**Time to breathe**

There’s never enough time when you’re getting pathology results. You have so many questions but they only have so much time and it’s not enough. You brought your list and you’re ready… but partway through they start looking towards the door. There’s someone else waiting after you.

I have simple questions. Now that I can breathe again, will I keep breathing? How long? What exactly had happened to make this all… happen? And other questions. I ask in the online group instead. The people there tell me. Together we share, ask for prayers, exchange the most intimate details as strangers, support each other. Support comes through a tiny lightbox in my hand now. It comes at night, when I need to rest. I will rest tomorrow.

In the radiation room, they position your body just so. You’ve been tattoo’d with tiny markings where they point the heat. I have 7 of these tattoos. And because one of the tattoos is close enough to my heart, just before they do the radiation I’m told to breathe in, hold it, hold it, then breathe out. This exercise moves my heart to the right, just enough out of the way that it doesn’t get hit by the radiation too. I’ve learned with cancer, everything you do to save your life can also, potentially, shorten. your life. Be careful. Protect your heart. Freeze like a statue and hold that just right position. It’s a long moment, the moment when you pull your heart away.

As homeschoolers, time has always been different for my family. I thought the pandemic would move more people towards our sense of time, but it’s not as much as I thought. My son’s friends were told by their school: be at the computer from 9-3. Wear your shoes. Watch your class. Breaks and lunchtime like at school. Like at school. Then they were back into school, then out of school again, our government always waiting for a desperate point of no return before they send kids home, parents left unsure whether to jump ahead of the government, to keep the kids out, when to jump. Our government calls it *locking down*. They don’t call it *pandemic safety measures* or anything nice about helping people. It has to sound like oppression because business is losing money, after all. It’s a lockdown, not a *help-out or a reasonable measure to curb the spread of a pandemic to save lives and protect our most sacred institution, the health care system and the workers in it* plan… No, it’s *a lockdown*.

I’m just saying this year could have been different. A quicker response, a better financial aid system that protected everyone, so we could all think of time and our work differently for a while and people wouldn’t have to think of lockdown as doom but as a low-risk social responsibility. A time to have things be really different for a while, because it mattered, to keep people safe. Stop. Take a breath. Stop the factories, stop the schools, stop the malls, stop the restaurants, stop the casinos, stop all the cars commuting in to nothing, back and forth from nowhere. Stay home. Don’t shop. Breathe. Come outside. I don’t care if they told your kids 6 hours a day. Come outside. Go to the place where there is always time. Hop on our bikes and down to the trail.

It’s autumn now. The trees are covered in fluttering, chattering leaves that sing. From the branches, a songbird calls out, in time with its flock across the meadow. Then from the bones of giant oaks the flock lifts, a murmur of black dots above us, heading south.

Out here on the trail, there’s time to dig, to look, to touch and listen close. I get answers to questions I never knew I had… and the other questions I had, fade into the twilight. I think now of Greta on her sailboat last year and how she took her time. She knew it was important to let that breath happen. As they waited for her on the shores of Manhattan, she chose to be present, traversing the bright and dark and beautiful ocean for all the time it took.