



Enjoy every sandwich

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Dr. Monica Kidd has written two novels and three volumes of poetry; she's followed seabirds from Newfoundland and Labrador to the Antarctic. She worked her way up to being the CBC's national science journalist, and then went to medical school. These days, she's a mother and family doctor in Calgary. She's never stopped writing. If you're curious about her unusual career, you can read a profile about Kidd in the Jan. 9, 2017, issue. We hope you enjoy Coda and, as always, we welcome your feedback.

Someone in my family was recently diagnosed with metastatic cancer.

It all came as a surprise, as these things do. As I write this, our family is doing our best to figure out what it means and, as the only medical person in the family, I am trying to walk the delicate line between navigating and taking over.

This is my first experience as a doctor with a close family member with cancer. Though I have delivered bad news to patients, I have been blessed to have received very little of it myself. I am reminded of how much of a shock it is, how random it can seem.

Telling people has been odd, and surprisingly difficult. Most have been devastated. Some have focused on what the news means to *me* — how difficult it must be as a doctor to have a sick family member, to maybe know too much, to try not to interfere with his care. When you care about someone in pain, you want to give them something, even if it's rhetorical.

Recently, we went back to Newfoundland, where I told a couple of old friends. They met the news with remorse, then silence. Instead of trying to offer wisdom, or normalize, or whatever it is that we doctors are taught to do for our patients, they simply let the news sit.

It was exactly the right thing to do. When I have lost people close to me, I have been amazed that the world does not stop, even just for a second, to offer witness. Saying

nothing more than “I’m sorry,” and sitting for a moment in silence was exactly what I needed. It let me think about him.

I told another old friend by email. I said it made me want to give a little squeeze to everyone I loved.

He sent back a one-liner: “Warren Zevon said, ‘Enjoy every sandwich’.”

I fired back to him that those very words hang on my kitchen wall, printed by the fabulous Laura MacDonald of Kentville, Nova Scotia. The print hangs mostly as a threat to my picky-eater children, but also as a reminder to me to think about the big picture when I feel under siege by the daily-ness of things.

Just letting something sit, letting the meaning emerge: it can be difficult for people trained to lead to let a moment just *happen*. I have been reminded of how quickly everything can change, and of the importance of enjoying every sandwich. And I have been reminded of the value of silence. It makes me wonder how many times — as a friend or as a doctor — I have said something when saying nothing would have been okay.

So, while I can't show you silence in print, I can show you this ...