Today I Am 33 (Sorry, Granddad)

July 16, 2008 By Shawn Decker

Today I am 33.

For quite a few years after my diagnosis, I could never have imagined reaching this number. However, a few years before my diagnosis, I was pissed off at my grandfather- who was watching me one day.

“I wish I was 33,” I said.

“Why 33?” Granddad asked, puzzled.

“Because you’ll be dead!”

I was showing off my new math skills at age 7 or 8, apparently. And he loved the story and my comedic timing so much he shared it with everyone at the family reunion that year.

Well, today I am indeed 33. And yes, the math held up and Granddad is dead. Or, better still, he has passed to spirit as I like to say. And, wherever he is, I hope he finds that moment as humorous as he did here in the physical realm.

What’s funny is that 33 is pretty uneventful. I have to remind myself of past speculation on how many birthdays I was supposed to live to see, and even doing that doesn’t get me too jazzed. And that’s cool- that’s how it’s supposed to be. Plus, I can’t say I’ve ever been honestly shocked to find myself marking another year in this fashion.

Being mellow about this birthday is settling in well with me. Maybe it’s because I’ve had so many big birthday parties, I’ve had my cake and eaten it too. I’ve even been known to eat the cake and a dallop of ice cream for good measure. And after my pet virus hopped aboard shortly before I blew out 12 candles on a cake, the birthday bashes for me got bigger- more friends were invited to the pool parties at my grandparents’ house. And I always jumped into their swimming pool without waiting for the appropriate time for the junkfood to settle.

Through good fortune, I never went belly-up or facedown in the waters. And, though patience comes easier these days, I never want to lose the youthful enthusiasm that shined through despite an uncertain future.

Yesterday, on my birthday's eve, I got see the folks responsible for my attitude and my existence. Mom called, her and Dad wanted to pop over and take Gwenn and I out for a surprise dinner. I accepted the offer, of course, and they gave me a card with some money in it, even though they'd already given me a birthday gift. (A weekend at the Hotel Roanoke for the Miss Virginia festivities.)

My Mom is big on gift-giving. "Here," she said, handing my a CVS bag. "These came with some Happy Meals." The plastic bag was chock-full of more plastic bags, each one containing a figurine from the Spiderwick movies.

There had to be meaning in this gift. I know Spiderwick is a fantastical tale of some sort, probably like Harry Potter. Maybe this is Mom's way of saying, "It's magical that you are still with us, Son"? Or perhaps the toys are a reminder that she- like me- sometimes forgets that I lived to blow out more than 12 candles?

Either way, I'm glad I'm here, still figuring out the riddle that is my parents, while being old and wise enough to not use my math skills to inflict emotional trauma on my loved ones.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

PS... here's the Smashing Pumpkins, and their song "Thirty-Three". I'm posting this because I bet Billy Corgan was a dickhead when he was 7 or 8, too. And I love the song and the fresh, new age of the same title.

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