



between my throat

and these TRUTHS

Between My Throat And These Truths

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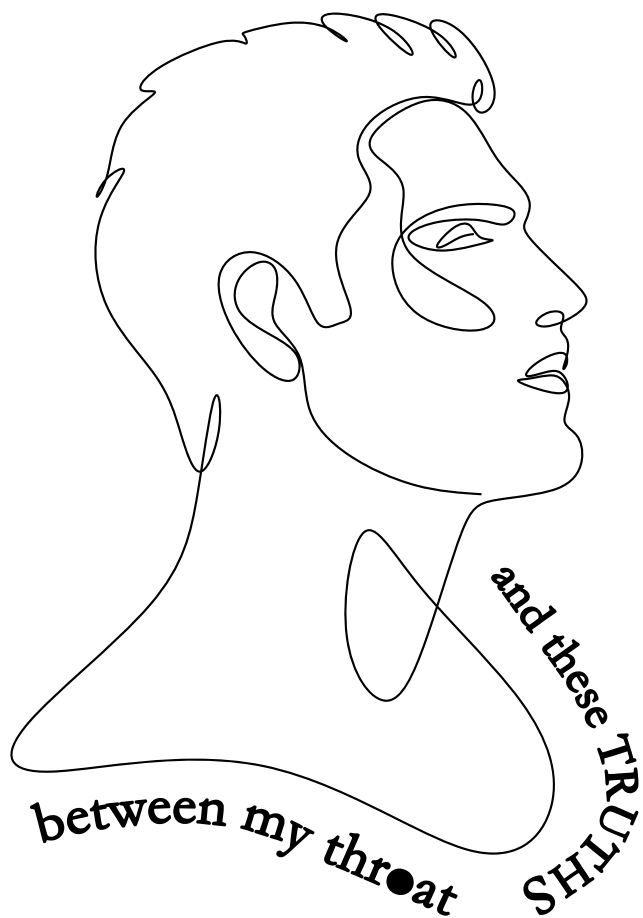
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Preface

Truth be told, writing has never been my calling, nor have I ever aspired to be a writer. My words flow mainly from the need to share about the journey regarding the state of my health, post-cancer.

The genesis of this book began as an idea to help my friends understand what I am currently going through, without the burden of having to repeat myself endlessly.

One of my friends once said, “We know you’re strong, but let us support you in return for all that you’ve done for us.”

It’s a little uncomfortable for me to admit, yet it feels necessary to share that as a friend, I will always be there for them. As such, I don’t feel the need for them to return favours or to repay me.

I’ve always considered being there for my friends, both physically and emotionally - it’s just part of who I am — it doesn’t feel like a significant act.

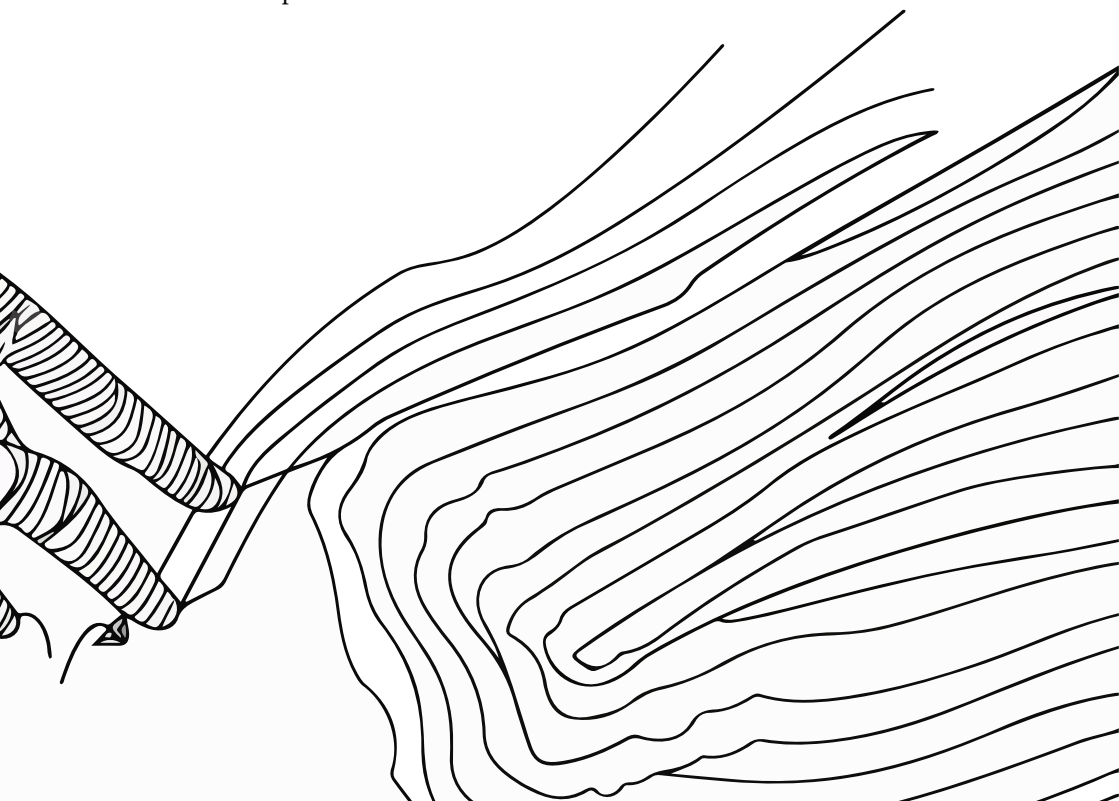


Friends are like my extended family. As a single gay man who has never entered a relationship, the support and care from my friends is truly precious. I see my friendships are some of the most important relationships in my life.

They are the people I can share my happiness with and rely on in times of trouble. Even though I never intend to ask for help, yet my friends are able to sense it and extend a helping hand. Friendship is a lifelong commitment to me and I will often offer a listening ear when they need it.

I can truly appreciate the profound love that shines through when my friends go above and beyond to make sure I'm cared for, especially during my darkest days. Their unwavering light of love has always guided me, reminding me that I am never alone in this journey.

As I put pen to paper, I hope to bridge the gap between my throat and these truths, allowing my story to resonate with those who care. It's a challenging endeavour, but it's one I feel compelled to undertake.



Wallowing

Swallowing feels like a curse,
Swallowing leaves me feeling worse.

Swallowing is a crime I can't confess,
Yet no one can arrest my heaviness.

Swallowing my pride, I find some grace,
But swallowing doesn't take away my place.

Swallowing my ego, I seek to be free,
For with each swallow, I refuse to be a fool.

Wallowing, I wish for relief from this weight,
Swallowing, I fight my fate.

Wallowing to uncover my peace anew,
For self-pity cannot guide me; it is true.



Truth be told, I have been wrestling with something complicated — both within myself and, more literally, in my lungs — over the past year. When I underwent radiotherapy years ago for cancer, I thought that the side effects were temporary. However, that was not meant to be.

When my present condition first became apparent, I did not pay much attention to it. Even as swallowing, listening, and speaking became increasingly difficult, I thought that all I had to do was to endure the suffering. After all, I had previously chosen to fight my cancer in the past with chemotherapy and radiotherapy, accepting the challenges that came along with it.

As a cancer survivor of nasopharyngeal carcinoma (NPC), I was unaware that the end of my cancer treatment only marked the beginning of something else. The interconnected nature of my ear, nose and throat meant that complications would come creeping in slowly but surely.

Swallowing has gradually turned into a struggle for me, each day more difficult than the last.

My friend Joey noticed my alarming weight loss this year and reached out, asking if her husband, an ENT (Ear, Nose, Throat doctor), could help. Accepting my friend's kindness, and also being somewhat concerned, I went for a consultation, hoping for some clarity.

What began as a mild discomfort soon turned into a condition known as “aspiration”, where food unintentionally enters the airway instead of the stomach, making its way straight to my lungs. What should have been a simple, everyday act — eating — quickly transformed into a great challenge.

Having three meals a day turned into a gargantuan task for me, and I struggled with every single bite. It felt like an achievement when I managed to finish a full meal. Unfortunately, the constant struggle to eat has affected my body, resulting in a concerning weight loss of more than 10 kilograms over the past year.

With my health declining, I found myself having fevers frequently and slowly began to lose the energy to meet people outside of home. My whole body felt weak constantly.

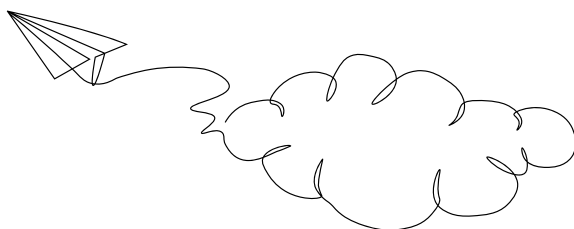
I found myself caught in a cycle; alternating between days where I feel well, and days when I am once again back to suffering from a relentless déjà vu of fever and exhaustion, being able to do nothing except lie in bed all day.

The diagnosis came back, and confirmed that that food was indeed entering my lungs, leading to infections. Whenever I had a fever, which was often, I would go through a phase where all I could do was lie down and sleep, feeling detached from everything around me. This occurred at random, although there were thankfully moments of reprieve.

Reflecting on the times when I was unable to do anything at all, I now understood what caused a six-day fever. It was interesting, because when I was admitted to the hospital, doctors struggled to pinpoint the source of my distress despite countless blood and urine tests.

It seemed perplexing then why we couldn't find an answer. But with time and reflection, everything started to make sense. It turned out that the fever was caused by food that had gone into my lungs. This led to an inflammation which resulted in a fever.

I realise that I took my health for granted, believing I could simply push through. This journey has taught me that surviving cancer is not just about overcoming the illness; it's also about confronting the lingering complications and seeking help when needed.



A Hopeless Aspiration

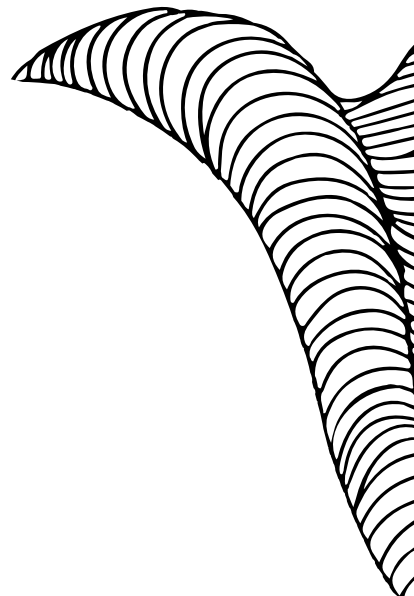
Aspiring to be, yet I'm not,
Aspiration fails to inspire a lot.

Aspiration is where
Food veers astray and enters the lungs, unaware.

How can I aspire to be?

Aspiration, I hope, does not bind me.
Aspiration leaves me feeling hopelessly entwined.

And so I take it one mouthful at a time.

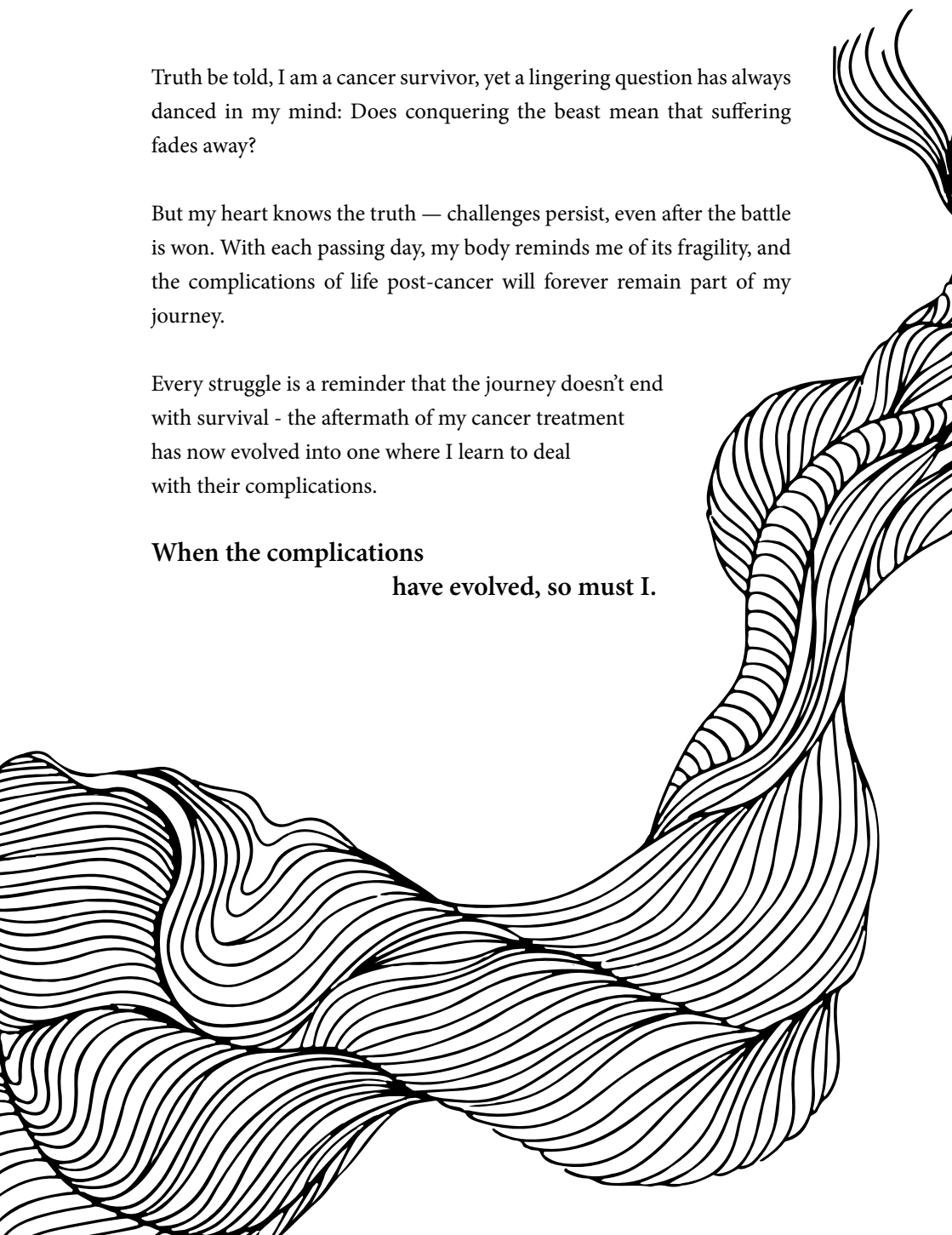


Truth be told, I am a cancer survivor, yet a lingering question has always danced in my mind: Does conquering the beast mean that suffering fades away?

But my heart knows the truth — challenges persist, even after the battle is won. With each passing day, my body reminds me of its fragility, and the complications of life post-cancer will forever remain part of my journey.

Every struggle is a reminder that the journey doesn't end with survival - the aftermath of my cancer treatment has now evolved into one where I learn to deal with their complications.

**When the complications
have evolved, so must I.**



Never Enough

How much must I suffer
To grow immune to this pain?

Never enough.

How much should I let go
To be free from this strain?

Never enough.

How much joy must one seek
To find room for more gain?

Never enough.

How much is truly enough?

Never enough.

