

APPENDIX 9:

HOPE

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As the little boy and his mother were leaving the zoo, he turned to her and said: "Mommy, I want a giraffe."

"That's nice, dear," she said, "perhaps we can buy you a little stuffed one sometime."

"No," the little boy said, "I want a real giraffe. I want to keep him in the backyard and feed him and ride him."

"I'm sorry," the mother consoled, "but a real giraffe is a lot of responsibility. They need special care, much more than we could ever provide."

"But, Mommy, I don't care. I want a real giraffe."

It has been said millions of times but made most famous by the Rolling Stones song "You can't always get what you want." "No, you can't always get what you want."

That's sort of how I feel about my good friend Hope. Hope and I have had an on-again off-again relationship for quite some time. Sometimes, she has been there for me. Sometimes not. I think what I have found over the years is that the more I rely upon her, or the greater the scale of my need, the less reliable she is. When I was nine years old and my dog was attacked by another dog, I hoped that she would survive. She didn't. When I was a senior in college and wanted to go to law school, I hoped that I did well on my law boards despite the fact that I am a rather slow reader. I didn't do well and didn't go to law school. When my brother was diagnosed with prostate cancer ten years ago, I hoped that he would beat the disease. He didn't.

I have had my share of disappointments with Hope. There were times when we didn't speak. There were times when I abandoned her. There were times when she was simply not a part of my life.

The trouble is that I missed her. Despite all the times that she let me down, I found myself wishing she were there. I found myself wanting Hope. It didn't really make sense, but then again, relationships often don't.

So, I tried to reconcile. What I found out was that if I lowered my expectations of her, if I relied on her less, she would become more reliable.

You see, Hope is only human. She cannot ensure world peace or rid the planet of disease or suffering. She cannot eliminate the pain in our lives. She can't even prevent the Yankees from winning the World Series for this die-hard Red Sox fan. When we hope for grand things, we are simply asking too much. We are asking for the metaphorical giraffe.

Hope and I have gotten back together but on different terms than before. We're really just friends now. I don't depend upon her. I see her from time to time and I make a request here and there. She's still not perfect and she still lets me down. But, more often than not, she has been there for me. We have a better understanding of each other now.

As many of you know, I have prostate cancer. It grows slowly but certainly does not seem to want to go away. Hope was right up front with me about this from the start. She said, "Don't say it. Do not ask me for your giraffe." So, I didn't.

I do not hope for a miraculous cure from prostate cancer. I do not hope to live forever, or without pain, or disappointment, or failure. Mind you, I might want those things. But, I'm leaving Hope out of it.

Instead, Hope and I have developed a less demanding relationship. Oh, I still call her. But, I am careful about what I ask for. And, she has been pretty good about trying to help.

I hope that, when I wake up each morning, I have the health and energy to do what I want to do that day.

I hope that I might continue to sense the freshness of the morning air when I go out to get the paper in the morning, the smell of flowers around my house, the taste of a good glass of red wine, and the sight of Saratoga Lake from my backyard.

I hope, everyday, for a big hug and a warm kiss from my wife, and a lick or two from the dogs.

I hope to laugh loud and long as often as possible.

I hope that I can be of use to somebody, somewhere, somehow – every day.

I hope that I can make someone's day brighter.

I hope that the people I love know that I love them. I hope that I am grateful for the love that people send my way.

I hope that I can share in the celebrations and sorrows of my family and those around me. I hope that I am a good friend. I hope to sustain and grow my friendships.

I hope that I remain as positive about life for as long as possible.

So, as you can see, Hope and I still have something going. It is not as grandiose as it once was. But, it is more practical. It is more successful. And, it is more rewarding.

"You can't always get what you want.

You can't always get what want.

But, if you try sometime, you just might find

You just might find

You get what you need."