

Leavings

The hemlock tree, which graced our lives for thirty years, left last week, felled by the wind. It left the same way Papa left--all of a sudden, before I could prepare myself. I have never known this old house without the hemlock tree, just as, eleven years ago, I had never known the world without Papa.

The hemlock's leaving reminds me that I, too, will leave this old house. I will leave the tall pine tree that filled slowly with snow long ago as I lay pregnant waiting. I will leave the hearth that warmed us, inside and out, for thirty winters. I will leave the rooms where children and Thanksgivings and Christmases used to be, teeming with life. My leaving will not be easy, but it will be gentler now because the hemlock left first.

All the leavings--the hemlock and Papa and moving and aging and the people who have left me little-by-little without a word--collect quietly, somewhere deep in my soul. They lie dormant until a hemlock falls, and the shock awakens them. Then they come to the surface to be grieved again, accepted again, and let go of again. They leave as mysteriously as they came.

It is like the movie "Awakenings," which tells the true story of people who had lain dormant for decades in catatonia and suddenly came back, awakened by a new drug. Suddenly, they were present again. They talked and laughed and danced again with the people who had never stopped loving them. And then they left as mysteriously as they had come.

So it is with the people and places I have lost. They come back unexpectedly, awakened for a little while by a memory or a scent or a word or a look or a dream. I talk and laugh and dance with them. I feel the gladness and goodness that was. And then they leave as mysteriously as they came.

Sometimes the awakenings hurt with a hurt that takes my breath away, but I am learning to welcome them. I am learning that there is a deeper joy on the other side of grief.

Father, I grieve today, not alone, but with You who never leave me.

"You will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy." John 16:20