

The Healing Tree



*Excerpts from
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A Different Perspective

POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 9, 2013

(6 days after double mastectomy)



I'm telling you, these button down shirts my mother has had in the back of her closet for decades are true classics. Soft, comfortable...a tad louder than my usual choice of clothing. She knew there'd be a purpose for them someday and the purpose has been found.

Thankfully, I appear to be healing well. I ate a small breakfast, lunch and, for the first time, dinner, and took a short stroll in front of the house with my sister. Pain medications are slowly decreasing, as is the pain. And I'm now enjoying a nice cup of tea cooled to my favorite tepid temp.

Tomorrow afternoon is a follow-up with the plastic surgeon so he can get a look at his handiwork. I just need to decide which of the lovely "vintage" shirts to wear for my visit, since an easy-breezy button down is the only thing I can get into at this point.

Comments

I believe that you will prevail very quickly with that great attitude and the beautiful button down shirt! - Elise

I wore that shirt yesterday - Mark

Ok, this photo is a hoot! I'm giggling at the thought of adding a nice Madras plaid to the outfit. Were you in San Fran, a good pair of polka-dot flats would complete the outfit when riding the number 30 Stockton Bus! Xoxo - Essie

Are you wearing plaid pants with that shirt? I bet Mom has them in the back of the closet too. Xxxooo - Aunt Ger

Front End Damage

POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 10, 2013



Minutes from when we were scheduled to leave for my follow-up appointment with the plastic surgeon, a van, which ironically had the word "control" on its side, smashed over a very tall metal light pole and two mail boxes before wrapping itself on the innocent tree in the front yard, narrowly missing my parked Subaru. Police responded immediately, and it was clear this was probably the most excitement they'd had for a week. And it was DEFINITELY the most I've had!

What a terrible thing to happen in the front yard. The driver or a pedestrian or possibly even one of us could have been seriously hurt or killed by this freak accident. Thankfully, they weren't, and my car was fine, too. And because of that, I was practically giddy to be distracted by something so out of the ordinary. My adrenaline was pumping and I got busy taking photos.

"Huh. And I was only going 15."

"No sir," said one the four policemen surveying the site, "You were easily doing 40-45 if you were going a mile."

The driver, who offered that he was on Atavan for anxiety, was asking everyone to help find his phone, which he couldn't locate following the accident. The thought is he may have been texting prior to plowing everything down, and it simply flew out of his hand.

Oh my goodness! This will be the talk of the neighborhood for days to come.

So...after all that, I don't want to say my good results were a bit of a let down excitement-wise, but the doctor would have had to be giving me the info dressed as Lady Gaga to hold my attention as much as the accident had. I vaguely now remember him saying everything is healing well and we'll see you in a week.

Comments

It's kinda crazy to think that whomever it was that planted that tree... however many years ago... if they had planted it just a bit off to the left or the right, it would not have been there to stop the van from plowing, oh, I don't know... into someone's bedroom! I'd like to offer a moment of thanks for the person who planted the tree where they did and for the light pole & poor mailboxes that slowed the van to a speed that hopefully did not do in the tree! SO glad to hear that no one was seriously hurt! Funny about "Control" ...glad for you for the distraction & that you're healing well :-) xoxo - Essie

Healing

POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2013



A big part of my in-home nursing staff, my sister Sue, left to fly back to Atlanta this afternoon. She will be sorely missed in so many ways. While my sisters and I now share the bond of being breast cancer survivors, my prognosis, surgery and upcoming treatment are unique. At the core, of course, there is still a common understanding, and I know from experience that what causes any of us pain causes us all pain -- it just may be emotional rather than physical. Having her visit was a big gift.

After yesterday's excitement, the house now has a Healing Tree in the front yard. My heart goes out to it, standing all alone out there, unlike me, who has had so much support to lean on in here. This unassuming tree may well have sacrificed its lovely bark to save the house, so I'm hopeful it will heal up before the winter chill. I'll keep an eye on its recovery and, if it'd be helpful, would be happy to share a button-down shirt or two to speed its recuperation. After all, I also feel like I was recently hit with a truck.

Comments

It was an honor and gift to ME to be of some use while you're recovering. I believe your strength of spirit strengthens all who know and love you. As for that poor, lovely tree that was minding its business when assaulted yesterday, I hope it receives some extra attention in its recovery. I suggested that Mom have a tree service check it over. While not there in person now, I know YOU know I can virtually help care for you. I will be your virtual nurse and nag whenever I feel you need it! Xoxox - Sue

There are some great articles out there about how to repair tree bark damage, including taping the old bark back onto the tree ASAP. Has an arborist been out to take a look? Much as it would look adorable with your Mom's shirts :) Is the bark left on the other side? Look at us talking about bark, and trees and such. Hooray for distraction! - Essie

Hiya Dollface, lovely sentiment about the tree. Amazing that the universe brought these two instances together in such a way and lovely sentiment about your sissy Sue. I hope today is filled with rest. xo - Carrie

Clearly this is a time of big adventures for you. Glad to know that the tree will heal -- and so will you! Big hug. - Joan

The Healing Tree, what a great thought. Mmmmm a great idea for a script. - Kevin

One of the most beautiful things I've read. - Tramaine

Storm Warnings

POSTED ON OCTOBER 9, 2013



1:00pm

Hello again! Last night marked five weeks since my surgery and one week since I wrote an update. And later today the oncologist gives me the results of the (finally!) approved MammaPrint that will help determine the next course of treatment. While I await my 3:45pm appointment I thought I'd update you on a few things.

DRIVING: A couple days ago there were tornado warnings while I was driving to my surgeon's office. The sky was eerily spectacular. It looked like we'd get caught in a downpour, but we were lucky. I've been behind the wheel several times this week and driven about 30 minutes at a stretch, or 60 minutes round-trip. Turning the wheel of a slow moving car, and turning my body to see if everything is clear behind me, are the two big challenges. And a nap feels pretty dang good afterwards.

HEALING TREE: The board here was told by the landscapers that the tree has at most five years, so they scheduled a vote on whether to remove it. I was miserable about this either way: kill the tree now, or a slow death over five years. Then it occurred to me that the landscaping biz has an obvious incentive to recommend the tree's demise. After all, they'd bill thousands for the removal and replanting. So you know what? My father, my hero, successfully lobbied for keeping the symbol. I mean, keeping the tree. We are going to do everything we can to make sure it survives for a good, long time.

3:30pm Now it's off to my appointment, joined by my parents, for whom I can only assume this is more difficult than it is for me.

6:30pm The storm clouds are going to take a little longer to pass than I'd hoped, though thankfully the sun is expected to come out eventually. The MammaPrint shows a high chance of recurrence so, considering my age, an aggressive four-month course of chemo has been recommended. Looks like I'll be sporting some snazzy silk scarves and hats this winter after saying good-bye to the vintage button downs. Next Thursday a port will be put into my chest and the following week a new journey begins. Alas, traveling is going to have to wait a bit. Now I'm really going to have to go somewhere AMAZING when this is done!

Comments

I live in a place that's all about preserving and promoting its municipally sponsored trees (we're an official Tree City) and I love love love that Marvin is that tree's advocate. Is there a cooperative extension in your area?? They might be able to recommend experts who'd provide second opinions and care options. More than all of this, I love you! I will be on the edge of my seat for the next four months. Write, write, write and we will read, read, read. xoc. - Carrie

Looks like you and the healing tree both have challenging upcoming journeys of your own. I'm so glad that you each have people advocating for you and that you have each other to foster positive growth between you! Sending positive vibes across the internet waves... - Shira

May the sun, earth and rain nourish that tree, and may those who care about it, give it the best fertilizer. Love you. - Fern

Embracing the Fall

POSTED ON NOVEMBER 5, 2013



Just as I am preparing to shed my mane for winter, the Healing Tree, at the height of its fall color glory, will shake free its leaves to conserve energy until spring. This morning one of the “tree specialists” clipped away much of her curled bark and fed her something nutritious. Having no shame (like having shame is a good thing!), and in the hope of ensuring the best care, I explained to the man the significance of the tree and why it has become so important to me. He listened and replied simply, “And now it is important to me.” I could swear the tree smiled.

So the two of us posed together in all our tressed glory, since things are about to change.

Today, the day I checked out wigs, marks two months since my return home following surgery. Remembering back to that time helps remind me of how tremendously far I’ve come on this journey. It is tough to be shocked back into a different reality when someone treats me like I am sick or in need of help, especially when I’m having a good day. And this whole wig consultation...I don’t know. It made me feel that way. So for now, I’m going to be bald and proud and see how that goes.

One thing that was suggested to me, however, is to do a G.I. Jane instead of a full shave since my head is particularly sensitive at this time. Sounds like a good idea to me, and an easier way to ease into the new look tonight.

Comments

The tree is beautiful in all of its times and so are you! –Marlyn

I noticed how your photo gallery includes photos of "your tree" in different seasons. How lovely! Just as the bare tree will gradually get it's leaves back and look full once again in a few months, so too, I hope your bare head will gradually get it's hair back and you'll be restored to a former image of yourself before this ordeal began. I can't help but think, though, that you are a very different person now, as a result of all of this, and perhaps your hair style of the future will reflect that new you. Lots of good health and happy days to look forward to! –Mindy

The Sun Will Come Out, Tomorrow

POSTED ON FEBRUARY 13, 2014



This winter has been memorable in more ways than one. Unbelievably, the east coast has been bombarded with yet another snowstorm! I don’t know why people insist Chicago weathers are so much worse – definitely not this winter.

Since I'm scheduled to fly to Florida on Sunday, I've been obsessively checking the weather. Along with snow and rain, the reports are filled with days that are "partly sunny," "partly cloudy," "mostly sunny," and "mostly cloudy." Seriously? I mean, if it's partly cloudy, isn't it also mostly sunny? And if it's partly sunny wouldn't it also be mostly cloudy? Does it all depend on a meteorologist's glass being half-empty or half-full?

As would come as no surprise to my father who, during last week's drug-induced, post-surgical stupor was telling the nurses about how I research absolutely everything...I looked it up. What did we ever do without Google?

Apparently, there is a difference. Partly sunny actually means more clouds than partly cloudy. In order of sunniness, it goes: sunny; mostly sunny; partly cloudy; partly sunny; mostly cloudy; and cloudy. It's as clear as a cloudy day. All I know is, it is far more likely to be sunny in Florida than here in Pennsylvania!

Even with all of this crazy weather, the Healing Tree continues to stand tall; however, yesterday we awoke to a missing tree on the side of the house. Wood shavings were lying in the snow like a trail of blood. There was no note, no explanation; it was simply cut down without our knowledge. Perhaps the tree was ill, or maybe it fell before someone cut it to the quick. Or someone was told to cut down the Healing Tree and removed this entirely healthy one, instead. It's a mystery. Now, though, I'm keeping an eagle eye on the Healing Tree to make sure it doesn't disappear suddenly as well!

Stay warm, everybody. Spring will be here soon.

Comments

Yes it did go into the 40's here last night, but we awoke to sun and the temp will get to 74. I have made a plan to keep it sunny and warm for your visit so no worries. As far as spring, PopPop always talked about the worst storm he ever saw was the blizzard that came in April. Let's hope we don't see that! -Aunt Ger

The Mystery of the Missing Tree - can't wait to hear the rest of the story! In the meantime, wishing you sunny weather and much love on Valentine's Day. Xoxox -Sue

It's indeed sunnier here than there, though it's in the low 40's tonight (!) Surely your arrival will brighten more people's days than the Florida sunshine - certainly mine. Can't wait to see you! Keep the snow shovel handy to get out of there. And I am completely entranced by your newfound role as inspirational tree-hugger. -Drew

Springing Back to Life

POSTED ON MARCH 20, 2014



Wanna know why I think it will be a good spring? Now that the mountains of snow have melted, the Healing Tree has tiny buds on it as well as the start of a bird's nest! Together we weathered the wretched winter of 2013/14 and now we are each beginning to bloom. I tipped my cap to display the fuzz starting to appear on my head and left strands from my saved ponytail to help the birds build their new home in her. I'd saved the hair after my big cut for several reasons, not the least of which was to compare the color and texture with what will eventually grow back.

This morning my mother and I went to a presentation about organic food at McCaffrey's Market. McCaffrey's, which is family run, endeavors to be a smaller, better-priced, community alternative to Whole Foods. Not only that, but they make big donations to St. Mary Medical Center, where all of my "work" was done. So we like them.

The big takeaway is to never ever trust the word "Natural" on food labels – it's definitely not the same thing as Certified Organic, and it doesn't even mean something is actually healthful. Listing a product as Natural is simply a way to market to consumers' desire to eat well without necessarily following through with the goods. Many genetically modified or engineered foods are branded as being Natural. Natural what? I don't know about you, but if I have the option of eating something with ingredients that I can pronounce as opposed to something filled with chemical additives, preservatives, modifiers, fake colors and flavors, I'd naturally choose the former. After all, who knows what those unnatural preservatives are really doing. They certainly aren't about preserving us.

Comments

Let's hear it for the Healing Tree. Trees, like we humans, thrive with strong roots. – Aunt Ger

I love the picture of your healing tree with the bright blue sky. I always expect the best and decide to be happy--it's a great attitude! We're all fine here. Stay strong, a day at a time. Much love to you and mom and dad. –Carol

Good to read this, Pam, and I especially like reference to your providing some of your hair for nest-building! We love our birds, for sure. So, good signs of spring--to life!--and we trust the buds and emerging signs of growth on the ground will shake off a last gasp of winter now in forecast for us! –Michael

We have enjoyed your blog so much – it's a great way to share your thoughts and feelings. And your healing tree is really something to behold! Love to all of you. –Carol

Blooming

POSTED ON JULY 15, 2014



Today was my annual visit to my lady doc to make sure all my lady parts are healthy. The nurse asked me, as they do every year, when my last mammogram was. My last mammogram was in July 2013 -- my last ever.

Being in the office brought back the memory of hearing there might be a problem with my mammogram, followed by hearing I needed to schedule an ultrasound. In the back of my mind there was a tiny shred of worry about another problem being found today; fortunately all is well from (if you'll excuse the expression) top to bottom.

One year ago today I was anxiously awaiting the results from the first biopsy. Though I'd had several biopsies over the years, I definitely had a sense that this one was different, and while I hoped for a negative result, my gut told me that wouldn't be the case. July 15th was the calm before the storm.

I'm truly amazed at how much I've healed since the series of biopsies, surgery, and chemo. My hair, while different, is growing in, my tattoos look terrific, and even my scars are beginning to fade. It seems like both yesterday and a hundred years ago that I was unable to reach my arms above my head, get in and out of bed on my own, take a shower, or sleep on my side. Believe me, I appreciate all of that so much more than I ever expected I would.

One clear sign that time has marched on is that the Healing Tree has healed! The tree, which lost its leaves at the same time as I lost my hair, now stands tall in the front yard, fully in bloom with its own scars fading. After the winter we had, it is both a symbolic and actual testament to resilience. I hope it lives a mighty long life.

Comments

Nice. Pam. Glad that you--and tree--are doing well! –Michael

And that is my mighty hope for you. Xo –Susan

Quite a journey for each of you. Both in full bloom, ready to take on the elements. Each have taken what has been tossed at them, and responded with grit, determination, and growth. Enjoy all the coming seasons. –Kevin

It's amazing how both you and healing tree have had such similar journeys. Thank God, you're both alive and well and strong and beautiful. Let's hope it stays that way for MANY more years to come! –Mindy

Woo hoo! Both of you looking so good and full of life! –Essie

Up, up and away...
POSTED ON February 3, 2015



This blog was wrapped up on July 16th, exactly one year after my initial diagnosis.

Today, February 3rd, marks the one-year anniversary of my final chemo treatment (woo-hoo!!), which seemed like a good time to check-in with a quick addendum/update.

So, let's see...what happened in the past six+ months? The world overall has had some major challenges with terrorism, hacking, and crazy weather. My loved ones, however, have had weddings, babies, college acceptances, and excitement with jobs and careers. And I had my nipple tattoo touchup, lots of work to keep me busy, and positive (the good kind) results from all of my doctor's appointments. Overall, things are going well.

Summer flew by. Honestly, I barely remember it.

Before I sign off, I can't forget about the Healing Tree. Even after the major trauma it endured, that beautiful tree ended up being one of the last ones on the street to turn colors this fall, or to lose it's glorious red leaves after they changed. Then, once the leaves had disappeared, something wondrous happened. Two balloons found their way into its branches and it wouldn't let them go. The Healing Tree seemed to be finding a very visual way to celebrate making it through another year. How ironic that, like me, her healthy body was now decorated with two new puffy things!



Here's wishing you and your loved ones a (belatedly) wonderful new year. May 2015 be especially healthy and happy for all. xo

Comments

I loved the update on the Healing Tree. Perhaps it's not a coincidence that the day you posted this coincided with the Jewish holiday of Tu B'shvat, known as the New Year for Trees. A day when we pause to appreciate what trees offer to our lives and to our environment around us! –Mindy

I love the parallels between you and the healing tree. So remarkable! Was so great to see a new post on the blog, especially since it was for good things! –Shira

You are a healing soul! Always the right touch! –Ifa

Tree, Heal Thyself

POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2018

Yesterday September 10th, marked the five-year anniversary of the accident with what would subsequently be called The Healing Tree.



Someone's initial assessment of the damage had noted the tree "may survive five years." Those words were particularly pointed to me as someone overcoming cancer, so the tree's health became intrinsically entwined with my own recovery. I lost my hair as it lost its leaves. We were both bare throughout winter and, come spring, our tresses began to return. I was grateful for both of our recoveries.

Several people had given input on ways to help the injured tree, and a dear friend even noted that she lived in a Tree City where they're all about preserving and promoting their municipally sponsored trees, wondering if there was a cooperative extension in our area.

Though I hadn't realized it at the time, Langhorne Borough is, unbelievably, also a Tree City!

My parents live in Langhorne, not the actual "downtown" Borough. Still, I thought the story might be compelling enough to warrant interest from the Shade Tree Commission. I made some calls and finally reached Chris Blaydon, the Commissioner. He has close friends in my parents' community so he knows the neighborhood well, and his wife is also a breast cancer survivor. He was happy to stop by to take a look at the famed greenery.

It turns out Chris, a lover of trees, spent most of his career flying high above them for Pan Am. We spoke about our relationships to those tragically lost in the Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988. He knew the flight crew. I knew several of the 35 Syracuse University students who had just completed their semester abroad.

While on the ground, Chris focused his efforts in this small Bucks County borough north of Philly, serving four-terms as its Mayor. Chris was responsible, along with his wife and others, for helping to push through historic district zoning in the 1970s, which revitalized the area. And during his 43 years on the Shade Tree Commission, he helped plant 310 trees

in the area. It's fair to say that Langhorne Borough would not look or feel the way it does without his commitment to both its history and future.

The Healing Tree stood tall this summer while Chris inspected its bark, branches and leaves. In his opinion, the tree saved itself by growing a very impressive callus around the injury. Chris was pleased we were taking such good care of it rather than simply knocking it down and he said he'd be happy to check on it whenever he's in the neighborhood. I felt as happy as if a doctor had given me a good report, since I still feel so attached to the tree's prognosis.

It's interesting to see this callus growing around the damage, almost as though the tree recently acquired some implants of its own. I like to think that The Healing Tree has simply transformed itself into The Tree of Life.

