

14 June 2020

Helen's reflection and poem

Peter and I have been married for 60 years in October. We have had a busy and happy life with many blessings, sorrows, anxieties, joys and challenges just like most people. All these experiences become part of who we are and hopefully we use them to grow in wisdom and understanding.

Twenty years ago a stranger called Parkinson came into our family when Peter was diagnosed with this awful degenerative condition. At first it wasn't so bad- we just got on with life and tried to make the best of it.

Time went on and the condition inevitably worsened and life got tougher for us and for our family. I discovered that grief can become a constant companion in a relationship, where little daily losses and the sadness that goes with them can pull you down into despair almost without noticing, and I found it hard to be called Peter's 'carer', it was as though I had taken several steps away from being his wife.

But we still have good days as well as grim ones. We find lots to laugh about and to enjoy, not least our family and our small garden.

We both find poetry a great solace and encourager and reading it together often feels like praying. A poem which we both love and which I turn to when things get tough is Wendell Berry's 'The Sycamore', It is so much more than a poem about a tree. For me, it is about Life and being Human Endurance, Acceptance, Patience and above all Hope.,

The Sycamore:

In the place which is my own place, whose earth

I am shaped in and must bear, there is an old tree growing,

a great Sycamore that is a wondrous healer of itself.

Fences have been tied to it, nails driven in to it,

hacks and whittles cut in it, the lightning has burned it.

There is no year it has flourished in

that has not harmed it. There is a hollow in it

that is its death, though its living brims whitely

at the lip of the darkness and flows outward.

Over all its scars has come the seamless white

of the bark .It bears the gnarls of its history

Healed over. It has risen to a strange perfection

In the warp and bending of its long growth.

It has gathered all accidents into its purpose.

It has become the intention and radiance of its dark fate.

It is a fact, sublime, mystical and unassailable.

In all the country there is no other like it.

I recognise in it a principle, an indwelling

the same as itself ,and greater ,that I would be ruled by.

I see that it stands in its place ,and feeds upon it,

and is fed upon, and is native, and maker.

Wendell Berry: A farmer,writer,philosopher and poet who lives in Kentucky.