

A Road

Bruce Shriver, April 2002

"Cancer", he said, "and here are your options."
The results of the biopsy were now known.
Although I thought I had prepared myself for this possibility,
I confess that, for a moment, I rejected the pathologist's analysis.
But then, in the chair across from him,
I decide to tell others of my cancer in an impersonal,
factual way, letting them know I accept it.
They must know little of my feelings.
Yet, when alone in the silence of my dimly lit room, I feel betrayed.
What have I done to my body that it has turned against me?
I feel empty, but for the cancer's presence, which I am now aware.
I realize this is a road I must ultimately walk down alone.

"Cancer", he said. So I chose one of his options.
A whole new set of concepts must be learned and assimilated
As if, in the learning, acceptance and comfort surely follow.
Anatomical retropubic prostatectomy, nerve sparing,
hemotocrit, staging pelvic lymphadenectomy, the
dorsal vein complex, positive surgical margin, and
metastasis are among a seemingly never ending list.
But, in fact, little acceptance or comfort follow.
"We can schedule the surgery six weeks from now," he said.
Six endless weeks to wait for the surgeon to begin
the process with an incision in my abdomen from the navel to the pubic bone.
I pray that the surgeon's hands are guided by the Master Surgeon
As I want to dance at my granddaughters' and grandsons' weddings
And salute life and love with my friends well into the future.

"Cancer", he said. Fears must be faced.
Friends and strangers, all survivors, share their stories with me.
Anxious and filled with anxiety, I contemplate post-surgical life.
Who will be my new bedfellows?
Incontinence, impotence, and recurrence?
Will I be less of a husband? Will I become a burden?
How will our lives be changed?
"Please be patient with me", I tell my wife,
"my acceptance and comfort are a little low right now.
Will you walk down this road with me, as far as you can?"

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