

## About Bruce A. McClelland at Martha Jefferson Hospital

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Perhaps it is because I grew up in a medical household – my mother was a medical records librarian – that I have always felt comfortable around hospitals. I even worked in one a couple of summers when I was in high school, as a sheet metal helper/trainee. I don't remember any instances of hospital-related trepidation, even when, five years ago now, I woke up in the UVA CCU after three days in an induced coma following sudden cardiac arrest on the tennis courts at Boar's Head Sports Club. But that is not to say that all hospitals are equal, capable of providing not just the highest levels of care, but also enabling the very experience of hospitalization to be as calm and reassuring as possible, given sometimes extreme circumstances.

I am of a generation when the very mention of the 'C word' – *Cancer* – often produced embarrassed, hushed tones and ambivalence about what to say next. Yet when, in 2022, I had my initial consults with Martha Jefferson radiation oncologists Drs. Sylvia Hendrix and Anthony Crimaldi, the diagnosis of aggressive (Gleason score 8-9) prostate cancer and the treatment plan (8 weeks of Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy (IMRT) and androgen deprivation therapy) felt more like a rational business decision than making plans for end-of-life.

As a former medical writer and current medical translator from Russian and Bulgarian, I am acutely aware of how the seriousness of medical problems can vary, and I am therefore extremely grateful that despite serious attacks on my physical well-being later in life (I'm 75 as of this writing), I am still doing better than "just kicking." Much of that good fortune comes from having received top-notch medical care and support. My experience at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital was – and I hope you will believe me – actually *enjoyable!*

Let me explain. For each session during my 8-week course, I would have to prepare by drinking lots of water in advance, then I would arrive at the SMJH Cancer Center, sign in, and wait to be called in for radiation. I would then have to change into a gown and go into the room where I would be positioned by laser beams in a large linear accelerator (LINAC), which delivered varying doses of radiation to my tumor sites as it moved around me for a few minutes. I had to be absolutely still to make sure that the radiation affected only the location that had been planned by the doctors.

Since I came in every day, I got to know the technical staff, who were extremely kind, and they all had a great sense of humor, yet I never got the impression that they didn't take their important jobs seriously: they were rigorous in carrying out procedures correctly to ensure that my care was delivered appropriately, that the radiation was affecting only the parts of my body that were necessary and not involving nearby organs.

In the first week of this treatment, lying completely still as this enormous, expensive machine moved around me, it occurred to me (I have a strange sense of humor) that it was like I had to be still because I was being sniffed by an enormous bear from outer space. I told a friend of mine about this, and she laughingly called the LINAC "Sniffy the Space Bear." From that time on, every day I went in for treatment, I was going to see Sniffy the Space Bear.

The treatment plan worked better than I would have expected. At the end of the eight weeks, like all patients at Martha Jeff who undergo such therapies, I was invited to ring the Treatment Completion Bell. I was almost sad that I wouldn't be coming back, to see not only Sniffy, but the radiation oncology team that had supported my care.

I felt I wanted to give Martha Jefferson some sort of donation in addition to money. Since one of my photographs was already in their permanent collection from an earlier show, I contacted Renee Dinwiddie to find out how to go about donating photographs if they wanted them. She followed up by selecting a print of a crocus from the Rhodope Mountains in Bulgaria (now used as part of a greeting card set the hospital has produced), and a shot of a house in the mountains of Transylvania. These images are now in the new break room in the Cancer Center.

Not long ago, I felt that perhaps another way to give back to the hospital that had treated me so well was to provide whatever volunteer services I could, particularly in the areas of photography and website usability analysis. As a result, I am now a full-fledged volunteer at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital. And, oh yes, I ought to mention that at my last follow-up visit, just a week ago, on the basis of my lab results, I was told by my doctor that my PCa was effectively "cured." This time, he called "Cure" the "C word." Fine with me.