



I spent Labor Day weekend healing – physically, spiritually and emotionally.

For the last twenty-four years, the holiday weekend has been cause for a vacation for my husband and me to celebrate our wedding anniversary. Although we have ventured all over this country and British Columbia to celebrate each other, our last two September adventures have been to cabins in the Georgia mountains. This destination makes it easier to drop my mom off at my brother's and pick her up on our way back home to Beaufort. Another plus is that the log cabins are pet-friendly, so Toby the Beagle gets to be a part of our rendezvous.

I arrived at River Reach (one of several Sliding Rock Cabins) in Ellijay, Georgia with a cramped calf muscle and a rash, patches of itchy skin resulting from my efforts to eradicate Virginia Creeper, a woody five-leaved vine that was taking over my backyard. These attributes did not make me the more attractive half of the anniversary couple, but three days of applying a prescription of Vanos cream and a hot tub to relieve the aches and pains of middle age provided a sort of miraculous healing.

This past summer has been one of the most difficult seasons of my life and the challenges boiled down to my job, my insecurities, and a struggle with faith. Back in April or May, rumors started that my business unit would be sold off, always a possibility in a world full of mergers and acquisitions. I anticipated a midsummer timeframe for a divestiture, and as July came and went, my uncertainty, coupled with one resignation and two transfers by colleagues weighed me down like a pair of cement shoes.

Still, summer was hot and busy with visits to relatives in Pittsburgh, a writer's conference, and days at the beach with nieces and nephews, but I could not get out from under my homemade shadow of uncertainty. This gloom led to a series of mistakes, and by the time Mac and I were finally at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, my spirits were lower than any Blue Ridge valley.

Enter Bubba, Father Bernard, and Pema Chödrön.

I met Bubba on a Delta flight headed from Savannah to Atlanta. Seated in first class, I tried to read a magazine while Bubba gleefully munched on a sandwich he had brought on board. (First class is also a victim of airline cutbacks!) It turns out Bubba is pretty high up in the ranks of a multinational papermaking company. Not only that, he has been working for them since he was eighteen and has ridden the waves of a changing corporate culture year after year after year. I am not sure how Bubba and I got into a conversation, but in no time at all, I was telling him that I "was in a hole," that I had jeopardized my relationship with my manager and lost his trust.

Bubba listened and then slowly and patiently shared some valuable life lessons. He told me to "start over." He said that in my job, I should focus on the issues and not the problems. He told me that I was broken and I needed to focus my energies on "purposeful passion." He counseled me to seek influence and not power. Bubba said that my success was rooted in helping my manager and that I could rebuild and recover if I worked at it. And then, he left me with a Bible passage. 1 Corinthians 10:31. *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

I made notes of Bubba's counsel in the margins of a

*New Yorker*

magazine and later typed them out to reference them in preparation for my mid-year review. Bubba disappeared somewhere in Terminal C to make his connection to Seattle, an airplane angel that evaporated, returning to his west coast heaven of salmon fishing.

I made my way to Chicago for a series of meetings with a colleague from Brazil. I was able to tie in a visit with my dear friend Bernie the Monk, and he told me that I "do not know who I am." That was his conclusion after reminding me that I was very strong, and that whatever problems or anxieties I was having, "these too shall pass." Our visit ended with Father giving me a book by Pema Chödrön entitled, *Taking the Leap*. I read a chapter the next morning before heading to work, but I read the entire book over the Labor Day weekend.

So what does Pema have to teach someone caught up in uncertainty, self-doubt, and fear?

Pema teaches that we must “lean into” our pain and “Sit. Stay. Heal.” We must “stop strengthening habits that only bring more pain to the world.” A Buddhist nun, Chödrön relays that “we already have what we need.” She counsels that “the next time you lose heart and you can’t bear to experience what you’re feeling... change the way you see it and lean in.”

I know part of my problem is ego and a bigger part of who I am has always been rooted in my need to control. Page after page of *Taking the Leap* stresses the need to breathe and move back into the present moment for perspective – a living meditation. I have been practicing this method for only a few days, but I find that I am a bit calmer and I am not trying to fight my reality.

Work is just that – it is work. Life is full of uncertainty, but fear and dread are not the responses I want to live with or in. The healing comes in healthy confrontation, much like my head-on collision with the Virginia Creeper. By meeting the weeds in my life, I may pick up a rash or an irritation, but it will pass because I attend to it and treat it. My skin heals. My soul heals. My fragile faith is restored.

I am looking forward to autumn and I know that change is inevitable. So is growth. Even a middle-aged, married woman can evolve. Even the Virginia Creeper turns from her summer green to a beautiful crimson red in the fall. It’s all good. It’s just not a sure thing, and I can live with that.

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