

28 days

28 days ago, I get a call in the evening: my mom got admitted to her nearest hospital. She had been bothered by some tricky back pain. Over the previous weeks, that pain had increased in spite of robust medication, and now mom could not sit still, could not lay down, could not sleep. Eventually, even the toughest have got to call an ambulance. Imaging revealed shocking news: a dirty spot in one lung, and a growth on a lower cervical vertebra. Of course that hurts.

21 days ago mom rides an ambulance to a nearby city to get her first radiotherapy session. This fucking cancer is already old and entrenched, but we can slow it down. We count ahead in prudent months, but maybe there can add into years? The paramedic that rides along is cute, she says — she flirts a good story out of this zap of gamma rays. Relief from pain does a woman wonders.

14 days ago, the pain is back. This is counterintuitive, but zapping tissue hurts it, and hurt tissue gets inflamed

and swells. When the thing that swells is a bone-adjacent growth that was already pinching a major nerve, *boila*, ow. My sister gets concerned at what's going on, so she goes to mom's bedside. I play what I feel is an important supporting role in a marquee 2-week workshop at the office, so hang in there, mom & sis. All tag-team in 12 days, and besides the radio will have taught this cancer to keep a low profile in just a few days.

5 days ago, my sister calls me at work. Mom slips into intense pain

again, and she calls me to her bedside. I drop the workshop in the hands of my team, and I drive all the way from Ottawa to my home town. Once there, I learn that the radio was too little too late, and the cancer is now speeding up its business. Mom is entering palliative care. The morphine is keeping her painless enough. Something is blocking a nerve that would control her larynx, and thus her voice has gone. She speaks in murmurs, like a breeze through the trees in

the winter. But she simply won't shut up regardless. And all who visit get the same messages of love and tenderness. This is where she gives me the best hug, the closest and truest and most bullshit-clearing hug she ever gave me. She does not merely close me to her heart, she hangs to my shoulders and neck too, with her warm hands on ~~my~~ my head. I love you so, so much, she says. I am completely proud of you, she says. Remember, she says. And I say I love you, mom, in turn.

I say thank you for all your love, for having done so much of what brought me here, in these ~~shoes~~ shoes, in between these two ears of mine. I say I'm proud of her too. Things start looking like time can be counted in weeks, so four days ago I drive back home.

Three days ago her night ends into a new spike of pain, and I get a call in the dark of the morning. I wake up Louis, Laurent and M'elodie, and we drive from Gatineau while the city awakes. Mom is awake and comfortable and she is

delighted to see us, and to hug and kiss us all once more. Mom's closest people visit, the air is dense with love and damp with tears. As the night sets in, I commit to sleep on a hospital armchair, right by her side.

Two days ago I hold mom's hand as she endures new waves of pain. In order to ease her into better comfort, she gets a new painkiller with anti-inflammatory benefits, but which would disrupt the management of her diabetes. This aligns with her wishes to avoid harsh life augmentation, so we stop giving her

insulin. Time is now counted in fleeting hours. She still speaks but is not always super coherent. She flits between sleep and wakefulness at times. She has shrunk so small. Sister massages lotion into her hands. It is an incredible privilege to care for her.

Yesterday, after hours of toneless sleep, she opened her eyes and raised her head. Her sisters, kids and grand kids surrounded her, holding her hand. She smiled! We were here with her.

Source of
this paper



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