

Cancer Struggles and Sinead O'Connor's "He Moved Through the Fair"

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October 18, 2023 By [Robin McGee](#)

I have been getting emails from some of you wondering how I am doing. This always serves as an indication to me that I am overdue for a blog post.

I was finally able to get started on a chemo protocol in late July. It is comprised of four drugs - two I have had before (irinotecan and 5 FU) and 2 new ones (Olaparib and Avastin). This protocol has proved tolerable but fragile. The drugs involved are known to cause anemia and raise blood pressure. Every cycle has been compromised by some issue - blood pressure too high, recurrent UTIs, or blood counts that are too low. I had my last chemo cancelled for these reasons. I have never had such problems before.

I cannot say if I am better (a scan down the road will tell), but treatment did seem to stop the excruciating sciatica-like pain from developing further. I started heavier pain medications (nortriptyline and gabapentin) around that time, so it is possible that the pain is merely masked. My right leg and foot remain functionally compromised. It is a sensation like the foot is both sprained and inside a downhill ski boot. It is painful and stiff. However, it has not developed "foot drop" yet, a condition in which one cannot lift the foot at all. Walking is quite effortful, as now both neuropathic legs shout with pain when I go any distance or go uphill.

One bizarre and unexpected side effect of these treatments - Cueball-hood! The day after my second treatment, I went into the shower with a full head of hair and came out completely bald. When I touched my hair, it came out in huge handfuls - all of it, sparing only my eyelashes and eyebrows. The photo shows my surprise. Unlike previous times when thinning hair made me shave it, my head is now smoothly bald all over with no hint of growth after many weeks. Because I cannot find my old headscarves, I had to start all over with new ones. Thanks to those out there who donated some. My role as Lex Luthor awaits!

We managed a trailer getaway to the Gaspé region. Alas, torrential rains everyday but one meant we could not really see the natural beauty of the place. We tried Keji for a few days with the same result. My Ottawa trip fared better. My six-minute talk at the Canadian Medical Association went

well. I raised the point that Canada is the only nation with socialized medicine that does not have a national pharmacare program (much applause) and that it is impossible to remove emotion from the debate over public versus private healthcare (even more applause). Many came up to me later to praise how it went. The summit had many great ideas on how to address the physician shortages. I hope something good comes out of it. I was able to visit my family, and that was very healing.

Recently we have lost many beloved music artists. The famous and adored Robbie Robertson, formerly of The Band, died last month. Nova Scotians lost our hero Bruce Guthro of Cape Breton. Ireland and the world mourned the striking Sinead O'Connor. The latter was a visionary, seeing the sexual corruption at the heart of the Catholic Church long before the rest of us did. When she ripped up that picture of the Pope on SNL, I saw it live. For her protest she was ostracized and essentially lost her singing career. She carried on nonetheless, like cancer patients must do.

Because each one of these artists made a claim on my heart, my song choice was a difficult one. After much musing, I have chosen an old Irish ballad "He moved through the fair" sung by Sinead O'Connor. Although it is not explicit, Irish listeners to this haunting song would recognize that the lover has died by the final verse. I choose it today for this intimation of mortality. If you have one Celtic drop of blood in your ancestry, you will be greatly moved by it; not only for its poignant lyrics, but for the otherworldly sound of Sinead's unparalleled voice. It gives me chills every time I hear it.

My own love said to me

"My mother won't mind

And my father won't slight you

For your lack of kind"

He went away from me

And this he did say

"It will not be long, love

'Til our wedding day"

He went away from me

And he moved through the fair

And slowly I watched him

Move here and move there

He went his way homeward

With one star awake

As the swan in the evening

Moves over the lake

I dreamed last night

That my own love came in

He came in so sweetly

His feet made no din

He stepped up beside me

And this he did say

"It will not be long, love

'Til our wedding day"

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