

A journey through cancer – Auriol de Smidt

Who knows where a journey into cancer begins? I was born in 1932 in Zimbabwe, (then Rhodesia), just after the depression. Cooper mining had closed down, my father and mother had lost their livelihoods. In my first year, while my mother expected a second child, our small house was burnt to the ground. From this 'nothing' our family arose. There was never a lot, but always enough, thanks to my parent's skill and hard work. We lived, far from the poverty of the cities, close to the wealth of the 'veld'. There my brother and I grew up, until boarding school intervened. This was a pioneer atmosphere where resourcefulness and exploration always found 'another way' to meet each challenge. It fostered courage, confidence in the generosity of the earth, and in the strength of the human spirit. Nevertheless boarding school at the age of nearly eight years was an abandonment. I had never slept away from home before. It was the beginning of an eight year servitude in which I recollect very little joy, but much learning. It firmed my resolution to find 'another way' to educate my own children.

My five children grew up in Cape Town and went to Steiner School. I became a teacher there. These were the strenuous years, as mother and teacher; my husband became ill. But they were good times too, with many rich friendships. In 1982 I came to Britain for further training, followed by a teaching post in Sussex. My husband died. Now the family was spread out across the globe. As teacher and single parent of our two younger children I 'soldiered on'. Although my health was good, my years under the hot sun in Africa had left me with a lesion on one cheek; later diagnosed as Bowen's skin cancer. This led me, at last, to mistletoe, or Iscadore, as the carefully gathered and extracted, herbal essence is called.

Bowen's skin cancer is very slow-growing form of illness. It is normally treated with chemotherapy which aims to destroy the errant cells. Iscadore has an opposite effect. Iscadore stimulates the body's immune system. My picture of the plant is that of a kind of benign cancer on a tree; it has one single root. In the human body I picture it tapping on every cell door: 'Wake up, there is an intruder here. Don't go to sleep'. In 2007 I was planning to explore the use of this very ancient healing substance. Then, one blustery night in Scotland, where I now live, I received a sharp blow on my upper arm, from a heavy door in the wind. A few weeks later a strange 'bruise' emerged under the skin of my arm. A visit to Dr Niessan, NHS, confirmed that she thought it was serious enough to make an appointment with a surgeon.

Now I had two reasons to meet Dr Maurice Orange, Anthroposophic doctor, and to discuss his experience with the use of Iscadore. Our meeting remains in my mind as an island of calm and clarity in a time of confusion. I felt immediately that here was someone working in a way I could trust. I remember him telling me:

"We are all 'cancering' all the time.' (i.o.w. We build more cells than our body needs.) 'But the immune system reminds the body when it is time to stop. The mistletoe treatment reawakens, it stimulates, the immune system. It reminds the body of its proper limits," This sounded good to me and I agreed to start low dose injections. Then he said:

"We could inject straight into the lump on your arm." How I wish now that I had accepted this offer! But at that point in my journey I had not yet really met the 'being of Cancer'; nor

experienced its transformative powers. I had already made plans to have the lump removed surgically and so that part of the message fell on deaf ears. I now know that it could have saved me much more trouble, delay and pain if I had heard it. I went to visit Mr Miller, the surgeon. He stated flatly

“That’s malignant.” I wriggled.

“It started with a bruise”, I said.

“Coincidence”, he replied.

But during the next weeks the tomato-red, weeping and smelly lump confirmed his diagnosis. This was the extraordinary, very visible and intrusive being called Cancer. My body boundaries were breaking down. I had left them to look after themselves, trusting that they ‘knew’ their forms and direction. But I, as an individual, was often unable to set myself clear goals or life tasks and stick to them. Yes, I was and still am, a philosopher, a poet and teacher, but in the individual form and direction of my activities, in each moment of my life, there was still much confusion. Vivien, my friend and Homeopath, had said:

“Cancer says; Get in touch with your Self or die”. Here was a thought to work with.

August '07: I wrote in my diary: Tonight the ‘baby’ is creamed and bandaged – more comfortable; though it was difficult to do with my left hand. The ‘baby’ seems a good name. I want to feel sympathy for this gross intrusion on my right arm... I can see that Dr Niessan is worried. I am caught in the worry-trap too, whenever my thoughts get on their hamster-wheel. But I have a deep reservoir of certainty and confidence, too, which I can draw on.’ I keep watch and I pray a lot. Diana allows me to cry, Bless her! Tears are good medicine... Suddenly I am beginning to map the circle of love: my brother, my family, friends. Mari will come and give me another injection tonight, even though she is moving house and very busy.’

Of Iscadore I wrote, after the first few injections: ‘I feel as if I am borne, floating down the road, entirely sheltered. I am inside a Garden of Protection. Now I know why people smile when they mention Iscadore – their eyes open wider – to take in a different world.’
And... ‘I am reading the Bible (John Madsens rendering) like a diviner, reading the entrails of life; discovering the mystery again and again.’

During this, much delayed, time of waiting for surgery I am supported by Vivien and Helen Petra, a healer and inspirer. I make many life-discoveries with Toveki and go on deep journeys in my long times alone. Journeys into and, resolutely, out of fear. I am certain that remaining in fear hinders healing.’

Finally, in September, the lump was removed, carefully by Mr Miller, without interfering in the lymph system, and was covered with a graft from the leg. But this was not the end of the story, because the paraffin-gel dressing, with which the two wounds were regularly covered, did not affect any healing or skin growth. For six weeks the nurses and I struggled. Finally I took charge of the dressings myself and found that honey was the best healer. Within a week the skin had begun to regrow.

Early '08: A year has gone by since the first blow on my arm which triggered the cancer. "Oncologist, Dr Macdonald, finds no visible sign of further cancer, but there is a lump under my arm which bothers him. He wants me to have five weeks x-ray therapy.'

I wrote: 'Neither surgeon nor oncologist know for sure what this 'swollen gland' is due to. One wants to knife it, the other to RT it. Maurice Orange and I both ask for a full body scan, but it is refused' (In the light of the future, that was another missed chance... to read the entrails in a practical sense!!) I ask Vivien Maule for homeopathic support again, for clarity in this time of indecision. Then, 'Everything starts to move.' I phone Dr. Teresa McCaffrey at Clan House in Aberdeen, for her very experienced advice. She is straight forward: 'The lump is almost certainly a secondary cancer. It could become very painful.' She suggests Mistletoe, without biopsy, followed by RT or surgery if necessary. No chemo... it could affect the nerve. Don't delay!

Now I am swiftly transferred through the NHS to Dr Stefan Geider, also a qualified Anthroposophic doctor, at Camphill Medical Practice in Aberdeen. This will become my regular centre for Mistletoe, massage and movement during the coming years; for transfusions of Iscadore as well as practical help and healing; a little beehive of nurturing activity, around the presence of Dr Stefan Geider, and his associates. Any stronger treatment with Iscadore would need to be started in a clinical setting and with an expert, so I return to Dr Maurice Orange.

My first stay was fairly short; meeting him and getting to understand more of the treatment and possibilities of Iscadore. Now my ears were open. I no longer thought that surgery, or other options, would be 'quick fixes' for the journey of cancer. More humble, more real, more willing to engage, I listen to what he has to say; that Iscadore could be given as a support to RT; it was not necessarily an either or choice. I did some thinking:

'Cancer sounds to me like a breakdown in the body's ability to say 'no'. The immune system is not doing its work properly. RT attacks the immune system at the same time as it attacks the errant cells. Surely it would be better for me to remind my immune system to do its proper work first.' With this homemade advice, I decided whole-heartedly to do all in my power to enhance nature's work with Iscadore and all other sensible means and I heard myself say, with perfect determination:

"I am not going to have RT now. Give me all the mistletoe you can advise". My diary records: 'Mistletoe is a work, but I am choosing it. Pain and fever open the heart'. The injections were given by intravenous drip and also directly into the lump – from about 3cms to 5cms, inflammation spreading below it. Three days ill and three days to recover. A month later I had a repeat treatment with, again, large amounts of Iscadore, but this time only two days of reaction. Lump still very swollen – 'injection burns its way into the underarm area', my diary records. But in between I am full of adventure and exploration as I take on a new zest for life. "The side effects of mistletoe are courage, confidence and hope!" Dr Maurice exclaimed and, looking back, I can see this expressed in all that I took on, in between visits. The sense of dull struggle which I had experienced while waiting for and recovering from the operation, were quite missing from these four and half months in which I was engaged in intense Iscadore treatment. From the moment I committed, as Goethe is famously quoted, everything moved to support me.

My wonderful community of friends, encouraged by Barbara S. and relatives found, between them, the money needed for this extra-ordinary journey. (May they be forever blessed!) The NHS, in

persons of rules and doctors, had no experience of Iscadore. To them 'it had not been proven' and they could not give it their blessing. (Since then there has been considerable support in obtaining the herb from Europe. But this was their first encounter in Aberdeen.) It was arranged that I would attend the Camphill Medical Practice weekly, to receive the same large doses in intravenous and inter-lesionary injections. The fever and inflamed reaction had now diminished sufficiently for the journey. So five hours down and five hours back, with a night in between, every week I went. It became my pilgrimage for healing. Gladly undertaken as I felt the lump under my arm grow steadily smaller.

Four and a half months of this intense, weekly treatment, together with the much smaller amounts which I was injecting myself twice a week and I was back with Dr Maurice Orange. This time with NO LUMP!! We danced together!! It was a victory not only for me but for the Angel of Iscadore. We began to reduce the frequency of the intravenous injections; there was literally no lump under the arm at all. But, if we had been granted the whole body scan, which had been requested from the NHS six months earlier, we would have known that our journey was not yet complete.

Throughout my diary notes, a smaller comment runs: 'Digestion troublesome. Is it something in my diet? Is it caused by the mistletoe? Etc.' All along it seemed a far smaller issue than the obvious cancer. I tried various remedies, commented on it to all doctors, but not with great emphasis.... This was me 'soldiering on' again! This was the boarding school child who did not make a fuss. The one who had not yet formed a clear picture of her own life tasks or embraced their importance.

January 20th '09 Three months later I visited the oncologist for a check-up. Told him clearly that the 'digestive' issue was troubling me and asked for a scan to make sure that there was no hidden lump lurking. He checked me over and refused the scan again – though he congratulated me on the disappearing underarm lump – And advised me to contact my local GP.

Five days later, 24/1/09, I found myself in hospital with a ruptured bowel. Operation revealed that a third kind of cancer had been quietly brewing, maybe over many years. If we had known that it was there, much more could have been done to meet the challenge. Now it was out... literally. This was a huge family crisis. My dear children flew in to call me back from death. All that love, care, wisdom and skill given to me by so many wonderful doctors, surgeons, homeopath and friends, together with the foresters and pharmacists, who prepared the herbs. All well as my own family members who supported my convalescence at home. I am alive and well now because of them all. There is a saying from Africa, which goes something like this: 'People are only people through people.'

Now I begin to regain my normal weight. Regular scans show no further malignancy and I feel my old health and vitality returning. I have had two operations, which I now know might have been avoidable, but not any RT or Chemo-therapy. A year and a half has passed since the last drama. I am still attending the Camphill Medical Practice once a month. Injecting myself with Iscadore has become a 'nae bother' routine. I revel in the healing extras of massage and eurythmy, with Ingrid and Marei, helping to shape-up new habits of care and consciousness in my body and soul. Deep gratitude fills my heart, especially for Dr Maurice Orange and Dr Stefan Geider, who are pioneering this work with Iscadore. It is a strenuous and sometimes lonely task to be a pioneer; it requires selfless devotion. But where would humanity be without them? Stuck in a rut!

Through all these challenges and difficulties I have been greatly enriched. I thank the initiation of Cancer, which has brought me to a much deeper healing. Now, at 78, every day is a new beginning, a new unfolding of the Presence within and about me. Living my life becomes an honourable adventure.