

When you look between your legs and the toilet bowl is crimson, you know it's not a good sign....

If you're David Ollier Weber, you spend the next weeks and months seeking diagnoses, weighing treatment options and contemplating courses of action:

In fact, what you'd glimpsed was so off-putting you'd begun to entertain the notion of simply letting the disease run its course. Do nothing, shun treatment altogether. Nature, you'd concluded, has given you a clear message: Die.

This, of course, is Nature's message from the moment of conception—and a mixed message, to be sure, because every strand in your DNA is also coded to snarl, "Screw that!"

Up to now your body had successfully disregarded its death warrant. But a serious cancer—not one of those faux dermatohickeys but the real stuff... a melanoma, say, or breast cancer or liver cancer or, for God's sake, rectal cancer—when you get one of those there's no ambiguity to the handwriting on the wall:

Mene, mene, tekeli, upharsin. The end is nigh.

Okay, maybe not real nigh if all goes well. But it is worth remembering that a cancer is considered "cured" when you're still alive five years after treatment began. Five measly years.

By which time you'd be pushing eighty.

Okay, that's worth going for, you'd have to agree.

But not at any cost. Not just so you could lie semi-comatose in an ICU somewhere, intubated, respirated, desiccated—and in a fleeting final flicker of deathbed lucidity croak to yourself, "I did it!"

Even your wife, even your kids wouldn't celebrate that.

No, you've lived a good life. You've lived three-quarters of a century. Or almost, and you'll pretty surely make it that far—probably further—no matter what you do. Or don't. That's a long time. And you have no regrets. No bucket list. You've been around. Done what needed doing—not Frank Sinatra's way, certainly, thank God (except, maybe, for Ava), but your way....

David Ollier Weber writes and farms in Northern California's Motherlode.
Photo: Santa Monica Pier, 1964.



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