

Empty Nest Syndrome

Hanna Wiwatowska

(A story that entered a writing competition for seniors with its theme of Resilience)

Krystyna woke up with a start. Through the fuzziness of her sleepy brain, she heard gentle drumming of rain and sensed dimness of a daylight. What was this sharp sound reverberating inside her head?

Phone...ringing impatiently...announcing Barbara's incoming call. Krystyna let it ring, she didn't want to talk to her... to anybody... The ringing persisted, it seemed easier to answer...

"Hello"

"Good afternoon sleepy head, you are not still in bed, are you?"

Barbara's cheerful voice was in vast contrast with Krystyna's own gloomy demeanour, making it hard to concentrate on Barbara's rapid chirping.

"Well...are you game to join the group?"

The direct question forced Krystyna's brain into operation.

"Sorry, love, again, what group?"

Barbara was one of those overenthusiastic and overenergetic people whose life mission was to bring happiness to whoever listened. She patiently explained about a new amateur drama group.

"Thanks Barbara, but NO. It sounds like so much effort. Besides I am not any good at public speaking. That time in High School, remember? It was a total disgrace, couldn't manage a word."

"Listen, Krystyna. It was ages ago, and since then you chaired numerous committees doing great job lashing out with your tongue when necessary. Don't be such a drama queen, shake off this empty nest syndrome of yours, and get involved."

Arguing with Barbara was always exhausting. Krystyna needed some caffeine in her system to cope with this ridiculous proposal.

"OK...I'll think about it."

One couldn't be cross with Barbara, she had such good intentions, but some of her ideas were preposterous. Krystyna had to admit that Barbara was right about the empty nest. Ever since the grownup kids had left home relocating to Adelaide or Brisbane, and her husband accepted an overseas contract, she had trouble adjusting to the quietness of the house. They were such a vibrant family, everyone's schedules filled to the brim by social and sporting activities. She enjoyed the constant crowd of people streaming through the house. It meant lots of responsibility and hard work, but she indulged in being useful and needed. The empty house asked nothing of her, there was nowhere she had to be, no one to care for. Initially the change of pace felt great, she had lots of "Me" time. The novelty of leisure wore off pretty fast. Without realising, she was slipping deeper and deeper into murky waters of depression.

Well...she had to face it...she WAS depressed...

How did she let that happen? It wasn't really her, was it?

Drumming of the rain got louder, she heard a distant thunder and could see a glimpse of lightening through a gap in the curtains. The Nature was angry with its own clumsiness engaging valiantly in a process of cleansing. She opened the curtains observing the garden through the veranda doors. The tall trees, tormented by aggressive gusts of wind, were swaying momentarily low, resuming its proud, vertical stand as soon as the wind eased.

Was she bending?...or was she already broken?

Krystyna didn't like the meaning of her thoughts...too confrontational. In her Glory years she was never afraid of dealing with difficult issues. There were always multiple solutions forming in her brain. She prided herself on being the one suggesting the best course of action. So why now did she seem quite clueless?

She was still the same person, a few years older, supposedly wiser. What happened to her vitality? Had she forgotten her own mantra, "life is for living not for waiting to die"? She felt her spark stalling, slowly...not dead yet, but frighteningly close.

Busy with her reasoning she didn't notice passing of the storm. The sun was shining from between the clouds, giving the garden an ambience of enchantment. Drawn to it, she stepped outside revelling in the resilience of flowerheads, heavy with rain, but gingerly lifting their faces to the heat of the sun. Looking at the plants, she realised that year after year they were unfailingly resurrecting their glorious blooms, despite occasional excess of heat or insufficient watering.

Was it still possible for her, to follow the suite? ... Or was it too late to even try? ...What was her problem, exactly? It was time to take an honest account of herself.

She was healthy, had a strong body with a capable mind, just a little foggy at this stage. Objectively there was nothing stopping her to rejoin the world of the living. It was only a matter of will...did she have this will?

Her train of thoughts was interrupted by an angry sound of the phone. She must remember to change the ringtone to something calmer.

"Hello..."

"Hi, Mum, how are you?"

It was her youngest son, Peter, kept on strait and narrow by his wife Martyna. Krystyna was fond of her. Martyna was all a mother-in-law may want for her son.

"I'm fine, thanks. What's up?"

"You don't sound very fine, anything I can do?"

"Not really...I was just pondering on the resilience of Nature. How efficiently it recovers from the effects of droughts, floods or bushfires. People are more complicated, acting on instinct quite often, but generally needing a conscious decision to keep going. The good news is that I just made this crucial commitment."

"Mum, what's going on? ... Are you unwell?"

"Nothing like that, I simply realised I was merely plodding through, but managed to find my own resilience. So resurrecting remnants of my creativity I am joining a Drama Group."

"That's great!... We were a bit worried..."

"Were you? How sweet...So how is life treating the both of you?"

"Nothing spectacular to report...we are happy to be part of this small community...so much to do, no time for boredom, and people are great."



“I am glad you found your piece of heaven.”

“So are we. Come and visit soon. In the meantime stay energised Mum.”

What a lovely word “energised”. It was exactly how she felt, ready for some serious action. Baking a cake might be a great start, her tasty contribution to the Drama Group first meeting.