

The Cancer Center

Category: Poems

written by Nancy Tune | January 30, 2015

Nancy Tune

First impression: New and well appointed,
staffed by friendly people and my favorite, irony.
In the clinic hallway a woman plays a harp.
I have come to learn about the process of
my dying; surely this is meant to shake me
free of dread and make me laugh. It doesn't, quite.

During treatment: I know where to go,
my focus straight ahead. Walkers,
wheelchairs, frightened people waiting in
the tasteful lobby. Down the stairs
I join a group of lonely people in a
silent prayer to gamma rays and science:
Please, some more time. Do not let us die, yet.

Later: Free of dread, I own this place.
Climb stairs to meeting rooms, drink coffee,
smile at volunteers, think how to comfort
newcomers who do not meet my eyes.
Look down the stairs to loneliness
and force myself to pay a visit there.
With every step, I know this place owns me.
I've learned to die. I come here for an update
of the schedule, the minute details, my news.

About the poet:

Nancy Tune is a retired textbook editor. "I started writing on a regular basis when I joined a group at the Stanford Cancer Center shortly after my diagnosis. It quickly became apparent that writing helped, and that regardless of how much time I had, there was more to write about than I could get to."

About the poem:

"This poem is about living with a cancer that is termed 'relentless.' At ten years since the original diagnosis, with one operable recurrence, I am grateful. I try not to waste time (a huge challenge) or make assumptions about the future, and I find that acceptance is not bad at all."

Poetry editors:

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer