

Maggie's Musings

Taking Care of Yourself

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Every time we talk my mother tells me to take care of myself. I have found myself saying that very thing to others over the years.

In the past I thought that getting a massage, buying myself something, taking a long leisurely bath or eating some decadent chocolate thing was "taking care of myself". I had never stopped to ask myself what that very commonly used phrase meant until recently when my mother underwent open-heart surgery.

I traveled to California to be with her for the surgery and planned to spend a few days afterwards keeping her company during the recovery process. I knew that she would spend a lot of time sleeping and under the influence of pain medication. So I had thought I would spend a couple of hours at the beach each day and then a few hours with her.

Instead I found myself spending every moment allowed by the hospital by her bedside. The night of the surgery after returning home for something to eat I found myself back in the car and headed toward the hospital to be with her again. I wasn't afraid or nervous about her condition I just wanted to be with her. Over the next several days I sat by her bedside while she slept, I held her hand, swabbed her lips, helped her with whatever she needed. My mother is deaf, so I also spent time communicating with nurses and doctors. My mother and I also had a few beautiful conversations. She didn't need to live or die for me. Whatever happened was okay with me. I just enjoyed being there. I have never felt closer to her.

At one point my brother who noticed how much time I was spending with her, lovingly suggested that I take care of myself. That's when it became clear to me what taking care of yourself is all about. I told him that I was taking care of myself. Spending time with my mother, just being with her and doing whatever small things I could to make things a bit easier for her **was** taking care of me. A few years ago that would not have been true. Now it was and I was delighting in it.

Through that wonderful experience I've come to learn that "taking care of yourself" is about doing what feels right in the moment. Not out of some obligation or need or desire or some motivation to make things different; simply because it feels right and honest. This doesn't always mean that it feels "good" but simply authentic. And that might mean taking a long hot bath, saying "no" to someone I love, or hours by my mother's bedside. I **love** taking care of myself.