

Lessons From a Tree

By David Stephenson

Trees don't heal, at least not the way we do. Let me explain.

When we are injured, whether it's a cut, broken bone or other physical wound, our body heals by creating new tissue *in the same places* as the damaged tissue. We don't grow new skin *over* a wound, the new growth *replaces* that which was damaged. There may be a scar, but skin knits itself back together, and broken bones don't stay broken. Often, we need to attend to the wound to ensure it heals properly, but our bodies do a remarkable job of repairing these injuries, often as though they never happened.

When a tree is damaged, it doesn't heal as we do. Instead, it creates new tissue *in different places* than that which was damaged. So, when we carve our initials into a tree, a branch breaks or a fire creates a scar, those wounds will always be there. The tree encapsulates or compartmentalizes the damage, internally with chemical barriers and externally with the new growth that eventually grows over the wound. Decades or centuries later, when that tree finally falls or is cut down, we can still see the wound within the wood. Interestingly, the strongest barrier to decay spreading from the wound is outward, into the new growth.

Grief is like this. It's a hole in our heart that will always be there. But by actively attending to our grief, that wound becomes a part of who we are. As we move forward with our lives, our new growth surrounds and envelopes the wound and, like the new growth on a tree, makes us stronger, while the feelings of sadness and pain continue to soften.

GRIEF DOES NOT OBEY YOUR PLANS, OR
YOUR WISHES. GRIEF WILL DO WHATEVER
IT WANTS TO YOU, WHENEVER IT WANTS
TO. IN THAT REGARD, GRIEF HAS A LOT IN
COMMON WITH LOVE.

Elizabeth Gilbert