

# Ruminations on a Ruined Face

Category: Loss

written by Claudia Presto | August 1, 2025

Right now, it's dark red. With fifteen days of radiation to go, it seems it will get a whole lot darker.

At least they warned me about the sunburn. They did not warn me about the swelling and the mouth sores. And the red crusted-shut eyes and floaters. "It's different for everyone," they say.

So, radiation accumulates. I was initially told that with proton therapy, it goes in, hits its point and has fewer side effects than traditional radiation therapy. Not happening. This radiation, like my cancer, is the gift that keeps on giving. Even on the days that I do not have radiation, my face swells and reddens and more sores appear in my mouth and on my gums.

I wake up every morning with my eyes crusted shut. I slip out of bed, grab for the wall, motor around sleeping dogs on the floor to the bathroom so I can put a warm compress on my eyes. Some crusties refuse to leave. They also encrust what is left of my eyelashes. I'm one big pie crust of a face.

Not eating for me is always a good thing, as my 100% Italian genes are always lusting for food. (I think I used to lust for sex, but it's hard to remember, which might be a good thing.) The roof of my mouth feels like I ate an entire, just out of the oven, piping hot pizza pie. My upper jaw and gums feel like they've been injected to hell with dental numbing needles, and the under gums are dotted with white bumps.

I can't eat anything without it hurting. Even smoothies with a straw! I struggle to swallow. The cold from my adored creamsicle bars stings. So I act like one of my dogs and lick. I tried soup, but the lentil soup from Trader Joe's stung my mouth, so into the garbage it went. I didn't realize the important part the roof of your mouth plays in eating, until I had a defective one.

Okay, I'm off to make the concoction the doctor prescribed for me—lidocaine, pink Maalox, and red children's Benadryl—and put all that in my mouth. What could go wrong?

*Claudia Presto*  
*Kanab, Utah*