# Waiting to Live

I was prompted by a friend to write out the journey I undertook to secure a new liver and stay alive. I had thought of doing it before: even thought of a title and an opening paragraph but ultimately decided against it. There was no sense in describing my struggles and decline. It wouldn't help anyone. I didn't want to relive it. Who would be able to get anything from a descent into Hades?  He persisted and made a simple point and it changed my mind. I was proof positive that, despite everything I had to endure, the process and medical science delivered a successful outcome. He insisted that it was a story worth telling. So, here is my attempt. It was a long trek over many years: waiting and waiting until I became so sick that I would get a chance to be given a donor organ.  I thought I'd try and break the story up into bite size chunks and kick it off with how things got started and take it from there, with each new blog covering something of interest.

With close to thirty years in the technology heartland of Silicon Valley I had been pretty successful. I had just turned 50, was financially secure and did not have to worry about much except if I was going to make United Global Services status, which would make my frequent global travelling a whole lot easier. Divorced with a young family I had met someone really special in my life who wove all our threads into a warm loving family. Everything was in its place and I seemed to be able to handle all life could throw at me. I felt healthy. Often in the gym, could run a mile well under 10mins and would dive regularly in the cold waters off Monterey.

I didn't know it but the compass had started to creep South. It's difficult to pinpoint a starting point but this is as good a place as any. The phone rang in my office. A seemingly innocuous call asking me to retake a blood test after my not so annual check-up results had been posted. The call was reassuring, "It's nothing to be anxious about. Your platelet level was somewhat lower than normal. It's most likely an error. It does happen. How soon can you come back in?". I was immediately suspicious. No, it doesn't happen I thought to myself. Sure enough, it was quickly established that the level of cells responsible for clotting had been slowly trending down apparently unnoticed for several years. The subsequent tests and trials wandered through the next 18 months and took me to a moment where I found myself sitting in a chair opposite my consultant who was spinning on a stool pushing and pulling a screen to show me various pieces of data and images.

There comes a part in such a conversation when you have to push yourself off the ledge and summon the courage to ask the question: "Given these findings, how much time do I have?". It's a cliché.  You blurt it out just like you heard it in a movie. The need to say it had been building as the last drain of hope of dodging this bullet was squeezed out with the review of each disappointing test result. It's *the* question and you are forced to ask it. Nothing more can be discussed until it is asked and answered. Quickly, you smack the hard concrete of a no-nonsense answer, "No more than five years". You just climbed over a fence and cannot get back over the barbed wire to safety. There was a semblance of personal control until you asked that question but now you've handed over the keys. How did I get to this point? This is really happening! What had started off as a simple check-up somehow morphed into a diagnosis of cirrhosis, end stage liver disease and the prospect of dying. All of this caused by a genetic condition I couldn't even spell.

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