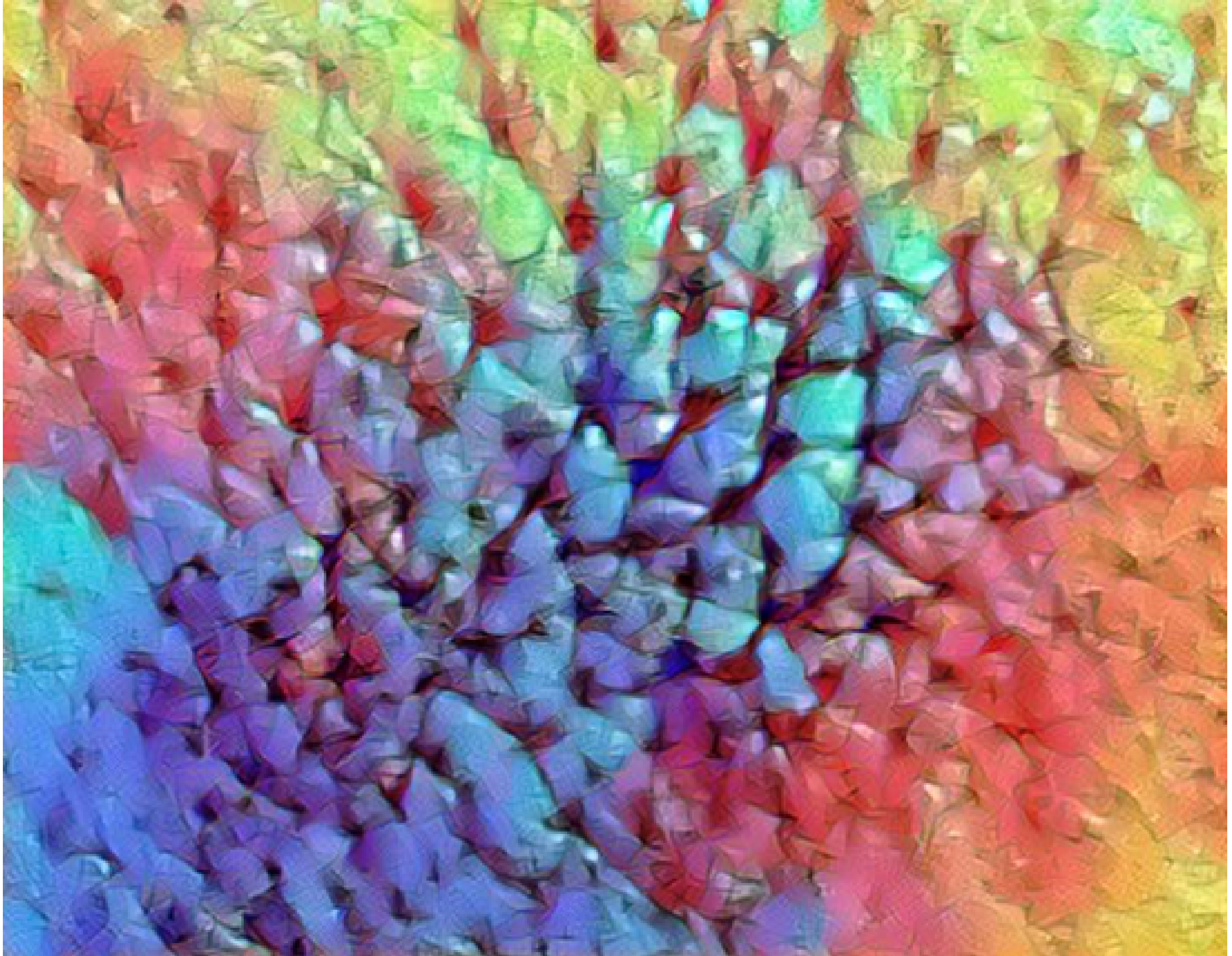


The Stars that Killed Me

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It started out as raspberries, light hives that stung. Then my skin grew dark stars.

It turns out, the cancer was changing the texture of my skin.

I have always been a Spoonie. I spent my childhood in hospitals, so as a kid when I looked to the future, I sometimes struggled to see one, but that line of fortune-telling became extremely prominent when I was recently when I was diagnosed with stage 4 Triple-Negative Breast cancer.

When healthy people get cancer, They become sick or ill. They can say 'I'm ill' and they are just referring to cancer but I'm chronically ill and so I don't like referring to my situation as becoming ill. I'm like a less impressive Hulk; I'm always ill. So what does someone like myself say under these new circumstances?

Cancer is an illness but I have always taken a certain amount of pride in being chronically ill. It's who I am but cancer is not that. There's no pride in cancer, just a constant attempt at survival. I look at the star-like pattern on my skin like it's a crystal ball where I am witness to my own murder.

I've suddenly become very focused on the future. Who will take care of my mom and my dog? What type of funeral will I have? Do I bother with a Bucket List? But most of these thoughts don't include me.

How do you envision a future where you're not there? You, can't, not really and that's sort of the point. So I try to focus on the present which is tough as a life-long-Spoonie. We surprisingly spend a lot of time thinking about the future. 'How will I get to this event?' 'How much energy will it require?' 'How many days after the event will be used as payment for said event.' 'Will I need to bring my meds, where is there space for me to do those meds, can I maybe cheat and not do those meds (no but Ima try anyways <deep laboured sigh>'. Now there is only tomorrow for me, if even. So, it's just what do I need today and what do I like about today. Aim for one positive a day, even if it's cliché.

It's kind of pleasant thinking only about today but that's in large part because everyone else is letting me. Cancer, especially stage 4, makes people uncomfortable so they sort of let you do whatever. Non-presently dying Spoonies don't have this luxury but they deserve it, we all do. Luxury, that's my positive for the day, I have a luxury.

Cancer is so prominent in my everyday life that earlier today I forgot to list meds for my lifelong severe asthma. Pulmicort and nebulizer, something I've taken for decades, just slipped my mind when the nurse asked me. Sometimes I no longer feel like someone who is chronically ill, I just feel like someone who is chronically dying but that's not true. I'm still a Spoonie, just with more meds than ever.

Dying is the future and I don't have a crystal ball, just a boob, well two boobs actually and for the most part we've all gotten along so I will focus on today.

As I was writing this piece, I realized that writing and zine-making is how I give myself a future too.