

medical system. But how wrong can you be? As young women, every single one of us was told we were too young to have breast cancer, and yet we do, in our 20s and 30s and younger. Unfortunately, most of what the medical system knows about breast cancer, for example, is applicable to women over 50, since 80 percent of women who get it are over 50. So it came as quite a shock to me that I had to go the cancer agency website and find the protocol for GP's for annual follow-up tests after a breast cancer diagnosis, and give it to the doctor. That I had to point out that the suggested annual mammogram for the six percent of women with breast cancer who are under 40 can miss breast cancer up to 52 percent of the time and demand an ultrasound with 94 percent accuracy rate. I find that's the best way to deal with doctors, don't you? Give them a prepared speech, with statistics, handouts, and weblinks, because between work and illnesses and friends and fun I have so little else to do!

When I "just" had M.E., people had no trouble at all telling me, friends, relatives, strangers, if that happened to them they'd want to be "put out of their misery," you know, euthanized. So comforting and supportive to know that so many felt I would be "better off dead." Now people fall into two main categories, and one special and rare subgroup. Group 1: totally in denial I have cancer, never ever mention it. Group 2: obsessed with my breasts. Not my health, not my well-being, not how I am feeling, not if I have enough to eat, but my breast, the tumor, the treatment, or lack of, as they see it. They don't say I would be better off dead now, they say, "please stay alive" with their scared-by-cancer faces. Now that I have an additional illness to deal with my life is of course so much more fulfilling. The rare subgroup: perfectly fine to mention it or not and very grateful I am.

Many think it sheer lunacy, that I have taken matters into my own hands, done my own research, hours and hours, of all the different treatment options. Made the choices which are right for me. Choices they do not understand, and that makes people, afraid. Not the right choices for them, and that makes people angry, with me. It doesn't matter that I have copies of all my test results and reports, and x-rays. Or that I make qualified professionals explain to me exactly what each one means. It doesn't matter that I know exactly what my cells are doing, and what I am trying to do to them, with the medicines I am taking. It's not over either way, no one can say I am getting better, nor that I am dying. I am living with this illness cancer, and that apparently, is almost, unforgivable.

I have traveled a different journey from some. I went through the heartbreak of illness in my early 20s, of confusion, disbelief, of believing I was going to get better, of not getting better. Of believing I was going to get better, of not, getting better, of believing I was going to get better, of not, getting better. It went on for years, until finally I had to accept it, and move on, and I did. People ask me what my plans are. I have none really, to

be peaceful, to get better, to live my life how I would if I was going to live, or die. It is all the same in a way, the mindfulness of how you spend your time. Frankly, I am invested in neither outcome, remission or death, but in some middle-ground, which is the present day. That's perfectly okay with me, but not for most others. They want to know what to expect, and when. None of us can ever really know. So, these are my plans: sleep, rest, food, medicine, meditation, art.

Meg Torwol is an interdisciplinary artist, working in Writing/Performance, Arts Advocacy, Radio, Video, New Media. Her work has been published, performed, broadcast, screened, and exhibited, in Canada, USA, UK, and New Zealand. Her writing has been published in Knowing ME, Spin, Eat these Sweet Words, Linescapes, Nuestra Voz, Sinister Wisdom, Magdalena Aotearoa, Sins Invalid and (in) valid. She has a degree in Social Policy, and is a commentator with the NZ Disability Media Collective. She has produced three new media projects and four documentaries, which are distributed by Video Out. Her program dealing with cancer, The Young and the Mutated, was broadcast in 2007. Her work can be found at <<http://integralmedia.blogspot.com>>.

JOANNA M. WESTON

Keep Childhood

unfold the children
lay them carefully
down

iron bodies flat
so they will fit
into the spaces
held for them

slide them onto hangers
in locked cupboards
where moth and rust
cannot corrupt

oh their innocence

Joanna M. Weston has had poetry, reviews, and short stories published in anthologies and journals for twenty-five years. Her poetry book, A Summer Father, was published by Frontenac House of Calgary. This poem was originally published in The Outreach Connection (2003). Reprinted with permission.