

# 20190523\_theslowdown\_20190523\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, buchanan, lymphoma, felt, life, heave, functions, life threatening illness, reexamined, talk, blood, story, remind, perspiring, draw, cancer, aspects, residue, tells, misguided

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I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy Casey. And this is the slow down.

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One of the many practical ways

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poems feel useful is that they allow you to look closely at small pieces of a larger, ongoing story. A poem can help you to revisit a single season from your life, or a single moment. A poem can rescue details that might otherwise be overshadowed by other aspects of the big picture, like a period of elation that preceded a major devastation, or an instant of clarity that didn't last but was nevertheless vividly felt. poems that dwell on difficult or harrowing aspects of life, serve a practical purpose. They remind us that we really have made it through what we thought would undo us. They also give us the chance to honor our own endurance and resilience, and to give thanks for our luck. I'm reminded of these lines from the late great poet Lucille Clifton, quote, come celebrate with me that every day, something has tried to kill me and has failed. And today's poem, the year I had cancer by Brad Buchanan, the speaker tells his story of being diagnosed with a life threatening illness, lymphoma. For those of us with friends, or loved ones who have gone through cancer, a poem like this brings much needed language to something that can be frightening to talk about. It offers one person's answer to the question few of us muster the courage to ask, what was it like? It tells one person's story of what it felt like to live day by day, through a time when not even his body's simplest functions could be taken for granted. Buchanan's poem opens with the line. One day, we will all talk about it this way. I read that as an attempt to draw a firm boundary around the year in question, to corral it off from the rest of the

speaker's life. It turns the poem into both an honest testimony and a plea for the then of illness, and the now of health to respect the border that has been drawn between them. The year I had cancer by Brad Buchanan. One day, we will all talk about it this way. That was the month when I started to wonder and decided to go to the doctor when they were so sure it wasn't lymphoma, and the lumps first appeared on my stomach. When my blood counts were reexamined in light of the internet and anecdotes. When they wanted to study the architecture of the nodule, they chord with their special gun. When I started perspiring, and coughing, and they admitted, they might have been wrong, when the insurance would not go along, and a second opinion had to be found. When I was proud to have something so rare, and spouted my own misguided blood when my left lung, abandoned all functions, and made the right one heave like a hero. When I went back in for more chemo, and found it was easier next time through when waiting was all anyone could do. And I shaved off my beard and hair. When my body slowly sluiced away the poisonous residue of niaf Tay when I got the transplant they called a cure. And I picked life right back up again, or I had left it the year before. The slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.