



## When Cancer Strikes

*By Robert Benn*

“Cancer,” said the urologist, “But superficial. I’ll be able to treat it with minor procedures.” Mind you, I didn’t like those kinds of minor procedures, but was glad that it was not considered major. So we were on a roll.

No, I didn’t like the idea of cancer. I had had a brush with this foe 16 years before, which cost me a little discomfort through radiation. This time it was different. And I wondered just a tad about that picture in Psalm 90 which suggested that a good innings was 70, and if there was an extra boost of strength, another 10 years. Well, I as up to 6 years bonus, so if this resulted in the divine ‘trumpet call’ then that was acceptable. The Author of Life had made life precious. It was, and still is.

Five months passed. I was in the 3rd of 7 hospitals. It was 10:00pm. A knock at the door. My urologist. “Robert, you know how we talked about the best-case scenario through to the worst case. And we decided we weren’t going to go anywhere near the worst? Well,” said he, “I’ve consulted with my colleagues, and we believe that is the only way now!” That makes for a sturdy and robust discussion. “Ok, go ahead!” It was Friday. “How soon do you think you could prepare yourself and your family for this?” “Tomorrow!” “Ok, how about you admit yourself to Macquarie University Hospital on Sunday afternoon. Surgery first thing Monday morning?”

I headed home on Saturday morning. Laurel, my wife and I had coffee. “Want to hear a story?” So Laurel and I talked it all through and then another discussion with family, and we were effectively “up, up and away.”

By this time I had just about done away with all sense of personal dignity. And on that Monday morning I was just about at home

with appropriately clad and masked medicos simply doing what they had to do. I’m glad I was sound asleep when they worked me over. And glad too that they had thought of the epidural before surgery, for the first day or so, though groggy, was a bit of a breeze. And then, reality hit! That made me wonder for a week or two whether living under the constant light of ICU was better than living in the eternal presence of the Light of Life! I didn’t like it.

The assistant urologist called in to see how I was going. “You know Dr MA saved your life, don’t you?” Another doctor friend and his wife handed us the keys of their home and car, and said, “It’s all yours. You need to stay very close to the hospital for you are so prone to infection. We’re off to Phuket.”

Family came. Friends came. Cards, emails and messages came. Nurses cared. Doctors monitored progress and meted out advice. The church prayed. I healed and wondered ... wondered into the “marvellous grace of our loving Lord”. How wonderful the Great Physician ... His grace ... and the “grace upon grace” that flowed from His eternal riches, but also that of His Body, His servants, His earthly professionals, those whom He was “not ashamed to call brothers/sisters”.

Of course, I made comparisons. I had been to many third world countries.

Donald Horne had written *The Lucky Country* in 1964. Amazon’s review states: *The Lucky Country* caused a sensation. The book was a wake-up call to an unimaginative nation, an indictment of a country mired in mediocrity and manacled to its past.” I don’t mind calling Australia *The Lucky Country*, but I assure you, there’s better phrases for it. My take would be something like

this: Australia is a country which has had the touch of the hand of the sovereign God such that we live in a state of comparative peace, health, wealth and ... and I wish a little more wisdom was a very close friend! What incredible provisions we have. And when it comes to our services, and in the particular area of health services, what blessings are ours! Right through referrals, diagnoses, GPs, specialists, surgery, medication, nursing care, etc. I've told a few people that if they're looking for someone to grizzle about medical care in our Lucky Country, they better talk to someone else!

Oh how I appreciated the ministry of the Great Physician as we communed with him in prayer, hope and better days. And oh, how we appreciated the caring ministry of His earthly understudies. I pondered "made in His image" as I saw right up close the evidence of intense scrutiny, imaginative reflection, creative ability, and practical end product of His wonderful gift to us mortals, "the clay in the hands of the Potter". The people, the equipment and the abilities of my carers was far more than eye-opening, as they walked me through all the procedures, the big one, the chemo, and the acceptance as a candidate for a clinical trial with the immunotherapy drug. Being an old-time Presbyterian, I guess I wanted to sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow".

Conversations: Sometimes on the hospital plaques, my name was written as Rev Robert Benn. The 'Rev' bit is the game changer. It inhibits some conversation. It opens other doors! Some even like to call me 'Father'!

Pathologist Nathalie knows me well. Always, "Rev Benn" when I turn up. "You're looking pretty crook today! Are you worried about the future?" "Nathalie, I've been talking about a Man for the past 60 years, who once stood crying with the sister of the man who died a few days ago, and said to her, "I am resurrection and life. If you believe in me you will never die!" And her brother had already begun to smell rather badly. Then to prove that He was serious, He asked the brother to stand up and come out of the grave. And he DID! His name, as you know, is Jesus! Am I worried about the future? No because that's where I stand, and a bit of chemo isn't going to make me change my mind!"

Nurse Hong from Vietnam was looking after me. I had been informed that she'd knock, be beside my bed before I had time to say, "Come in!" ... would hurry around doing all the things that nurses do in about 1.5 minutes, and then she'd be gone. No messing around there. One night there was a knock at the door. "May I come in?" She sat on the bed, held my hand, and nervously ventured, "You're a minister?" "Yes" ... and out it all poured. Spiritual issues. Desperate concern in respect to health

care in her country. Where was help possible? Prayer.

Dr MA had had some unfortunate experiences in churches, here in Australia and back in his home country. The first interview concluded with, "No gap to pay for 'god-botherers!" We laughed. He was excellent. His patient care was impeccable. On the first anniversary I wrote him a note, telling of how my little boy Murray at 4 years old had fallen down into a moving mass of sewage in Makassar Indonesia, and was about to be swallowed up into an enclosed drain which would have taken him out into the Java sea. A trishaw rider jumped off, grabbed him, took him in his filthy state into the shop where his mum was. They threw away his clothes, put him in the shower, and presented him back to his mother! "Dr MA, one great regret in life is that I never knew who saved my little boy, and I have never been able to say thank you. This time it's different. I know who saved my life, and I want to thank you for using your God-given gifts and servant heart in what you did. I was referred back to him a month or so later. "We didn't expect to catch up so soon, did we?" he said. Then he turned to the card I had sent, sitting prominently for all to see. "I treasure that!"

The other day I came from the cardiologist who informed me that "Your numbers are all good!" Scan results arrived from the Imaging Centre, so off I went to the Professor in charge of the clinical trial. "Dr AE tells me my numbers are all good!" "What numbers?" "Not sure, but they're good!" He looked at the scans, and pathology results. "Looking good here too!" We celebrated by having good exhilarating hospital coffee, and we were off home. Singing.

My friend Paul was a cancer patient recently. He's now in glory. Same with friends Bob and Keith and John. I've just heard that Joyce is in and out of consciousness. I'm alive. And well. And that's the nature of the enemy. But in Christ Jesus, also the nature of the hope. And back of it all, a Sovereign Father whose other name is LOVE.

I read John Brown of Haddington recently, and found it extremely profitable. At 65 years of age, he was close to seeing the Lord "face to face". I quoted this when writing to my six siblings:

*June 1787: When he lay down own his bed, he was asked how he was now. "I lie here in the everlasting arms of a gracious God." "Are you not afraid," said the friend, "to appear at the tribunal of God?" "Were I looking to give the account in my own person, considering my sins, I might indeed be terrified; but then I view Christ the Judge as my Advocate and my Accountant, and I know that I do not owe more debt that He has paid."*

I finished the email with: “And there, in Him, we confidently stand! And just in case you’re wondering, I am in good health!! Love to y’all ... rb”

A sister responded, “I love your last line!” And so do I! I’ll wait

for the trumpet call.

*Robert Benn.*

