



The year 2020 has been brought to you by the letters W, T and F.

Hi and happy Advent, Christmas, Hannukah. Solstice and whatever greetings!

I can almost hear you thinking "Wow! What's this? Fitz usually has some inspiring quote or image at the top of his Christmas letter." Forgive me. Not exactly a Christmassy 12 months. Unless you recall that these holiday seasons are all about darkness and light. And God knows there's been plenty of darkness this year! Yet light as well. Let's recall the darkness first and then move into the light.

On January 5th my younger brother Dan died in the arms of his beloved wife Nena. His double lung transplant (Pulmonary Fibrosis) 12 years earlier was only supposed to give him another 5 years. He fought like hell and survived – mostly thrived - but it all finally caught up with him. Was able to go to Chicago/Park Ridge for a memorial Mass on a very wintry day.

In February I was feeling sluggish. Decided I needed to go to the ER at KaiserSF but didn't want to miss a SF Symphony concert with our soon-to-be new Conductor that night. After cheering Maestro Salonen lustily I realized that my legs were dramatically swollen. Could barely walk. Took a LYFT to the hospital where they diagnosed me with Congestive Heart Failure and kept me ten days.

Two days after getting home with instructions to "take it easy" for a while, the City of SF helped me adhere to that by declaring a major lockdown thanks to Covid-19. Have been "sheltering in place" ever since.

On the 28th of March my older brother David died. He'd been declining for many months so it wasn't exactly a surprise, but a thunderbolt even so. He died in the same hospital where he'd ministered as a Neurologist and touched many lives for the better. His dear wife Lisa, a nurse in that same building, had to sneak in to see him because of pandemic restrictions. She graciously held her phone to his ear so a bunch of us could say our "goodbyes".

Later in the Spring my remaining sibling, Marykay, was doing some gardening here, on part of Telegraph Hill's public property that she's adopted and taken care of for years. She lost her balance and tumbled down the hill. Thank God some folks, coming down from a climb, found her and alerted me and called the paramedics. They took her to the Trauma Center at SF General with serious injuries

(face, skull and back, where the spine becomes the neck). A 6 hours plus emergency spinal fusion surgery kept her from paralysis and death. She's recovered after a prolonged period of rehab.

It was around this time that I began entertaining thoughts about old Irish and Druid curses that might have been leveled centuries ago but scheduled to materialize in 2020.

Not finished yet. In late September I went to the ER because of some side effects from a visit there a week before, due to still another bout of Cellulitis. When they took my vitals they sort of freaked out. My heart rate was only 31. Overheard one nurse say "We should have a crash cart ready." Several hours later they squeezed me into the schedule to install a pacemaker. Now my heart rate doesn't go lower than 70. Renewed musings about Druids.

Let me say the obvious. It HAS been a really bad year for me. (Did I mention the Xfinity corporation and months of frustration over TV and WiFi while sheltering in place?) I was/am a hardcore extrovert now living like a hermit. Soooo dearly wanted to join my fellow San Franciscans dancing in the streets when the election results were announced! BUT I am alive! With great family, friends, neighbors and churchmates. (Including my fellow ND grad Peter Cullinan who's been doing a weekly grocery shop.) The past nine months have given me an enormous gift of time to do the sort of interior journeying I never would have otherwise. Acutely aware that hundreds of thousands of my fellow human beings have had significantly worse events this year.

And in all that darkness I cherish more than ever the gifts (they are really sacraments!) of light that have illuminated my world and my sacred self. Like the glimpse of 90 year old Maggie Keenan getting the very first Covid-19 vaccination two nights ago. And that same night, the streamed concert by my friend Craig Hella-Johnson and his choral group Conspirare, who rival the angels with their glorious, hopeful and life-giving singing!

I came across a marvelous quote from Albert Camus a few weeks ago that I wish I had written, because his words so accurately mirror my experiences and feelings as we approach the longest, darkest night of the year.

"In the midst of hate, I found there was, within me, an invincible love.

In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile.

In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me, an invincible calm.

I realized, through it all, that ...

In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer.

And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger - something better, pushing right back."

May you have an invincibly bright and hopeful holiday and new year.
With lots of love from Telegraph Hill here in the City of Saint Francis!

