

Protea caffra

Category: Turning Over a New Leaf
written by Joe Amaral | January 15, 2020

Beverly called the ambulance because she couldn't walk anymore. Her feet were edematous after ten days of radiation treatment for metastatic lung cancer, and her heart was slowly overflowing with fluid, backlogging into her body. She was stoically resigned to her pain and newfound infirmity, but she kept a wry sense of humor, cracking jokes about being waited upon and the "magic carpet ride" sling we lifted her onto.

During transport to the hospital, Beverly told me she grew protea: pale red, pink and cream-colored flowers native to South Africa. Her family sells them at local farmer's markets in bouquets. When I inquired further, Beverly perked up and gave me the rundown:

"Protea are drought tolerant and sustainable, requiring little water and absolutely no fertilizer because they need no food but the soil they're rooted in. They're easy to harvest. Simply cut the flower head, trim the branches, and they rebirth new buds."

"Hardy like you," I declared. "And I like how they renew in a nontoxic way, seeing as how it's January, and we are all about resolutions right now."

We then Googled photos of protea. The petals cluster like two cupped hands opening into the sky. I told Beverly when I die I want to be cremated into a seedpod and planted to become a tree. She laughed and agreed, then paused and said: "All false hopes aside, we both know I'm not going to survive this."

Undeterred, I matched her bluntness: "Probably not, but part of you will still be in those trees. Every time those flowers regenerate, your family, and now me, will always think of you."

Beverly winked and retorted: "Yup, and they last a really long time in a vase, too. Just like a resolution. One whole week!"

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