

I am standing on the shore. Arms at my sides, hands open, palms facing the sea as gentle swells touch the shore. The horizon shows no hint of the storms to come.

The first wave laps at my toes.

“Let’s order a CT scan just to be safe,” my doctor suggests.

A white puff appears, dim on the horizon.

“Are you driving? Can you pull over?”

I am in Friday night Minneapolis traffic heading to an Airbnb where my adult daughter and I will spend the weekend making Covid-19 masks, watching girl movies and visiting over a bottle of wine. And swallowing fear.

“I’m sorry, the CT scan came back abnormal. We’ll schedule an MRI for Monday.”

The waves cover the tops of my feet.

“It’s a tumor,” the neurosurgeon I met minutes before, tells me. Unable to join me during the office visit – another bit of Covid-19 fallout – my husband phones in from the hospital parking lot. He listens. There is nothing to say.

The images tell a story. The tumor measures roughly three inches long by an inch wide. It has been there awhile, slowly taking up space meant for my brain.

My feet melt into the wet sand as the wave covers my ankles. I breath in and blow out trying to calm my frantic heart.

We are in Rochester with yet another neurosurgeon. He assures us the tumor is benign. We cling to hope.

Clouds on the horizon show hints of gray. The seas build and I brace myself for the waves that splash white foam up my legs.

It is early morning. A young resident appears at my bedside. My head is swathed in bandages ala “The Mummy.” Lauran already knows what I am just learning. The tumor is malignant.

A rogue wave crashes the shore. I am knocked to my knees. Drenched, I struggle to regain my footing, determined to face the coming storm.

The next 10 days will be consumed waiting to learn whether we have a future. Lauran insists all will be well. I want to believe. But I don't want to make promises I can't keep. I share the image of my lone vigil against the storm with our youngest son.

"Mom," he chides me. "You need to rethink that image."

"You are not alone. Others are on that beach, joining hands, linking arms."

What comfort those words bring.

I construct visions of rows and rows of friends, family, loved ones, volunteers, medical professionals, and all those who will join me in facing the crashing waves, forming a barrier that surrounds me in love and healing.

Another day, another doctor. "You have a rare lymphoma. This is something you will learn to live with, not die from." There will be work ahead. It will be hard, but we can do hard.

Storm clouds threaten, but hints of blue appear.

I am filled with gratitude for the community that will see me through.

I am not alone.

Jan Larson