

The Art of Gratitude



There's an Art to Giving. And some are more skilled than others. Challenging for many is the Art of Receiving. Always appreciative...in the last five months of her life, Bri mastered the Art of Gratitude. It was all that was left to her.

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From a June 17th FigsWithBri.com post, here are Bri's own words...

With Gratitude

Hi sweet friends. I am so deeply touched by the outpouring of support, love, well-wishes and prayers. I had no idea this [ChipIn] fundraiser would be such a success. It's truly an inspiration. We've told everyone we know about it since it is such a testament to the idea that many people doing small (and not so small) things, can make a big difference. I have been so enveloped by your generosity. One night, when we were

drifting off to sleep, Marc said, “What if you imagine all these people standing in a room together cheering you on.” So, that has become a common bedtime practice, especially when it’s been a hard day...

This fundraiser is really making it possible for me to get the treatments I need, and not worry about where the money is going to come from.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for that. xoxo Bri

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As the cancer overtook her body, Bri grew weaker, and lost energy to do for others as she always had. Having lost strength and the ability to care for her own needs, made her utterly dependent on family to prepare food & feed her, to wash & comb her hair, to bathe & dress her, to take her to the hospital or the bathroom.

Bri’s physical world became VERY small, shrinking from our locality, to our house, to the master bedroom, to the sling chair & bed, and finally to a reclining chair. Even in her recliner, the shrinking continued. From sitting up, to being bent over face in her lap....for weeks on end. From being in touch with her world of web friends via blogging, family & others via email & the phone, to asking Marc to read emails aloud, to checking cell phone messages, but not having reserves enough to call back.

What Bri was left with was her ability to listen ~ to hear what others were really saying, to the emotions in our words. And to listen to herself, to recognize her own needs ~ physical & emotional ~ and to ask us to help her with them. Always vigilant and alert, Bri began keeping track of all of us, reminding us not to forget what we were to do next or what we came into the room with.

The more she was forced by circumstance to ask for help, the more Bri had to practice receiving. Practice makes perfect...if we don’t resist, and accept our lessons wholeheartedly. Bri was without a doubt, a wholehearted person.

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From a July 21st ‘FigsWithBri’ post, again, in her own words:

Peace of Mind

I have literally wanted to write everyday...and haven't. I've got two or three drafts of things I've started, run out of energy, thought I would get back to, and didn't. Everyday, I have wanted to tell all of you how incredibly humbled and appreciative I am that you participated so lovingly in this fundraiser. But, with viruses, fevers, coughing fits, and fatigue, I just haven't gotten to the blog much. I have good days and bad days, but I really do feel blessed. Below is a post I started to write after the fundraiser ended, and leaving behind my perfectionism for a moment, I'll just share what I wrote then, and hopefully have the energy to post more (including pictures) later. I just want to let you all know, I'm still here, I'm taking it one day at a time, and Marc and I are so touched by the outpouring of support and love. Thank you.

Well, the fundraiser on my behalf has officially ended. I haven't gone through and added absolutely everything up, but the combination of the "Bloggers for Bri" ChipIn Fundraiser, family and friends who've given money just because (not knowing about the fundraiser), and about \$3,500 that the hospital near me waived in emergency room charges, all comes to about \$20,000. I honestly couldn't have imagined that [amount] in my wildest dreams. We went into (and haven't come out yet) so much debt from the first time I got sick, that I am speechless at the generosity and kindness of friends (old and new) around the world.

I am much better after the pneumonia, but it took a lot of rest, love from my family in the form of chaufferring and meals brought to me, and between \$500 and \$1000 a week in alternative therapies. Knowing that the fundraiser has been such a wild success has given me tremendous peace of mind. I can do what I know is good for my healing and not think twice. I can't begin to express how powerful that is. ~ Bri

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Healing is a holistic process with many facets. And isn't always what we intend, wish for, or expect. But, if we have learned to trust ~ ourselves, life, nature, and the cosmos.... healing is simply that.

Facing the precipice of death, certainly challenged our ability to trust! But not, Bri. She held a space for the possibility that she would be well again. That she would be whole. Bri had an amazing will, an intensity of conviction, and an active dialogue with love....to giving and receiving love & blessings.

That's what I sense inspired people, even utter strangers, to give to her....to join in savoring the love & enthusiasm Bri had for life, for Marc, for family and friends, for food, for creativity, for expression....her overflowing optimism.

Trust didn't always come easily to Bri. In fact, it was an issue. Life presented tough challenges almost from the beginning ~ family estrangements & complications, isolation from people she loved, poverty & worry, innumerable grade schools, the loss of her beloved Mom when Bri was only 14, the challenge of finding her place in other households, navigating philosophic & religious debates, and multi-cultural differences.

Life forced her to give up many dreams and plans ~ when she was little - the security of belonging, of financial solidity, of finding her true career, of motherhood, of having her own home, of living in Hawaii, of world travel, even of having more time, of being able to hold her head up, of being able to.... breathe.

Still, Bri was willing to engage fully with what her life had to offer in all its imperfections. I'm not at all certain I could have remained so hopeful. Or withstood the severe discomforts and limitations as gracefully? Bri grew more appreciative of people, even if they weren't "perfect." She and I came to an understanding that we could love each other genuinely, and be there for each other, even if we didn't always agree on stuff.

In the last few months, Bri learned to be completely present. She would meet us with full attention. When something intimate was expressed, she would look up with her deep brown eyes and be with you. Bri learned when to speak and how to hold her tongue....at least occasionally. She acknowledged our concerns, even if she couldn't bear to have us discuss certain subjects. She became more patient and inspired us to be patient with her requests. And she thanked us for every gesture of assistance, un-

ingly.

In the last three days, Bri accepted what her life had offered. She made peace with her nearing transition. When her focus changed from struggling to survive her failing body, Bri's face became radiant and serene. Her loving glances were infused with gratitude.

Bri did not want to be medicated, remaining fully coherent and occasionally communicative, even in the final 15 hours as she slipped between here and there. A student of life and teacher by example, Bri shared priceless snippets of her transition experience in short evocative statements, like "I'm getting my most profound questions answered..." and commented that from the darkness behind her closed eyes - faces, and places, and other things could be seen.

Late in the evening as Marc realized that this was THE "good-bye," he broke down in soft sobs near Bill. Always thinking of others' well-being, Bri rallied, raised her head staring into the darkness, and asked me in a clear voice "Is Marc going to be okay?" I said, "Yes. He's with Bill. And we'll take care of him." She silently nodded approval, free to make her exit a few hours later.

Bri entrusted me with an intimate final gift: the honor of sitting in attendance, quietly holding her hand, listening to the rhythm of her breaths in the darkness ~ Witness to her farewell, a bittersweet moment of mystery. And for that I am deeply grateful.

~ Cynthe (Bri's Mom-in-Law)