

Renewal

by John Farrow

The telephone call with the bad news invariably comes on a Sunday morning. This time it was my sister, calling to tell me that our cousin had died.

Shirley? She had been so happy and smiling and in good spirits when I had seen her only a few months ago at her parents' golden wedding anniversary. And wasn't her cancer in remission?

The malignancy in her breast had first been diagnosed eight years ago. At that time, she told no one but her husband and her mother. Not even her father. She was determined to fight it herself and not cause worry to anyone else. Eight years! How could she live with a disease for eight years knowing that it would surely kill her before her time?

She was older and I mainly hung around with her younger brother. She had been a twirler in front of the band both in high school and college, a carefree spirit on the beaches of the Texas Gulf Coast during Spring Break and summer. Always worrying about boyfriends. Later a computer whiz and mother.

At the funeral, there were lots of tears and hugs and photos, the older ones black and white. Birthday parties and Christmas and picnics. The scrawny little girl with a new baton. Dressed in her best cowgirl clothes on Old Yeller, our grandmother's palomino. Black and white memories.

Eventually it all began to swirl around and I needed to get away and sort things out, to run, alone. Going nowhere, just running, for as long as it took to deal with the sadness, the helplessness, the anger.

Out on the road, the south Texas air was warm and humid with its old familiar smells of orange blossoms and oil wells. Bees were buzzing around the cactus

flowers, doves and mockingbirds swooping in the air.

The more I ran, the more the colors seemed to be reaching out, soothing, caressing, the sky a deeper blue than I could ever remember, the greens of the trees and grass somehow more vivid, the yellows and reds and browns and purples of the flowers and birds and rabbits, so alive and vibrant, floating. It was as if I had become immersed in the entire landscape, absorbing it at my leisure with no sense of time.

Memories came welling up: learning to play golf with my Dad; my grandmother on the porch shelling black-eyed peas; a favorite uncle slipping silver dollars into my pocket at Christmas; my first bike ride, straight into a tree (I had been too terrified to steer).

At some point I began to realize how hard I was running and yet how effortless and comfortable it seemed, too. And I could feel the grief melting away, replaced with a calming peacefulness.

Somewhere out in the sunshine, a sense of order seemed to be restored. I knew then that it was time to go home.

ARR News, December 1996
Albuquerque Road Runners Club