

2020: A Year in Review

Remember first: the warmth of December's cedar-planked cabin, ringed by green pines, and the soft crackle of fire logs in the stone hearth; the velvety, brown reading chair and golden couch, softly worn, waiting like old friends; the rows and rows of time-slowng books leaning upon the shelves and we, family four, sitting on worn carpet around the wood hewn coffee table, playing a silly card game, laughing, happy for each other, for this complete moment, for each other, for the clean smell of wood smoke.

Remember first: the smell of wet earth and the snap of branches as we adventure on a trail new to us, and another and another; gray days and sunny days, barren fields, wooded paths, river views, city views, walking always walking to feel like we are getting closer to changing the story and using beauty to keep the outlines of our whole selves from shrinking too much.

Remember first: the soft shuffle of his feet in the morning kitchen, mixed in with the smell of coffee and toast, and those same feet then propped on a couch; yellow fleece and blue flannel and the click of computer keys and the smile that will always be that boyish smile to me; dinner chats and evening walks and the gift of time with a child grown and returned whose presence quiets the chaos of the unknown.

Remember first: the quiet serenity of the once-bedroom-now-office; new desk against the window where the cottony curtains curl in the breeze; his bobble heads and high school memories on the shelves above my head; the view on the other side of my computer, the blue sky and white fence and leafy green gardens and the high-pitched gleeful bark of the neighbor's new puppy as work's new background track.

Remember first: the finish line-like cheers when Mom finally got on Zoom; the old shirts that gained new life as masks; air hugs and gifts left on porches; virtual dinners at night and morning runs to the lake to find a reset lent by the ever-changing conversation between water and sky; rearranging, reorganizing, repainting and re again; lawn chairs and front lawns and lovely neighbors whose names I now remember; and eating takeout on the wobbly table in the backyard, content.

And then remember: the stomach-churning week of helpless uncertainty and mismatched opinions from well-meaning doctors following Dad's fall that began the year; the stiffness of the hospital bed and each other's hands as we watch dad pass from one journey to another. Don't remember the way he looked because it didn't look like him. Do remember the people, the lines of people who journeyed out in the chill of January, simply to hold hands and share a joke told too often or a story still held close.

And then remember: the musty smell of cabinets, closets, drawers and rafters as we sort, toss, box and reminisce, weekend-by-weekend, the story of five decades

stuffed into one tiny house; sibling and spouse laughter as we find yet another tape measures or place a dozen more books on the mountainous pile; and then once gone, the utter stillness of an empty house, a museum holding our memories in gloved hands; the release of knotted fears, mom safe in her new home and welcomed by others with grandmotherly smiles who keep a strict 430 pm cocktail hour by the pool.

And finally, don't forget: the warm well of resilience, evaporating like rain but falling with grace again and again in nature's changing colors, in small kindnesses so bountiful, in focusing on others over my own fears and confinements, and of gratitude, pulled time and again, from surprising pockets. Turn the page, I'll remember.