

SPIRIT, MIND & BODY

Wherever You Are, Be There.

by Pam Bell

This an invitation and a reminder to be fully present with whatever is going on in your life. Whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, your spiritual evolution asks only, that you show up the best you can.

Life IS a bowl of cherries and it's not. It's also a pile of rubbish. In actuality, it's both. That is the dual nature of our existence - we get the good, the bad, and the ugly, and sometimes all in the same day! And it's neither, because so much depends on our perspective - I might view something as good and you view it as bad. As most of us know by now, however, it's not what happens to you that matters, but how you handle it.

Or at least that's how the story goes. But I slightly disagree. I think it certainly does matter what happens to us "and" it matters how we handle it....both. Oh look! Another duality.

Let me explain.

As I write this I am sitting by my mothers bedside in a rehab center in Clayton, Georgia. She lives in a small town in North Carolina, just over the State line, about 30 minutes away. She is sleeping, dreaming, and I'm sitting in the dark. Forty-eight days ago she underwent surgery to have her voice box removed. Yes, you got it, she can no longer speak! Can you even imagine what that must be like? To not be able to communicate your needs, your pain, your distress, or your joy, other than by waving your arms about, mouthing your words over and over and then eventually resigning to writing everything down anyway? Well I'm here to tell you, communicating in

this fashion is not easy. Yes, there are devices and she'll eventually use them but for now, she is challenged. After discovering throat cancer last August and undergoing 12 weeks of radiation and chemo in the Fall, where they got 99.99% of the cancer, a smidgen of the cancer came back and a smidgen was all it took to determine her ultimate fate.

So, she waited, and she waited. For eight weeks, between learning she had to have her voice box removed and the actual surgery date, she waited, and during all that time she was a wreck. Knowing it was coming, not wanting to face it, fear of not being able to communicate out in the world, all of it ate her up. I'd call her and she'd say, "I don't want to talk about it" and so after a while, I'd just tell her stories or we'd talk about the holidays or what I was cooking and sometimes not at all, I'd just call to tell her I loved her and that was that. She just wanted to get it over with and end the agonizing anticipation!

Finally, the day came and under the anesthesia she went. The recovery was supposed to be seven to ten days. Patients who have had radiation might take a little longer. When I arrived in Atlanta two weeks ago (where she had her surgery) she had been in there for 34 days! She had had "complications" and "setbacks" and by the time we got her to rehab, her total hospital stay was 41 days! She was deeply depressed, sick, and had lost 30 pounds. My brother and sister-in-law, who live in the same town she does 2 1/2 hours away from Atlanta, have done so much to help her and would go whenever they could but, that

would only be about twice a week. She was lonely and although there were probably 20 people in and out of her room everyday (nurses, aids, technicians, therapists, housecleaning, residents, etc.) she was at a teaching hospital and more often than not, the people were not the same as the day before. It felt as if there was no continuity in her care, just everyone doing their own little part. It's not that the hospital did anything wrong or was grossly neglectful (although I will admit there didn't seem to be a comprehensive plan in place for her recovery and well-being), she felt lost in the shuffle and stuck.

So when I arrived, all of that changed. Not so much because it was "me" but because I was there on a daily basis to watch, ask questions, be her advocate, ensure her needs were met and to add, I must admit, a little

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comic relief! We watched the Oscars, dressed up in funny hats and glasses (a tradition) and she went along with the charade. In all honesty, the state of her condition broke my heart. She was so frail and dependent, but I could still see a feisty spirit in her eyes so I knew everything would eventually be ok. Because of what was required of me however (I won't go into the gory details) I alternately shifted between wanting to throw-up and break down in tears. I did neither in her presence because it would have only added to her burden. So, I showed-up the best I could, in service to her needs. I answered the call before me and truthfully, considering the circumstances, there was nowhere else I would rather be!

Oh sure, I figured there would be lots of down time so I brought many things

to do, books to read, taxes to finish, work to complete, etc., but very little of it ever got done. All of it seemed so insignificant to what was before me right then and there. I mean really, what else mattered? What couldn't wait? What was more important than this? My mother is 76 years old, she has a hole in her throat (from which she now breathes) that will leave her vulnerable in so many ways, and who knows what will happen next? What I know for sure is that she's not getting any younger so, to me, every moment with her is a precious one....even if it is sitting by her bedside while she sleeps. In her dreaming she keeps reaching up and out and I envision her practicing for her ultimate transition....reaching up to God, the Light, Buddha? Whatever and whoever, I know for certain they are reaching back.

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