



HOW NOT TO DIE

In 13 Easy Steps

KURT BRINDLEY



HOW NOT TO DIE IN 13 EASY STEPS
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to all who Survive

in Life
in Spirit

and to all who Care for those who do



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*forge forever on
tho' dark death rewards us all
forge forever on*



INTRODUCTION

On this day five years ago, I received the news that a recent lung biopsy showed that my lungs were inflicted with a severe form of graft versus host disease (GVHD) called *bronchiolitis obliterans syndrome*.

BOS, I came to find out, was a known but uncommon side-effect resulting from a bone marrow transplant (for leukemia) that I had had earlier in the year. And by severe I was told it meant the BOS was incurable, non-reversible, and, in most cases, aggressively fatal. I was also told — because I had asked and insisted on an answer — that, according to a National Institutes of Health (NIH) study of the time, those of us with BOS had only a 13%, five-year survival rate.

In other words, there was an 87% chance that within five years I would be dead.

Well, it's been five years now and here I am — still very much alive and now a newly minted *Thirteen Percenter*.

Can a brother get a “Hell yeah?”

Hell yeah!

At my most recent appointment with my oncologist, in addition to his standard declaration whenever he sees me of, “So, I see you're still alive,” he also declared that my present condition may just be a miracle of sorts because it appears that my incurable BOS may have actually been cured... somehow.

I say “somehow” because as I've learned from my extensive involvement with the medical community these past five years or so, there rarely is a definitive medical answer as to why things happen with the body the way they do. For instance, I will never know why I became inflicted with leukemia, or why I had such a severe reaction to my bone marrow transplant; or now, why I may be magically cured from an incurable disease.

I suppose it's all the mysteries life affords us that makes life so worthwhile to live it.

As it is, I don't think I would be overstating if I said that, because of all my extensive mysterious goings on these past five years — goings on such as leukemia, GVHD (and not just of the lungs, but also of the eyes, liver, and intestines), prednisone side-effects, cytomegalovirus (CMV), and heart failure to name a few — I think I've learned a thing or two from these mysteries about life in general and the living of it in particular.

Now, if you search around my website, *kurtbrindley.com*, I'm pretty sure you will find that much of my writing, mostly encapsulated in my haiku and other poetry, reflects a lot of the insights and understandings I've garnered from these goings on. However, just because I like you all so much and don't want you to have try to sift through my site for days on end in an effort to discover these insights and understandings for yourselves, and because short, pithy lists are all the rage these days, I will identify for you the top thirteen things I learned, not only about how

not to die, but mostly about how to best live your life filled with happiness and meaning, regardless whether Death is looking you directly in the face or not.

Cool?

Okay, so here we go...

Kurt Brindley
November 5, 2015





HOW TO NOT DIE

IN 13 EASY STEPS





Step One

*Love Someone
Even If No One
Loves You*





*well-worn and wanting
pocked and patched yet still preferred
beauty lies within*



STEP 1: LOVE SOMEONE EVEN IF NO ONE LOVES YOU

I was and I am very fortunate for I love and I am loved.

Love, I have learned, is *the* most important substance of life, and I was happy to find that when it came time for me to face the consequences and challenges that my diseases posed to me, I had many people around me whom I love and who in turn love me to help me meet those challenges.

First and foremost among those whom I love and who love me is my lovely and loving wife. As I say in my website bio, without her I am certain I would not have made it – I would not be alive right now. However, I am just as certain that without her love and my love for her I would not have wanted to have made it nearly as much as I did, if at all.

If you don't have someone to love, or if you in your present state are simply not a loving person, you have to try as hard as you can to find some way to change this.

Support and religious groups and other volunteers can bring a form of love into your life if you are all alone in your efforts at living, but only you can change your own ability to love others.

There are not many things in life that I am wholly certain about, but this is one of them: You must learn to truly love in order to fully reap the healing benefits that the love of others can truly bring to you.





Step Two

*Be Someone
Even If You Feel
You Are No One
Worth Being*





*at the day's dark end
when the shadows fell the sky
what will be thy claim*



STEP 2: BE SOMEONE EVEN IF YOU FEEL YOU ARE NO ONE WORTH BEING

Disease has the power to change not just how we feel but also how we look and how we behave. A disease can be painful and depressing and enervating and emasculating to the point where it has us thinking, what is the point?

All this power that a disease may have over us is a sad but true fact of living; however, no matter how much a disease can negatively impact our lives, we cannot let it take away the essence of who we are... of who we *choose* to be.

Regardless the type of prison of disease we find ourselves in, as long as we have control over our own faculties, we have the ability to transcend the diseased boundaries that may be *physically* holding us back to find mental freedom within the limitless universe of our mind.

And it is within this universe of mental freedom where we make the choice of how we wish to regard ourselves.

Do not forsake your freedom. Choose to find worth in your being, in spite of the disease that constrains you.





Step Three

*Achieve
Something
Daily*





*the truth of it all
is found in that which is done
all else is just dreams*



STEP 3: ACHIEVE SOMETHING DAILY

Even if it's nothing more than making a bed (which at various points throughout my life journey was impossible) or, if that's too much, pulling up your socks by yourself (which at various points throughout my journey was near impossible), if it's a challenge and you are able to do it, consider it an achievement, do it daily, and congratulate yourself when you've accomplished it the best you were able.

Unfortunately, some of us may not be able to achieve anything physically because of our disease. If that is the case, if able, try challenging yourself mentally each day by reading as many pages of a book as you possibly can or memorizing a new poem or learning a new language.

The bottom line is, find something challenging for you to do, do it daily, and congratulate yourself when it's done.





Step Four

Exercise
Daily





*no surprise in death
tho' dying startles us so
'tis the thrill of life*



STEP 4: EXERCISE DAILY

Even if it's nothing more than raising your feet off the floor or wiggling your toes as many times as you can, consider it exercise, do it daily, and congratulate yourself when you're done.

I challenged myself with a daily routine of what I called my *Countertop Calisthenics*. Each morning as I made my coffee I would hold onto the kitchen counter and do as many repetitions as I could of toe raises, knee bends, calf stretches, and, once I started getting stronger, push-ups (more like, push-offs from the countertop).

However, it took many years of incremental progress for me to get to that point, with many setbacks and misgivings along the way. When I began my journey, I was happy to be able to do a single toe raise. So, please, when starting out don't get discouraged if that is all you are able to do. And even more importantly, do not try to overdo it; instead, just do it simple and easy and with an understanding that the goal is to try to improve daily... for the rest of your life.

And similar to Step Three, if you cannot do anything physically, exercise the best you can mentally each day, consider it exercise, and congratulate yourself when you're done.

✧ ✧ ✧ ✧

Note: it's important to make a distinction between Step 3 and Step 4, even if both are similar in their activities. My goal was to always strive to live as I would have had I not been sick, which was, at its most fundamental, doing some kind of work every day to maintain my lifestyle and exercising as often as I could to maintain my health. Steps 3 and 4 were for me my efforts while sick to emulate normalcy while well.

✧



Step Five

*Be Happy
Even When
You're Not*





*storm clouds beckon bold
a winded fury stills all
peace is found within*



STEP 5: BE HAPPY EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT

Our existence is very existential, which means to me that our every response to our every second of life within the universal, infinite flow of *now* that we have available to us is exactly how we choose it to be.

In other words, only you can decide what your emotion will be right now – no other person in this world can; nor can any situation that this world may throw at you.

Choose your emotions wisely and, regardless what the *now* of the moment may bring, always err your emotional choices on the side of happiness; for it is the *now* of *now* that will greatly influence each succeeding *now* you have left to live.





Step Six

*Be Kind
Even When
You're Not*





*from mind to matter
believe it and it shall be
you determine you*



STEP 6: BE KIND, EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT

As long as you are paying close mind to Step Five, this step should be a breeze.

However, it is much easier to be a jerk than not, especially when we are trapped within the prison of disease. That's why it is important for us to find clarity in our mental freedom and remember, just as in Step Five, the choice whether to be unkind or not when faced with an unkind situation or person is totally ours.

Choose kindness, as hard as it may be.





Step Seven

*Mind Your
“I Ams”*





*I Am That I Am
Is the name of He on High
That, then, means It All*

*That, then, means He, too, is I
And that I, too, am the Wood*



STEP 7: MIND YOUR “I AMS”

If God has taken the name *I Am That I Am*, there must be some pretty big consequences whenever we mere mortals use His name during the course of our everyday living.

Think about it... whenever we use His name to declare how we choose to feel, as in “I am... sick” or “I am... happy,” the universe must surely take notice and find a way to make it so.

In other words, when you say “I am...” you’re essentially saying “God Is...”

If you ask me, when it comes to your “I ams,” your best bet is to keep them as positive as possible...

The universe is going to take notice, regardless.





Step Eight

*Embrace
Modernity*





*every season's end
draws veil over dreams of old
to reveal the new*



STEP 8: EMBRACE MODERNITY

There are some of us out there who live alternative life styles and who choose to shun modern medicine for a more “holistic” approach to healing, whatever that may be.

That’s cool. I’m not saying to compromise your values, but what I am saying is that when it comes to whether you may live or die, don’t just go down the single path of relying solely on alternate healing techniques and putting your trust into graces of our good – but also of our rather precarious and sometimes a bit spiteful – Mother Earth.

You can still go down that hippie path, but as you do, I strongly encourage you on behalf of those who love and care for you, to also go down a parallel, less-than-hippie path that incorporates modern medicine and technology.

I have two words to sum this all up in a sad, unfortunate, but easy to remember way: Steve Jobs.





Step Nine

*Ask
Questions*





*what is it, this life
I think I may know – do I
this life, what is it*



STEP 9: ASK QUESTIONS

In other words, trust but verify.

Sometimes this can be harder than it sounds, seeing that we, as a society, tend to hold doctors in such high regard, and deservedly so. But no matter how awesome your doctor is, she or he is still, just like you and me, only human. Not everything they say is gospel no matter how much some of them may act as if it is.

Now, your default response probably should be to listen to what your doctor has to say, but the bottom line is, doctors are nothing more than highly trained, highly paid medical consultants and service contractors. It is their job to provide you with their best advice and/or service that they can. And it is your job to decide whether to accept their advice and/or service or not.

You are both your doctors' customer and your doctors' boss – meaning your doctors works for you. It is up to you to hold them, and yourself, accountable.





Step Ten

*Find Your
Guru*





*entangled we roll
each clinging madly to each
caught in fate's cross winds*



STEP 10: FIND YOUR GURU

We all need someone we can look up to, someone who can teach us new things, someone who can motivate us to achieve things that we just may not be able to achieve on our own.

This person or persons may be a guru, or a mentor, or just someone you connect with who can motivate you to live your life better than you were living it without them.

It would be awesome if this guru or mentor could be someone we could actually meet with in person and on a regular basis, but it doesn't have to be. You can find your guru anywhere – in books or on TV or the internet or even your smartphone app.

Dr. Wayne Dyer, may he rest in peace, was and still is my chosen guru. He has an ability to say things, things that I may have heard said many times before by many different people, in a way I can connect with and become motivated enough so that I choose to apply the things he says to my life.

There are, of course, other gurus out there I also like to be mentored by from time to time – Anthony Robbins, Eckhart Tolle, Thích Nhất Hạnh, Oprah, and others – but the one guru and personal pope who I choose to call my own is Dr. Dyer.

Do yourself a favor and find your guru.





Step Eleven

Meditate





expecting nothing
sitting, waiting — unattached
patience thy reward



STEP 11: MEDITATE

Meditating can mean many different things to many different people, but to me it is finding a way to slow my mind down in an effort to eliminate thought so that I am able to allow myself to fully accept and experience the *now* of each moment.

If you're not sure what any of that means, see Step Ten.





Step Twelve

Pray





*transcendental we
eternal epiphanies
pure stardust and light*



STEP 12: PRAY

If you are a religious person, incorporating prayer into your life goes without saying.

Ask and you shall receive.

And the more people asking on your behalf the better. Fortunately for me, I had so many loved ones and friends putting in the good word to the Almighty *I Am That I Am* on my behalf, that I fear that other souls in need out there may have gotten a busy signal.

Prayer works and I am living proof of that. But even if you are non-religious and don't believe in a higher being named *I Am That I Am*, you can still be putting your positive vibes out there.

Think of it this way, we are nothing if not electric beings, especially our thoughts. Our brains are mushy lumps of power generating matter. I don't know about you, but I would rather have positively charged happy thoughts transmitting out throughout the endless infinite universe(s) rather than negatively charged dismal ones.

Therefore, keeping *Pascal's Wager* in mind, my best advice is to assume that both prayer and the Law of Attraction really work and behave accordingly.

Might as well, right?





Step Thirteen

*Remember,
Life Is Relative
To The Person
Living It*





*what must be endured
before the blossom unfolds
heaven only knows*



STEP 13: REMEMBER, LIFE IS RELATIVE TO THE PERSON LIVING IT

Your best day just may be someone else's worst day, and your worst day just may be someone else's best day.

No matter how sick or crappy you feel, there is someone out there who is much sicker and feeling much more crappy than you. So, you might as well stop your whining right now.

Instead, use your relative good fortune to seek out and try to uplift those less fortunate than you. The simple act of a smile from someone in your current condition, whatever it may be, may be just what is needed to help someone else find the strength to meet the consequences and challenges of their current condition, whatever *it* may be.

Choose to uplift those in need of a lift up.



NO MONEY BACK GUARANTEES

So, I guess the question is, if you find yourself in a similar situation where Death is lurking right around the corner of your life and there is an 87% chance you will be dead within the next five years, will following these 13 Easy Steps keep you from not dying like they did me?

My answer is, of course, who knows? I'm sorry but I really have no clue.

Maybe they will or maybe they won't, but what I am pretty sure of is that by following these steps – steps you yourself are probably already well aware of and, for some reason or another, maybe just forgot to follow through on – you will live the remaining life that you still have yet to live, however long that may be, with a bit more happiness and a bit more meaning than you would have lived if had you not followed them.

Anyway... regardless whether you follow these steps or not, remember that it is inevitable that at some point in your life you *will* come face to face with Death. And when you do, I recommend, in addition to following these 13 Easy Steps, you throw up a middle finger and tell that annoying little buzzkill to...

Bring It On!





SHORT SHORT STORIES



Sick

It was one of those sick — one where the head didn't just throb, it felt as if it were being pummeled, as if it were being brutally, sadistically pounded upon, as if it were the floor for a step dancing competition and all the teams, maybe two hundred of them, were passionately, madly, dancing at once for the grand finale showcase where the winners had already been picked and now the dancing was just for showing off in the last-ditch aspiration that they could interest some unseen reality dancing show talent scout who just may be hiding in the crowd. It was one where the eyes gave up all hope of focus; one where the covers meant nothing to the chills. The slightest movement became a revolt of hurt; an aching anarchic rebellion of agony. He was so sick and had been for so long that his bed had become a form-fitting, tempurpedically molded permanent place of residence, of restlessness. The distance between the bed and the toilet a Sahara Desert of certain atrophied exhaustion.

But as sick as he was, it meant nothing really, at least nothing new. He was always sick. Just as the racking of one infection waned, the racking of a new one waxed. He was sick and sick was he. Sick was his no longer new norm; his way of living (so to speak). For him to not be sick was, well...sick.

And there was no hope that his sick would ever tire of making him sick. He went to bed each night sick, knowing without no longer ever thinking that he would wake up in the morning sick, if not sicker.

Sick was both his is and his mortal will be. Death would be his healing.

But some days were better than others. Some days the pounding would subside enough to where he could hear over the blood erupting in his ears. On those days he liked to reflect and mentally compose verse.

Haiku, mostly.

He liked haiku because he got to work out his brain both philosophically (at least his haiku were deep in his pained yet hopelessly pretentious mind) and mathematically with the whole 5/7/5 thing.

During his last *Day of Haiku* – a moon or two ago maybe... he couldn't remember exactly when – he came up with a good one; at least it was one that he has since used to dwell upon during his brief moments of lucidity, when the pain ebbs just enough for reflection, but not enough for composition...

*leaves obscure the path
pilgrims lost along the way
Buddha seems to smile*

But today wasn't one of those days, one of those *Haiku Days*, that is; today was one of *those* days, one of those sicker than sick days. One of those days of constant hurt. A day of pure, unadulterated and relentless pain.

They say that pain is God's way of reminding us of all the good reasons for living.

Whenever he thought of that, whenever he could think through the pain, he had to laugh.

And even if it did set off a new revolt of hurt and ache, at least there was that.

Laughter.

Pained laughter.

Which is always better than pained crying.



The Angel in the Cracked Mirror

It's hard not to be aware of a crack in the mirror; just as it's equally hard not to recall how the crack came into being each time the crack is noticed. Yet, as distractive as both the crack and the cause of its infliction were, she didn't mind. She much rather preferred to have cause to be distracted by the crack and the sad story it had to tell than have to constantly be made aware of what it was the mirror actually was insistent upon revealing to her each time she stood before it.

The crack, initially not much to notice, began at the bottom left corner of the mirror – your standard medicine cabinet mirror (nothing fancy) – and extended upward and diagonally toward the center, and, for the time being, stopped its ascent right where the left corner of her mouth appeared whenever she had cause, or took pause, to look at herself in the mirror.

Awareness is a tricky thing: She was obviously aware of what was found in the mirror – the crack, her reflection, and all the sad stories they both had to tell – but she was not aware of her awareness. While, because of the larger mirror that was set over the sink behind her she was aware of the infinitely expanding reflections of herself in the cracked mirror, she was not yet aware of all that she saw. As a result, she did not see her infinitely expanding universal self: an expanding awareness of everything there is to know; an expanding awareness of everything that is not known; an expanding awareness of everything that is unknowable.

Everything was revealed for her in that cracked mirror and she saw it all for herself; yet, still, she remained unaware that she was aware, preferring, instead, to let her self be distracted by the crack and the sad story it had to tell.



The Moment Before He Realized He Was Happy

Even the day seemed depressed: Clouds, swollen, heavy, and low, cried and cried their raindrop tears. Though he wished he could, and though he certainly felt as if he should, he did not cry in solidarity with the clouds. The clouds cried alone and for reasons which he did not understand, and for reasons which he did not contemplate; for he had his own reasons for which he wanted to cry and for which he spent a considerable amount of time contemplating.

But the day wasn't really depressed. Intellectually, he knew that as a matter of fact; but, as a matter of feeling, he couldn't help but think that because of his own sadness, the day, too, was sad. He thought, couldn't we, by the sheer force of our moods, affect the environment around us? If our brainwaves are electric, then surely our electric thoughts must do something to that, and to those, around us, right?

He softly scoffed at that thought, knowing as a matter of fact that it was impossible for his thinking to affect the weather.

He tried to remember whether he was sad before the day turned dreary or whether the day turned dreary before he became sad. As he pondered the order of the day's depression, the clouds suddenly broke and a sharp beam of sunlight sliced its way through all the grayness and found its way through his window, turning his room into a brilliant denizen of light. The change in the room from gloom to glow was drastic and forced his eyes into a tight, reactive squint, which, in turn, forced the corners of his mouth upwards into an unsuspecting smile.



ABOUT THE BOOK

HOW NOT TO DIE: In 13 Easy Steps first took the form of an article published on my website in celebration of reaching an anniversary that medical statistics had predicted I would never reach.

To my surprise and delight, the article was well received and I was encouraged by those whom I trust most to republish it as an ebook in order to provide its message to a broader audience...

And here we are.

While the original article remains available online, I have taken the liberty to update and expand it here for clarity and completeness.

Additionally, I have supplemented this ebook edition with relevant haiku and other poems from my recently released book of poetry *SHORT VERSES & OTHER CURSES: Haiku, Senryū, Tanka & Other Poetic, Artistic, & Photographic Miscellany*, as well as a selection of similarly-themed short stories from my forthcoming collection *LEAVE: And Other Stories Short and Shorter*.

Links to the health-related articles that I have written throughout this journey of mine can be found at the end of the book.

Finally, a portion of the proceeds from the sale of this small but hope-filled book of mine will be donated monthly to my wife's and my favorite charities and organizations committed to the curing and caring of those who suffer from cancer and lung disease.

Thank you for your interest and support.

In Peace & Wellness,

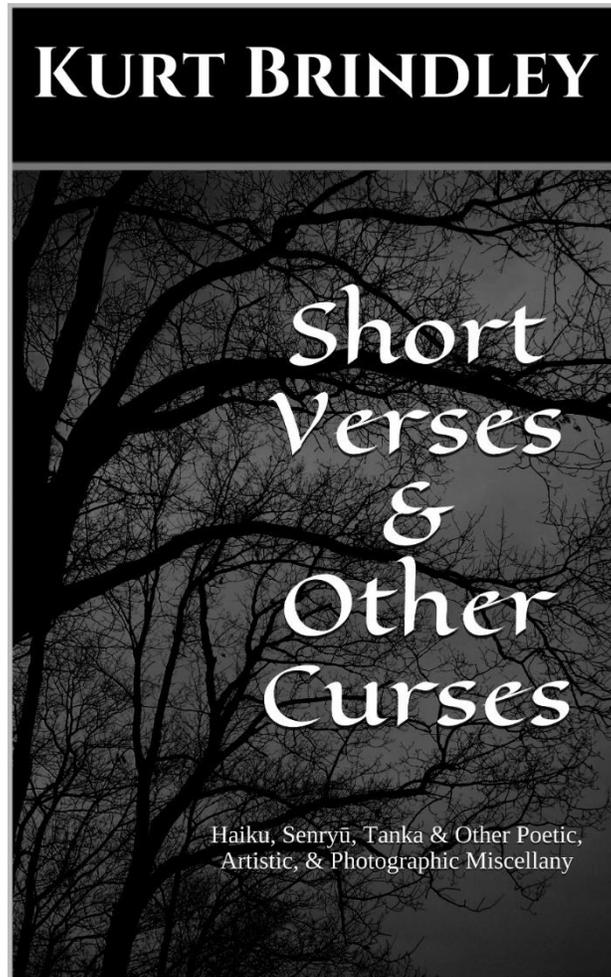
Kurt Brindley
January 5, 2016



ABOUT THE POETRY

The poems in this edition of *How Not To Die* are selections from Kurt's newly released poetry collection *Short Verses & Other Curses*.

Please click the book cover for more information.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



A husband and father of three, Kurt Brindley is a retired sailor who lives in a house on top of a windy and rolling hill. He traveled much of the world while serving in the navy and, aye, he's got some stories to tell...

When not telling stories, reading, or listening to music, he often wanders down to the bottom of his hill to walk along the countryside's many rushing creeks and silent still ponds.

He likes it there down by the water.

kurtbrindley.com



LINKS TO KURT'S HEALTH-RELATED ARTICLES

[It's Lymphoblastic!](#)

[Thank You Cancer](#)

[It's Not Lymphoblastic!](#)

[My Doctor's Explanation](#)

[My Hickman Line](#)

[Donor Update - 1/11/10](#)

[Bloodwish](#)

[Finding Out - Part I](#)

[Donor Update - 1/20/10](#)

[Finding Out - Part II](#)

[Donor Update - 2/2/10](#)

[The Registry Works!](#)

[Bone Marrow Transplant Schedule](#)

[My Donor and Me](#)

[Feeling Pretty Darn Good](#)

[One Night](#)

[Test Results](#)

[After the Transplant](#)

[Our Cancer Year](#)

[My Cancer Class, 2011](#)

[Chemo](#)

[Hair](#)

[A Bone Marrow Biopsy](#)

[I Want To Know](#)

[Lung GVHD by Any Other Name](#)

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[Stimulating News](#)

[Sayonara Marrowish](#)

[Caffeine Therapy](#)

[Caffeine Therapy - Update #1](#)

[Caffeine Therapy - Update #2](#)

[Dayglo Eyes and a Uniform Surprise](#)

[A New Anthem for Life](#)

[Ask the Question, I Dare You](#)

[No Sense, Whatsoever](#)

[Steroid Psychosis Blues](#)

[Insurance Ensures My Frustration](#)

[If You're Here You Must Be Sick...](#)



