recent health struggles and near-death experience (sepsis is very often a killer and extremely difficult to overcome), I'm forced to consider that my brother might die before my time, despite my issues. And this awareness/revelation has weakened me. Seeing him fight for his life every day in SICU as I did for nearly six weeks was a life-changing experience, especially as a younger brother who looked up to and was somewhat dependent on that older brother.

Now that he's home recuperating and rehabilitating as vigorously as he can, he is - to me, anyway, establishing his bona fides. He is not letting his recent health struggles/challenges negatively affect him at all. He has accepted his deficits and is working every day to overcome them. And even though he can't walk without the assistance of a walker, his goal is to do so. Though he may not be able "to leap tall buildings in a single bound" (or even walk up a few steps) he is my superman and I'm proud to share all our burdens together. And due to his tireless efforts to get better, once again, I don't feel as if he's going to predecease me; and in an odd way, that's extremely comforting to me.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.



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