

The Tree of Life – Etz Ha-Hayim

When Brad called and asked me to write what I would call a “love letter” to Julie he connected our friendship with the love of music with a touch of spirituality. After deep contemplation and musings with dear friends I felt the most beautiful way to share my love for Julie with that of the growth of a tree. Our friendship didn’t begin with the joy of meeting someone new but that of someone who was ill and needed my help finding the answer to what was causing her symptoms. I had this vision of Julie before I met her as this wildly successful executive in the medical device industry – I was petrified even though our phone conversations felt like we’d known each other forever. When I first laid eyes of Julie, she’d asked that we meet at a Perkins parking lot and drive together for our first attempt at an answer. This set us off on the journey of a lifetime and a friendship that felt like our souls had been connected for many lifetimes. There is a Hebrew word Beshert – which translated loosely means “it was destiny” which meeting Julie I believe was preordained.

And to write about our time together as patient, dear friend and I have to say the only friend I’ve ever had where there’s a song marking our journey and our growth. Like a tree that is bare when you begin to grow together, and the leaves develop on the tree the beauty that’s been hidden begins to emerge. So let me walk you around this beautiful tree that is our friendship. And I hope that this understandable but also like the sweetest secret between two friends. We checked off physician number one quickly and moved on to Dr. Greg...one of the sweetest physicians I’ve had the pleasure of working with. But no one is prepared when Anni, Julie and Doris walk into his clinic for the first time and are greeted with joining in on the ringing of their “Intention” bell. This is a beautiful beginning of the day but for those of us a bit jaded we gave each other the sideways look of laughter. And then it really all began as he has another bell in his office. We off course asked when that bell is rung...Dr. Greg replied, “when we have succeeded in a diagnosis”. Upon leaving I asked Julie if she felt we were going to “Get it on Bang a Gong” as sung by Mark Bolan and T Rex and have that bell rung!? That became our mantra for each visit. Upon our next visit this time with Brad joining the three of sat in the waiting room and spontaneously started singing Seals & Crofts Hummingbird...it was quite touching. I shared that I had seen them at least 3 times in concert and loved what they shared about their Baha’i faith. And in looking up the meaning of this song as shared by them “Hummingbird” is about Baha’u’llah, the manifestation of God’s will for a human race in desperate need of spiritual understanding, inspiration, and purpose...how truly fitting. And to complete the Seals & Crofts offering to us Julie and Brad had the sweetest dog Ruby...who I immediately renamed Ruby Jean and sung that song to her every time I was with the Higginson clan. And when I speak of the Higginson’s you must see their home to understand how a home can become like a tree as well. You see for every season or holiday Julie would “reset” the house and like leaves turning colors in the Fall so did their home...it was magical...and way too much work for me.

As Julie’s and my friendship grew so did my utterly strange need to give Julie what I call “hand kisses”. This tradition of my placing my hand gently against my daughter’s cheek

when she didn't want me to kiss when dropping her at school somehow became a ritual with me to Julie. I've never given another person besides my sweet Olivia and my dearest friend Julie hand kisses. And so, you have the song "Hands" by Jewel as another leaf on the tree of our friendship. And when we were just not getting the answers, we were looking for Julie and I took off on a road trip to see my now passed mentor, spiritual guide, and shaman to see if she could intuit what was happening to Julie. Yup on this road trip with me behind the wheel of Julie's super-fast car we laughed as we sang "Country Boy" by John Denver...we both knew every lyric! It was on this journey that I sat and listened to Julie share with Reenah her life, her struggles, her successes and of course her children. I have a lot of girlfriends with children, and I can honestly say I've never heard someone share with such love and devotion the raising of these three beautiful souls. The matching flannel pajamas for Christmas, the bedtime stories, the absolute love of sports...Julie is like the most amazing athlete of all my friends. I remember leaving to drive back home after our overnight and sharing with her that I wish I had known her when I was raising my sweet child as Julie is the best example of a great mother I've come across. We left with not a lot of answers but maybe a smidgen of hope.

Now I must jump around a bit as we were on the medical quest of the century and desperate to find an answer that can be treatable. On our last visit to see Dr. Greg and I was super proud of my fancy burned out velvet top...weird to mention...yup...but it is why Violet Beauregarde from Willy Wonka is on our tree! You see as I looked at my hands and wrists I was turning completely deep blue. Julie of course was laughing hysterically as we realized I was going to be blue everywhere...she called me Violet after that!! And now on to our next chapter which took us on the road down to Southwest Minnesota to see yet another physician. These trips were always Julie, Doris, and me. And at the time my sister Sue was living in a town that we drove past and Julie knowing my sister's boyfriend at the time had the unfortunate last name of Barreau and every time Julie would yell out "if your sister married him her name would be Sue Barreau...or the actual pronunciation Subaru! These road trips were always hard as Julie was enduring more treatment modalities and me and Doris were her travel buddies. It was on these trips that I learned that Julie's favorite musician is James Taylor so of course I had to include him on our tree of life – what could be more fitting than "You've Got a Friend"?! As the season changed and winter was now upon us Julie and Doris were both really into snowshoeing which was something I'd never done. They would take off for time up at Sugar Lake and invite me to "shoe" with them, but I hadn't been convinced that it was for me. But winter is my absolute favorite season I was giving it a thought but wasn't sure I could afford to buy all the equipment needed. Well, my birthday was coming up and Julie and I planned a "Women's Healing Evening" at her house with some of us slumber partying it. Reenah drove in from Waukesha, WI, Dr. Kathy drove in from Baldwin, WI, I came in from what we jokingly called Hooterville, and we also had friends from Stillwater who were healers and of course this was the night we met Dr. Sue for the first time. Here's what I can say on this also a meeting with destiny as Dr. Sue had been a bit of an enigma and a very in demand physician, but she was recovering from the most painful loss...that of her dear daughter just 6 months earlier. And to meet Dr. Sue is like meeting Mother Earth herself with a sprinkling of

OY's and the infamous F bomb which I knew she had to be my soul sister. Well, I was excited just to be in the middle of all these amazing women healers, but Julie had something else that she was excited about. To say that the gift Julie gave me was a newfound freedom would be not giving it all it has given me. You see Julie gave me my first pair of snowshoes complete with poles and all the gear. This gift has literally given me back something I haven't had since I had to give up running. It was a new path of spirituality for me as I started "shoeing" in the wee hours of the morning with my music guiding me. So, this is my beautiful leaf "Song for Juli" by Jessie Colin Young.

As the seasons changed again, we started adding to "Team Julie" and decided we needed a full deep dive into her medical history and asked Dr.'s Kathy and Sue if they would be willing to come to Julie's and pour through her extensive charts. So, the whole gang sat around Julie and Brad's kitchen table and Kathy and Sue each had huge three ring binders and a laptop so they could pull up labs and/or other things that may have been missed. Watching the two of them was literally like watching a symphony orchestra...it was like medical music...something I had never seen before. These two beautiful women working to help beautiful Julie. And, while Dr. Sue was not taking new patients after this afternoon together, she agreed to take Julie on as her Primary Care physician. If you haven't had the chance to witness medical magic, you must meet the loving and brilliant Dr. Sue. But as time moved on and more complex medical diagnosis were given to Julie it was clear that while we all tried, and Julie made a valiant effort in each new treatment plan it was time to move on to acceptance of her clinician diagnosis from The University of MN and The Mayo Clinic. This was not how this tree was supposed to grow but nothing every grows the way we expect. And even as this beautiful tree grew tangled branches Julie's fight was as valiant as ever. And while Julie and Brad finally left MN for the calm of the ocean in Siesta Key, and due to the health crisis in the world, I was unable to go to see my sweet Julie. But that didn't stop our growing together with the secret love of deep friends. No one has ever come into my life and given me what you have given me. I learned from you, I grew from you I learned what true fight looks like, and by God what love looks like. Julie, I am sending you a million hand kisses and my never-ending love. The final two songs I chose from my childhood hero, the singer that gave me my first real experience of leaving this dimension and feeling what God or the Goddess feels like. I chose these last two beautiful leaves with two of the most beautiful and yet simple songs of Shawn's. The song Moments is about the struggle in life and finding peace. But most importantly if you do not know what happiness it's moments...and moments made of wonder count the most. Julie, we have had so many moments made of wonder and that's how I will always see the two of us as friends. You did fill my life with wonder.

My closing to you my dear Julie is to use another beautiful Hebrew expression of Tikkun Olam which translated means – Each act of tikkun olum is a fine-tuning of our world voices. With each tikkun, we are creating meaning out of confusion, harmony from noise, revealing the unique part each creation plays in a universal symphony that sings of its Creator.

My love to you dear friend. We have grown together like this beautiful tree. And we will continue to grow together forever. You will find your way to peace. And now let Shawn sing to you Ease Your Mind and as you listen to these simple but beautiful lyrics you will know that I am singing to you as well.

Blessings.