

An Editor's Invitation: Holding On

Category: Holding On

written by Paul Gross | February 1, 2019

There are times in life when holding on is a real necessity. For instance, when winter arrives in the Midwest.

Or when your children reach the teenage years.

Or when the government shuts down, and you happen to be a federal employee.

Illness is such a time. I spent this past weekend feverish and in bed. Even as I lay there shivering, I had the good fortune to know that this little torment would pass. Yet there are some conditions whose time course is much less certain. There are some illnesses that never will go away, that require us to grip tight and hold on.

This week I lost a patient, a likeable fighter in her 70s, quite suddenly, to the combined effects of heart disease, diabetes and kidney failure, and the arrival of cancer. She and we, her doctors, have been holding on for months and years, trying to ward off her body's gradual erosion. And then, Tuesday night, while she was in a hospital bed, her symptoms rumbled to a crescendo, her body gave way with awful suddenness, and she was gone.

One holds on until sometimes there's nothing left to hold onto.

As a physician I hold onto hope as patients make their best efforts—sometimes heroic, sometimes less so—to ward off the impact of chronic illnesses or to change self-destructive habits.

This month's More Voices theme is Holding On. Send us your story of clinging to hope, to health or to life.

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