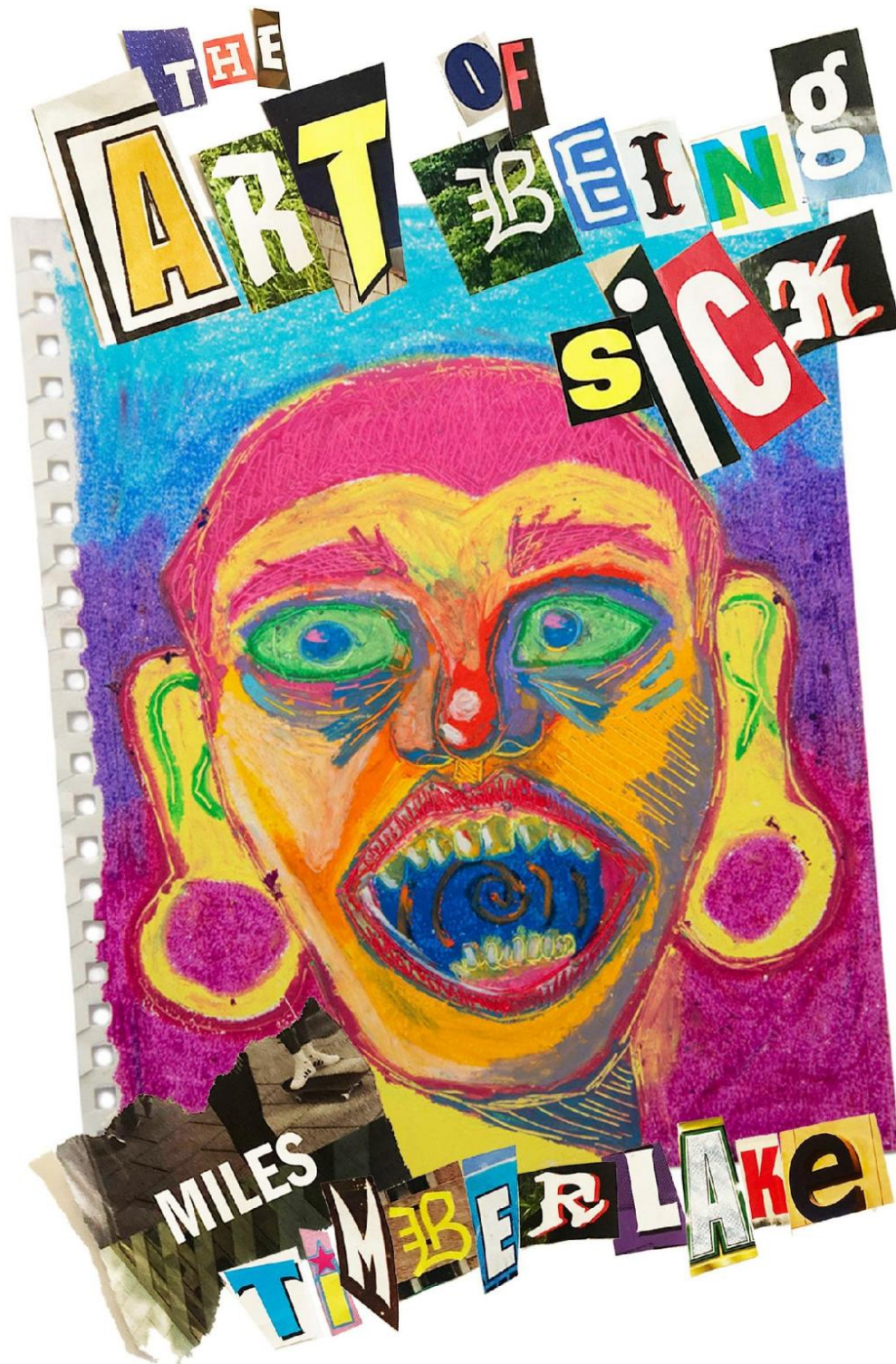




The Art of Being Sick

Miles Timberlake

I'm the first person I've actually known with cancer.

You can never really know how it feels until cancer happens to you.



After I was diagnosed it seemed like everyone had some kind of cancer story for me.
 "My mom's friend...".
 "My brother's teacher...".
 "My dog...".

I think people were trying to tell me they cared about me and wanted me to feel better about the situation, but mostly it made my cancer diagnosis feel insignificant.

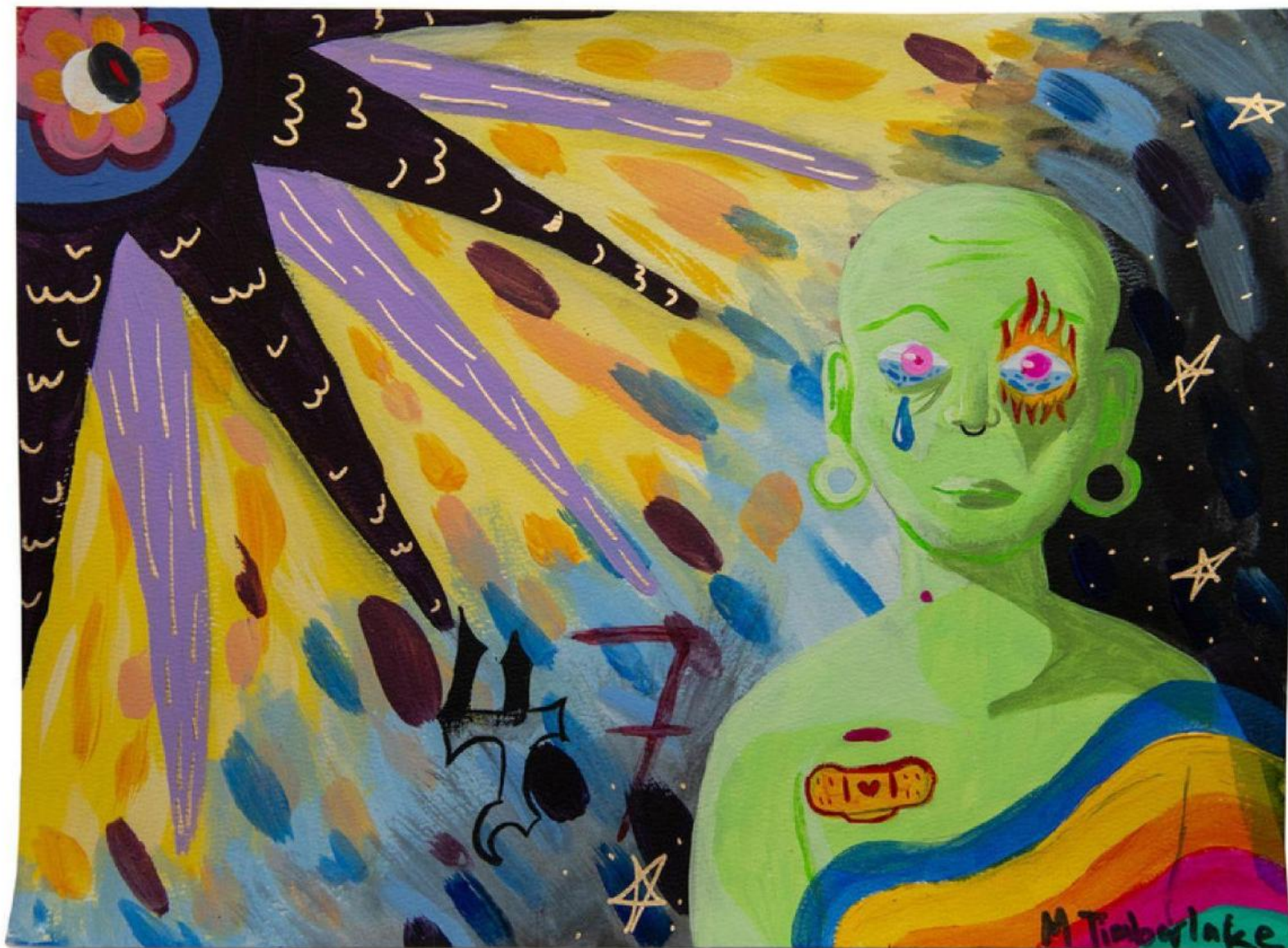
Cancer changes almost everything.

Sometimes change can be a good thing, but with cancer its mostly not. Most things that changed for me were just fine the way they were.

Cancer sucks because I didn't get to pick what things changed and what things stay the same. Cancer decided for me. After I was diagnosed with cancer, everything just stopped and life just hung there while we waited to see what would happen next.

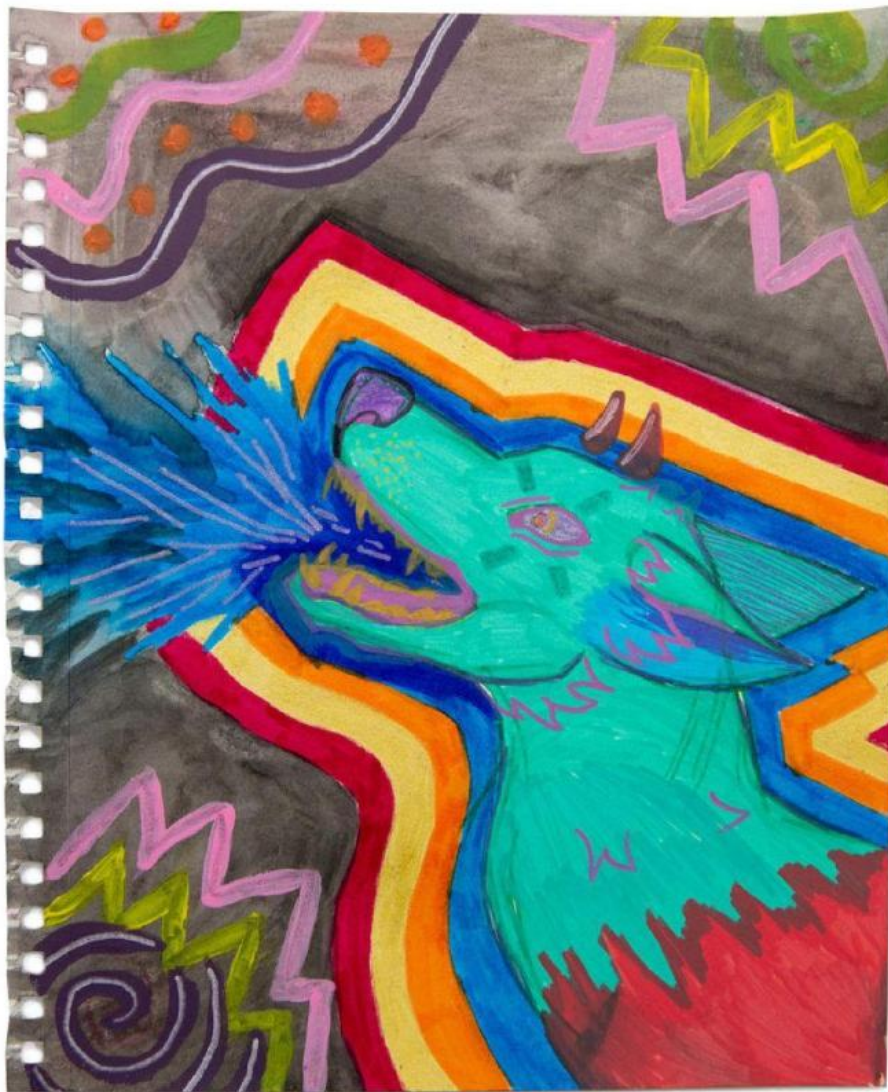
2. Self portrait - green

**“Will the medicine work?
What if it doesn’t?”**



Some of the cancer changes aren't that big of a deal. My sense of taste changed. I used to love baby carrots, but now I'm a pickle person.

3. Scream

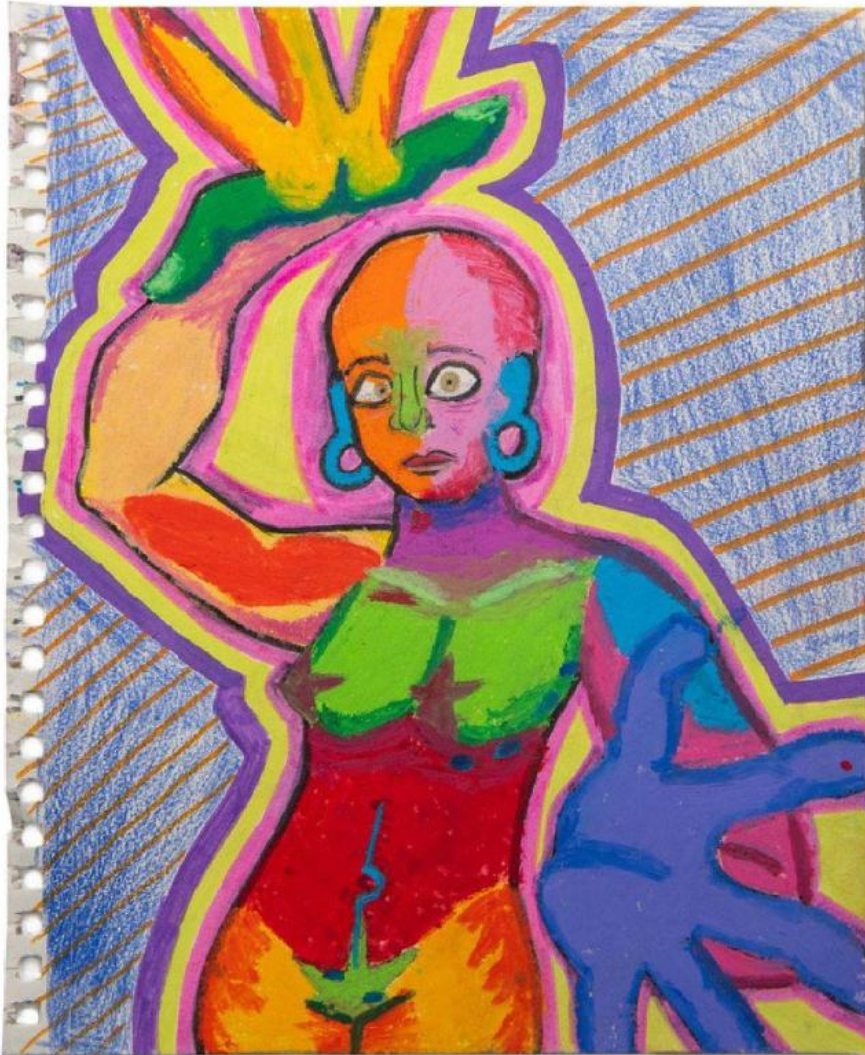


Carrots are whatever, but other changes hit harder. My body feels different. I'm tired and out of breath a lot. My body looks different. My hair is gone. I've lost weight. I'm sick to my stomach all the time.

Things with my people changed too. It can hard to be around someone with cancer because all anyone wants is to be with the person and not the cancer. When we love someone who is sick it can feel tricky to know what to say or do. We want to say "I love you," but sometimes don't know how because cancer can make us question everything we thought we knew, including knowing the right way to say "I love you."

Sometimes we say "I love you" with words. Sometimes those words sound like the words "I love you." But other times the words we use to say "I love you" sound like "lets binge watch dumb TV and eat nachos." Or, "I made a casserole for you."

Other times people want to say "I love you" but they don't know how to say it because cancer makes everything so friggin' awkward. Sometimes people say hurtful things without meaning to — even the people we love the most.



Bro, I don't need you to point out that I'm living your worst nightmare.

4. Thermal

And even if having cancer has brought me closer to God, saying so doesn't land like you might think. It's hard because on top of the cancer I've had to learn to be graceful in a new way.

The best text I ever got was simple.

“How did your new chemo go yesterday?”

It wasn't a text about chemo, it was a text about me. They were asking about my cancer the same way you'd ask someone about algebra. That text mattered so much because cancer is really isolating.

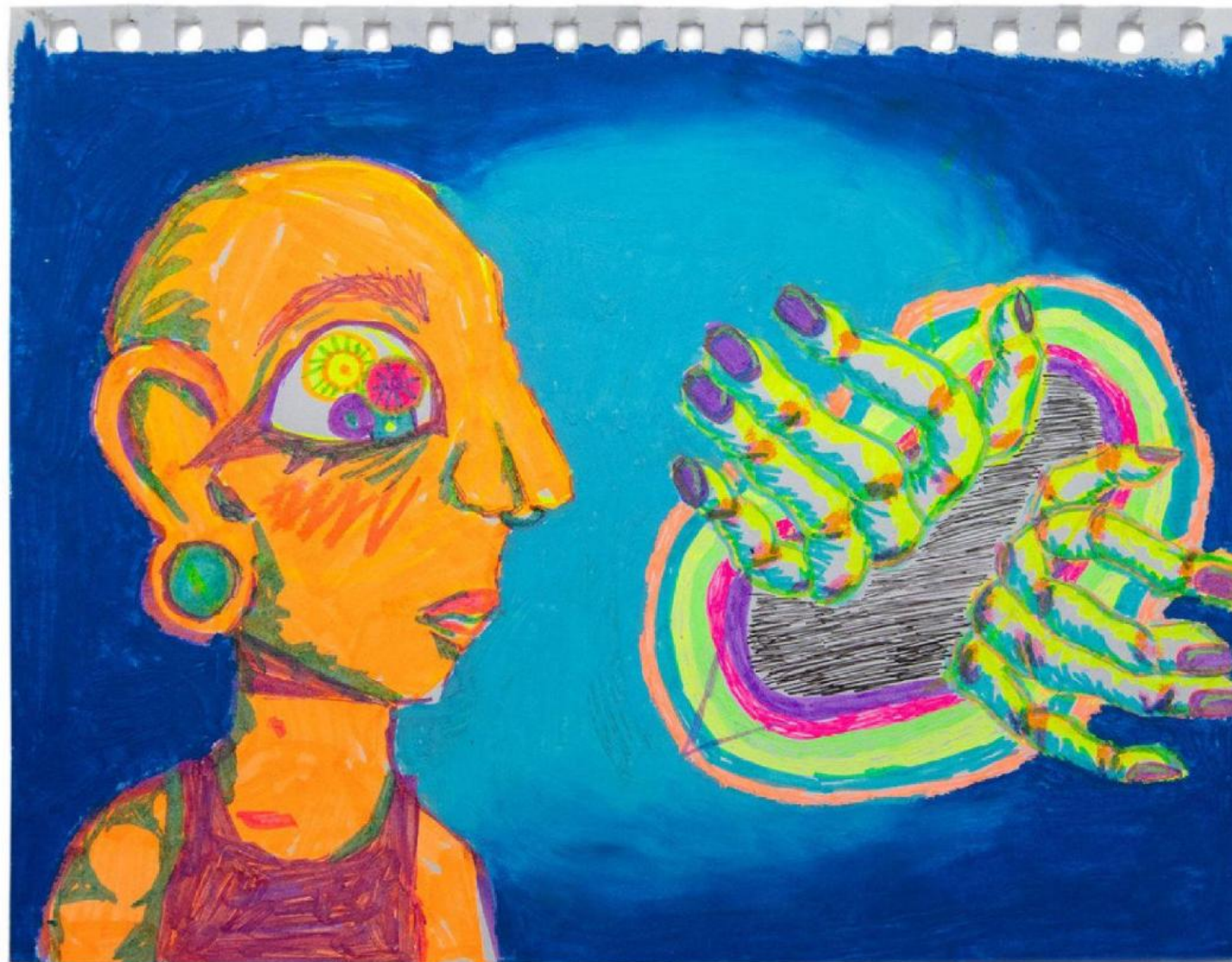
After my first surgery, my friend Faith came over and hung out. We didn't do anything super exciting, we were just there together. She kept showing up. Sometimes she would bring other friends over to hang out. It never really mattered what we were doing. What mattered was that we were together. Cancer was there and everyone knew it, but it just did our thing anyway.



ut its not always
chill like this.

After I was
diagnosed with cancer
random people start
showing up out of
nowhere. Sometimes
it feels like people are
nice to me because they
like the way it makes
them feel.

**After my
diagnosis,
I got a lot
of social
media
friend
requests.
I'm not
sure why.**



5. Self portrait - orange

Were they interested in me? Was it morbid curiosity about the kid with cancer? Sometimes their attention felt performative like “hey everyone, look at me being nice to the kid with cancer.” I wish most of those people had asked themselves “Would I reach out if Miles didn’t have cancer?” before they sent the friend request.



relationships were hard enough when I was healthy, but now that I'm dealing with cancer sometimes they just feel like work.

Like on top of having cancer, now I have to entertain or be polite to all these people who are suddenly curious about me because they know this really personal thing.

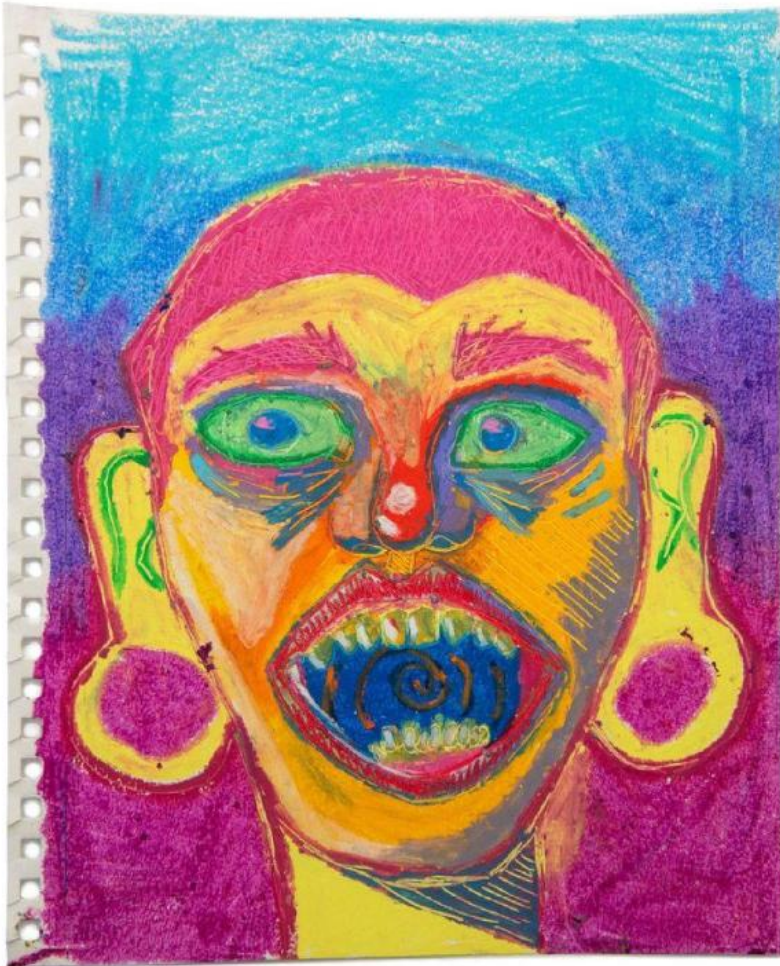
**Maybe
just
be nice
whether
people
have
cancer
or not.**





aving cancer means I'm the center of attention a lot. That can be hard because it can feel like I'm the center of attention because I'm sick.

Sometimes all the attention and sympathetic gestures are overwhelming. Sometimes it isn't a good time for company — even from the people I love the most. When that happens, I just need people to be okay with me not being okay.



7. Me



8. Port

**It's not you.
It's cancer.**

There's a weird stigma with cancer. Sometimes people are suspicious of my joy, like "What could possibly be so funny?" Maybe people think I'm going to be sad all the time or that it's not okay for me to experience joy because, you know, maybe I might die.

**Bro, we're all going to die.
Cancer has taken a lot away from
me, but it will never steal my joy.**



9. Show me your teeth



ecause even though I have cancer and even though cancer has taken a lot away from me, I'm lucky, it can always be worse.

So just go and do your stuff. Hang out with friends and do your thing.

It genuinely does not matter what other people think about you, like at all.

Just get off your ass and do stuff.

I missed out on things when I was first diagnosed because

I was worried what people would think when they saw me. I should have been living my life the whole time, not worrying if people thought I was gross.

Cancer sucks, but I can't shy away from the difficult parts.

Yes, it's different when you're 16 than when you're 70, but I'm chill with it.

I was planning on living my best life before I was diagnosed.



C

ancer changed
a lot of things,
but not that.

Of course
I have
my crash-
outs, but
I'm still
planning
on living
my best life
no matter
what.



12. Dying of thirst

Cancer took a lot of things from me, just not my joy.

