

The Vulnerability and Freedom of Nakedness

Category: Naked

written by Elizabeth Ross | August 28, 2016

There are many ways to be naked. There's physical nakedness, and there's also the nakedness of feeling vulnerable. When my body and hence my life have been out of control, it has felt like nakedness. When I have had no covering against the elements, whether physical or psychological, I have felt naked.

After I had a baby, I thought I'd lost my modesty, what with having to completely expose my body. I loved the freedom of being physically naked. It felt liberating and unrestricted.

But after I had a bilateral mastectomy and chemotherapy, nakedness took on a different flavor. I felt ill at ease baring myself in the gym locker room, so I began to shower and dress at home. I told myself it was to preserve my privacy, to keep others from feeling uncomfortable when they looked at me. Indeed, I felt naked just facing life at that time.

Then during a vacation nine months following my recovery from treatment, I went to a mud bath. Afterward, I was put in a delightful cucumber- and lemon-scented soaking tub, next to another tub holding a woman from South Africa. I still remember her lovely face, her charming accent and her gentle non-reaction to my altered nakedness, to the body I'd worried about ever again baring to others.

Her non-reaction ushered me into acceptance of my new physical nakedness in front of others. I am so grateful for her gift of peaceful non-reaction, and yet this woman never knew the gift she gave me. My emotional healing over the months and years since then has given me the courage to face life as it comes, without the apprehension of feeling bare.

So the freedom I once appreciated about my healthy nakedness has been reframed by my illness nakedness. Through feeling naked and vulnerable, I could let go of the previous versions of myself, both physically and psychologically, and embrace alternate ways of seeing and accepting myself. I now cherish the many benefits of my survival.

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