

Ode to Bob

May your song always be sung / May you stay forever young.
—Bob Dylan

When I was in high school, I became fascinated with folk music. The more “ethnic,” as we called it then, the better. No polished Peter, Paul and Mary for me. My favorites were Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly, and Pete Seeger. To be like Pete, I bought a long neck Vega 5-string banjo and learned dozens of songs about our country, the rape of the land, and the downtrodden, which I played and sang in the suburbs of New York.

When I became a first-year man at the University of Virginia in 1963, I believe that just 3 black students were attending the school. All of them were athletes, and they boarded together in the basement of one of the dormitories. There were 31 fraternities, of which 3 were for Jewish students. Crossover membership was forbidden, although we regularly partied at each other’s houses.

I became totally obsessed with this new kid on the block, Bob Dylan. I learned his songs; adopted his voice in my everyday life; and bent a coat hanger to hold my harmonica while I played guitar, much like he did. A buddy and I formed a folk duet. We were quite awful, but very serious about what we were doing. We saw a poster for an upcoming hootenanny at St Anne’s, a posh, private, all-girls high school in town. We rehearsed with a vengeance. On the designated night, we 2 hippie-ish, jeans-wearing, instrument-toting men took the stage. We first sang a song about ships on the sea, to tepid applause. Our closer, however, was destined to bring the house down. I pulled out my 5-string and we went into as passionate a rendition of “We Shall Overcome” as we could muster. Well, I wish we had cell phones in those days so I could have captured the stunned looks on the faces of those Southern belles!

My devotion to the music of Pete Seeger, and especially to that of Bob Dylan, has lingered. Although I was a bit dispirited when I saw Bob perform decades ago at Forest Hills Stadium in Queens and, instead of his old Martin guitar, he pulled out a Fender Telecaster and plugged in for the first time, I have long since recovered. I



have used quotes from both Pete and Bob in my Letters From the Editor over the years. I own boxed sets of Bob Dylan CDs, but cannot bear to see him in concert these days, as one hates to watch the aging of our idols. If you were to ask me to name my favorite songs, they would be Bob’s “My Back Pages” and “Like a Rolling Stone” (including my splendid rendition with the Oncotones), along with Warren Zevon’s “Werewolves of London” (the last being totally irrelevant to this discussion).

Thus, it was to my great delight that Bob Dylan was recently awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature (in the olden days, we thought he should have been a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize). Let the pundits argue about whether what a songwriter/musician produces is actually literature—his words speak for themselves in the hearts and minds of generations.

A couple of years ago, I received a call from a gallery where my wife and I had purchased a number of pieces. The gallery had acquired a group of original Bob Dylan paintings, including some with bicycles! I was impressed by what I saw, but—unfortunately—even more by the price tag. Nonetheless, Bob and I obviously had another bond: the bicycle.

Speaking of bicycles, the 10th annual Lymphoma Research Ride on September 25 was wonderful: splendid weather, loads of happy people, the raising of more than \$500,000 (donations still welcome at www.lymphoma.org), and the experience of pedaling around the countryside of northern Montgomery County, Maryland. Indeed, I took the opportunity to have the fastest ride of my life (was it the excitement of the 10th anniversary or the fact that I used Gu Energy Gel to get me through it?). The result of all the effort of Christine, my wife; Gary, Lisa, and the rest of the committee; Robin, our ride planner; and all the patients, friends, family members, and caregivers, was an extraordinarily successful day.

Until the next (special) month . . .

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce D. Cheson". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Bruce D. Cheson, MD