

vial of sedatives; step in front of a bus. Then I had my epiphany: each day I am worse than I was but better than I'll be.

There was only one thing on my bucket list: to write the book I'd been blathering about for decades, an investigation into how my father, back in the 1960s, masterminded the theft of 70 tons of super-rich silver ore from under the nose of one of the world's most productive and profitable mining company's in the world. United Keno Hill Mines was based in a remote hamlet in the middle of the Yukon Territory where I spent my first 10 years. The book would also be a memoir of how his crime affected our family. I'd done a good chunk of the research before my diagnosis: interviews, archival sleuthing, a trip to the Yukon, reading and more reading. Now it was time for the hard part, the writing. For the next 14 months, I wrote at least four

hours a day. As my ability to speak and swallow deteriorated, I wrote. And rewrote. I had great organizational help from my husband, who moved his office home early in 2013. I had a manuscript ready by November and sent it to Harbour Publishing.

In January 2014, a gastroenterologist inserted a feeding tube in me despite my initial vow to avoid all medical intervention. The following week, I heard from Harbour that they would publish my book, titled *A Rock Fell on the Moon: Dad and the Great Yukon Silver Ore Heist*. I jumped up and down and squealed with joy. At that point, I could swallow a sip or three of champagne. Editing, picture selection and book promotion ensued. So did increased muscle atrophy, twitches, overwhelming fatigue, weight loss, and the waning of my voice and ability to swallow. Through commu-

nity care (bless you, Canada), we hired three part-time caregivers, seven days a week. Goodbye privacy and independence, and hello humility. My biggest humility lessons are, one, I'm not the only one suffering and, two, ditch "Why me?" in favour of "Why not me?"

A third lesson this disease has taught me is that love truly is a medicine. Not a cure, but a salve of gratitude, comfort and peace. From acquaintances to close friends and family, I'm being carried out on a river of love. Who could ask for more?

#### Alicia Priest RN

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**Editor's note:** Alicia Priest died on Jan. 13, 2015, at the age of 61.

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## POETRY

### St. Vitus' dance



Pieter Brueghel the Younger

A jig. Pray to god and little basal ganglia bugs that stand at attention and command *March*. Your face flails according to order: *choreathetoid, choreathetoid*, your jerky-sinuous lips pulled and pushed to command the martial music of a possessed two-year-old who can't sleep because his heart bugs have autoimmuned. *Sleep Child* a mother says, and the great Sydenham asks *what's in a name* and the febrile child is coursing, his mother applies cold cloths to the forehead, but the child hits invisible targets. Group A *Streptococcus* insists on mad ballet, of buck-sinister crump, the waking hours of the child devoted to marionette tugs. Yet the prognosis is good, the grating at St. Vitus' altar proves transient. Look at the child, the body wracked, the face ticked, the parents afflicted, praying to patrons.

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