

July 30, 2013

Dear Eastern Theatre Alum,

As many of you probably know, I've been dealing with a fairly serious medical condition that required me to take a leave of absence this spring, and then take an Administrative Sabbatical this fall. I did this so I could continue to serve as Director of Theatre and Chair of the Dance and Theatre Department while I recovered, anticipating my return in January.

Unfortunately, I have not recovered from the disease damaging my lungs; in fact things have worsened rather rapidly, in spite of a powerful regimen of steroids I've been on since May. The ongoing progress of the disease has in fact made it impossible to recover, and as of the third week of July, I have begun being cared for by home hospice.

The collective and individual wisdom of the best medical team one could hope for makes the time line for my demise within "weeks to months" depending on a variety of scenarios.

In short: I'm dying, folks, and I wanted you to know.

Of course, as many of you know, this is a scenario I've been dealing with since 2005 when I was diagnosed with a bone marrow disorder that has continued to this day. As a result, I'm more prepared to deal with what's coming than I would have been, and I've got plenty of help to do it.

It's important for me to do this part of my life well: generously, mindfully, with a minimum of stress or pain for myself or others. Hospice is a big part of making that happen. In addition, I've got an amazing group of folks who, for reasons not entirely comprehensible to me, have decided to take the trip to The Big Door with me, and for them I am almost beyond words of gratitude.

They're my "Kamikaze Ground Crew," so to speak. Betsy [REDACTED] and Brooke [REDACTED] with Pastor Amy [REDACTED] and Dan [REDACTED] make up TEAM HALLUNG (as we call it) in terms of care-giving and load sharing with the hospice folks. Together, we're aiming for a couple of things:

A) ***"Fall apart in my backyard..."***

In Disney's version of The Jungle Book, Balou says it to Mowgli when he's showing him around his part of the jungle. For us, it means: we're all given permission to fall apart as needed, to be each other's back yard; to relax, not obsess about it.

B) ***"If you're going to pray for me, pray that the wine doesn't run out."***

I think evoking Jesus and Mary during His first miracle is the right idea, don't you?

C) ***To have a "generous death."***

A phrase from a NYT article about a terminally ill man, who coined it to describe the kind of ending he and his wife, a scholar of end of life issues, wanted him to have. To live well is to die well: conversation, playfulness, good food, fun drugs, mucking about (film screenings, working on plays, writing books, re-decorating, shopping on Amazon Prime, etc)

Take the time to absorb this news for yourself and collaboratively (everybody needs a "Kamikaze Ground Crew" for times like these).

Once you have, I strongly suggest contacting Amy ([REDACTED]) or Brooke ([REDACTED]) to set up further communication with me, whether by phone or Skype or hologram or dream visitation (this is tricky, check with your local shaman first).

On we go; let's see what happens,



Mark