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In Memoriam

Thomas J. Connor (1971–2013)



Tom passed away in the early hours of Tuesday 26th February after an illness of 3 years which he dealt with in a way that touched his huge group of friends and colleagues. He was so brave, courageous and positive in the face of endless rounds of treatments that he was a true inspiration to everyone with whom he came in contact. He worked until a few days before he passed away, continuing to supervise his students, oversee his research and even write and review papers.

For the past 3 years, Tom would set off for his treatments armed with his work-primed iPad and would conduct electronic 'conversations' with his friends and colleagues, often giving a blow-by-blow account of activities in the oncology unit, describing some of his fellow patients and, especially, describing his interactions with the medical staff whom he knew as fellow members of the School of Medicine and, in some cases, as friends. I have no doubt that the oncology unit was a happier and more positive place on Tom's treatment days.

Tom was utterly devoted to his science and treatment days were also work days for him. He operated a seamless continuum, orchestrating activities in his lab from the hospital and he would frequently arrive back to work for the afternoon following a morning treatment. He did not believe in being ill – he believed in being treated.

The staff and students in Trinity College Dublin have lost a wonderful colleague, and a talented and exceptionally popular teacher and mentor. I will quote the words of one student who so eloquently described how he was regarded "I first met Tom when he lectured me on a short Neuroscience module in my 2nd year of Science in Trinity. What struck me at the time was how approachable, good humoured and kind he was. He was bombarded with questions at the end of each class but always had time for us – despite the fact that there were 200 students at each lecture! By the time I graduated from Neuroscience in 2006 we knew Tom well and I don't speak just for myself when I say that we considered him a friend and not just our lecturer. Tom brought a sense of fun to every situation".

Many of us have lost a loyal friend and it will take a very long time to adjust to this loss. We will miss his good humour, his quick wit, his positive attitude and his limitless ability to help, listen and chat. The world of Neuroscience, and Neuroimmunology in particular, will miss his scientific contributions and his vast knowledge. I will miss my coffee pal in his office three doors away, his constant willingness to discuss matters scientific and other, and his laughter, friendship and generosity.

Marina Lynch

Tom carried his illness with great grace for 3 years and despite all the time that we, his friends and colleagues, had to prepare, his death still came as a shock. At a distance, the passing of the indefatigable figure of Tom Connor must be all the more shocking to the members of PNIRS and the editorial board and readers of BBI. Tom's many contributions to the journal over the years, as both author and reviewer, will be greatly missed. His research spanned so many different areas relevant to PNIRS over the years, publishing on sickness behaviour, depression, stress, tryptophan metabolism, the noradrenergic system, the serotonergic system, cytokines, microglia, immunosuppressive effects of ecstasy and caffeine and beyond. It is remarkable just how often Connor et al., turns out, upon a quick flick to the references, to be one T.J. Connor.

Likewise his contribution to PNIRS meetings will be remembered fondly by many. Indeed, when news of his passing emerged, a string of heartfelt messages of love and condolence arrived in Trinity College inboxes. The common themes in these messages were Tom's genuine contributions to his field and great enthusiasm for his and other's research, but above all, his good humour, his warmth and his great personality. One recollection that resonates on thinking about this memoriam for the pages of BBI, was his enormous pleasure at the success of the annual PNIRS meeting that he organised in Dublin. Tom was very proud of his connection with Trinity College Dublin and to bring the members of PNIRS to Dublin to show them a good time in the historic and beautiful set-

ting of TCD was an achievement he was proud of. After his immaculate attention to every detail, it was a great pity that his early chemotherapy prevented him from basking in the full glory of the meeting's success. However, he was there for the banquet in Dublin's beautiful Mansion House and looked on with anticipation as he released his secret weapon upon the unsuspecting audience: a musician who will forever only be known to us as 'sexy violin' brought the members, previously sedately seated at their tables, to their feet! Tom left some time later, with the dancing in full swing. The phrase 'my work here is done' must surely have crossed his mind!

On a personal note, Tom was the first to extend the hand of welcome to me on my arrival in Dublin and he quickly became a friend and sounding board to me, co-interviewing my first staff, co-supervising my first PhD student, coaxing my first undergraduate lectures from me as well as absorbing all my early rants and helping me to remove the obstacles. Tom was never too busy. Generous, funny and calm, I will miss his friendship and mentorship.

Tom's funeral captured the colour and the spirit of the man. His colleagues formed a guard of honour that lead the funeral cortege

from the church to his final resting place. The sight of the damp country roads of Breaffy, County Mayo, a small village in the west of Ireland, festooned with fifty academics in coloured gowns, was something no one there is likely to forget. A sad occasion, but a celebration too. We are fortunate to have known him.

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