

# Days of Cancer and Covid



From the car to the chemo chair  
and back again: that winter  
I wore a thick jacket;  
asked for warmed blankets  
from the line nurse;  
kept books, baby wipes in my purse.

I accepted rides from friends at first.  
We became ladies who lunch—  
the sort who wear gloves and a hat.  
Does anyone still wear a hat? Bald, I did.  
Soon it was the spring of Covid.  
Rides and lunches had to stop.  
I clung to my books as comforting props.

Despite hospital stays, infections,  
a carpet-bombed immune system,  
I escaped the wrath of Covid.  
I rang the Victory Bell. Chemo ended.  
My sapped strength surged again.  
Radiation started.

Sliding off the nuking platter, no bra,  
I went alone on languid walks  
down long medical blocks,  
observing with renewed wonder  
the works of public art:  
*Hallelujah, Double Helix,  
Healing Plants, Physician and Daughter.*

Twenty treatments, twenty walks.  
Each day an encounter with the new:  
morning glories in a vacant lot,  
a shrine to St. Thérèse of Lisieux,  
a swarm of butterflies in bee balm,  
a Japanese garden and koi pond

Under trees on a shaded path,  
I found a dropped pair of tweezers  
screwed to a magnifying glass.  
The lens helped me better see  
an oak leaf, seed, beetle.  
I wore the tweezers and glass  
like a cross on a string.

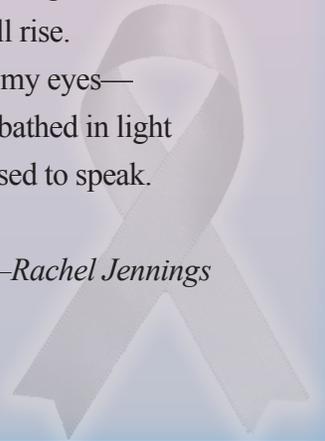
The Health Science campus,  
its mammoth buildings  
quiet with summer and Covid,  
melted into meadows, marshes,  
sun-baked trails, secluded woods.

Deer were everywhere—  
a tangle of trees behind the garage,  
a stream near the parking lot.

On the last of twenty walks,  
a deer stood quite near  
on a small rise.

She held my eyes—  
an angel bathed in light  
who refused to speak.

—Rachel Jennings



# Chemo's Electric Slide Effects

My feet burn,  
baby, burn, are un-  
comfortably numb,  
tingle here, there,  
everywhere.  
I rock down  
to Electric Avenue,  
got on my boogie shoes,

boogie oogie oogie,  
got this fire  
in my new shoes,  
want to be hip,  
try not to trip,  
just trippin'.  
My feet, legs  
shake, shake, shake,

shake it down  
all night long  
in my fiery bed,  
this disco inferno.  
Born to be alive,  
I will survive.  
I jive—will thrive.

—Rachel Jennings



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# Scars after Two Cancer Surgeries

Straight lines, geometric shapes  
on healed skin—faded signs  
of missing organs, flesh—  
please me, being less but more  
than mere tattoos or scars of chance.

The hyphens, dashes, crescent, half-moon  
on that torso in the mirror  
like a Picasso make me gasp.  
“Can we listen?” the doctor asks.  
“Breathe in! Now let it go.”

When I gaze at them,  
the lines, angles,  
curves are flat,  
two-dimensional,  
this canvas a dream  
of science or math  
like slatted sunlight  
on square tile.

Matisse’s scissors  
slashed like wild beasts  
to make bold paper cutouts  
as his blue eyes failed—  
so, too, the surgeon’s manual  
or robotic scalpel  
wakened wonder  
while I was under.

—Rachel Jennings

## Emma Tenayuca Speaker Series WESTSIDE HISTORY SYMPOSIUM

09:00am

Welcome - Cristina Ballí & Dr. Sarah Zenaida Gould

09:15am

A Historical and Archaeological Overview of the Westside - Sergio & Melinda Iruegas

10:00am

Carolina Munguía and Emma Tenayuca: The Politics of Benevolence and Radical Reform - Dr. Gabriela González

10:45am

Significant Architecture of the Westside - Lee Reyna & Steve Tillotson

11:30pm

History of City Policy in the Westside & Current Policy Challenges - María Antonietta Berriozábal

12:15pm

History of the Westside Preservation Alliance & Current Preservation Challenges - Dr. Antonia Castañeda & Graciela I. Sánchez

01:00pm – Closing



The Esperanza, Westside Preservation Alliance & Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center invite you to a virtual Westside History Symposium, highlighting innovative work in community history, historic preservation, and social justice.

View Live on  
FaceBook &  
YouTube!

Saturday  
October 3rd  
2020  
9am-1pm