

Four Seeds

Inspiration • Renewal • Beauty • Love



The beauty of ascension is in every moment

Jennifer Wilson Cooper

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Foreword



In 2008, Jennifer Wilson Cooper, our son Little J (two and a half years old at the time), and I moved to a charming town north of San Francisco that would become known as Sugartown. For us it was time to get away from city living, put down some roots, and be part of a community. A few months later, life took an unexpected turn when Jennifer was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer. The next ten months were filled with aggressive surgeries, barbaric procedures, and harsh treatments that, though necessary to hopefully kill the cancer, had brutal side effects, including the possibility of death. But something else happened in those ten months. We came home from the hospital over the holidays to find that our neighbors had put up Christmas lights on our house. People (many of whom we didn't know) brought us meals. Somebody mowed the lawn. Friends and family took turns staying at the house to help out. And in August 2009, Jennifer went into remission just in time for her 40th birthday.

We didn't know it at the time, but this remission would last only a year, and from there we learned that remission is something that comes and goes. But with each recurrence, we'd fight the cancer as a family and a community all the while continuing to enjoy the nectar of every day. For as Jennifer writes in the introduction to her blog at fourseeds.com, "it is possible, you know, to live a fully embodied life while fighting cancer. I can honestly say, it is almost easier." And that ... is Jennifer.

All of us have an inner light. In the best of times it burns hot and shines out in everything we do. And there are darker times when it's all we can do to find and cling to a flicker inside us lest it be snuffed out completely by disease, or heartbreak, or the sometimes cold objective circumstances of life. Jennifer started Four Seeds in January 2010 as a place for her to "share the things I love about this life that leads me." It was really just intended to be read by her close friends. But Jennifer's

thoughts and her writing are things you want to share. It wasn't long before she got comments on the blog and received email from people she didn't know. I remember her calling me at work once, tickled and surprised that she now had followers in countries she had never visited and where no one she knew lived. It was soon after that when Jennifer began to muse that someday, if she built up enough material, maybe Four Seeds could be worked into something that could be published as a book.

Prior to being diagnosed with cancer, Jennifer had been a writer, an editor, and a teacher by trade. She was a scholar, had a passion for the arts, and, being deeply spiritual, had a love for and an attraction to the beauty and elegance of nature and the universe. Jennifer's approach to life, her insights, her grace; they intrigue and inspire; they make you want to follow her story. The ironic thing (but probably why the blog resonated with so many people) is that the act of writing Four Seeds, whether anybody read it or not, became a source of light for Jennifer when, on so many occasions, everything could have easily and understandably stayed hopelessly dark.

The publishing of Four Seeds as a book is one of Jennifer's dreams coming true. It is an effort to punch a hole in the darkness so that we can all dance in her light.

Enjoy.

—Dennis Cooper



Welcome to Four Seeds ~ January 3, 2010

Hello! I'm so glad you're here. I have a story I want to share with you. You may have heard it before. It's about the Greek Goddess Persephone.

There are so many renditions of this story. Persephone, daughter of Demeter (goddess of the Earth, harvest, and all things alive and growing) was abducted by Hades, God of the Underworld. Persephone had been playing in a field with some nymphs, probably picking flowers with her long, white arms, when Hades opened up the ground beneath her and dragged her down to hell. Just like that.

Persephone's mother Demeter was horrified. Of course. And since Demeter governed all things that grew and sustained people, she was not to be trifled with. The enraged mother went straight to Zeus. Demeter had pull with Zeus because the two deities had some history. In fact, the gossip around Olympus was that Zeus was Persephone's father.

Demeter gave Zeus an ultimatum. Not wanting to waste time by asking nicely, Demeter stopped all things on Earth from growing and told Zeus the world would simply starve if her daughter was not returned.

Eventually, Zeus complied. He ordered Hades to let Persephone go. She was returned to her mother, and the barren Earth came alive with blooms and vegetation as Persephone resurfaced. But, since Persephone had eaten some pomegranate seeds (possibly four) while in the underworld, she was doomed to return to Hades once a year for a season, each seed in her belly representing a month, perhaps. During Persephone's annual visit to hell, the Earth goes barren (winter) until the maiden queen's return to Earth (spring).

I love this story. It explains so much: the difficulty of winter, the redemption of spring. But I also like to look at the myth in a different way.

Persephone, when she descended to Hades each year, was the Queen of the Underworld. She decided who came and went (just ask Orpheus) and lorded over her domain, gritty as it was.

What if Persephone's story is not one of victimization, sacrifice, and tragedy?

What if Persephone's story is one of difficulty, power, and redemption? Persephone loses everything. She then makes hell her own beautiful domain, her Queendom. She returns annually, as to a second home, then is reborn again and again.

All women suffer and recover. What if Persephone's story is a template for the journey into darkness that so many women experience and return to, literally and mentally, again and again? What if the power and understanding that the descent affords us can be seen as something beautiful and powerful?

It was when my family and I first moved to Sugartown, nearly two years ago, that I first saw her. She rides around town in her wheelchair. She leans slightly to the left as she goes, her long, unkempt hair trailing from her slightly tilted head. She smiles as though she's having a ride in a paddleboat, her lover at the helm. All that's missing is the parasol.

"How is it that this woman is beaming?" I used to wonder. There I was, fretting about this and that and chicken again tonight, and there she was, in her own personal heaven, in a wheelchair, cruising along a main road, with no bike lanes.

A few months later, the ground opened up beneath my feet. After my own journey to hell and back, I now know what the wheelchair lady sees. After nearly losing everything, after being dragged down to Hades, the beauty of ascension is in every moment.

Four seeds in the wheelchair lady's belly. Four seeds in mine. Four seeds in yours, perhaps. My seeds are for harvesting inspiration, renewal, beauty, and love. This little blog is where I'll plant little tidbits for the enjoying and the sharing. And don't worry, all my posts won't be as long and serious as this one. Hopefully you will taste some, enjoy some, and pass some on. See you soon.

Stephanie Aurora Clark Nielson ~ January 5, 2010

Sometimes women inspire more than they could possibly imagine.

Stephanie Nielson is the author of one of my favorite blogs, NieNieDialogues. For years, she's blogged about the joys of motherhood without literally blogging about the joys of motherhood. She writes about her life, her kids, and it *is* simply joyous. Because she is the coolest mom on the block blogs, ladies everywhere quickly became devoted fans. Stephanie's joie de vivre chronicles inspired them to enjoy their simple lives, their kids, and their daily routines, and to breathe a little creativity into everything.

She's got style, a great smile, and taste for miles.

A while ago, Ms. Nielson and her husband were in a plane crash. Stephanie sustained burns over 80 percent of her body. Gently nursed back to happiness by her heroic husband and kids, and her devoted readers, Stephanie continues to inspire us to see what is perfect and beautiful about a life that is, at times, not perfect or beautiful.

Take a look at her post, Mr. Nielson's Top Ten, where she counts down her favorite moments with her husband in 2009.

Hugs, Jennifer

Chicken with Herbalicious Yum Sauce ~ January 8, 2010

Here in Sugartown, moms take care of each other.

When we moved here almost two years ago, I joined the local mothers' club. I volunteered to work with another mom to schedule meals to be delivered to new moms, sick moms, moms with traveling dads, and moms who just plain need a break.

A few months later, I was on the receiving end of those meals. Every three weeks, moms delivered some homemade deliciousness to our doorstep while I recovered from a chemo session.

Now, Little J and I deliver meals to moms once a month, in the spirit of thank-you-ness and because we like to cook together.

The last few months, I've made my now-famous "Chicken with Herbalicious Yum Sauce" (the name is mine, can you tell?). The day after delivering this dish, I always get an email requesting the recipe, so I thought I'd post the secrets to this pure poultry alchemy here.

This is for all you home chefs looking for some inspiration from the humble bird called "The Chicken." Lord knows we all need that from time to time.



Chicken with Herbalicious Yum Sauce

Don fancy apron. Then, in a large, super-cute bowl, whisk:

- 3/4 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1/2 tablespoon dried basil
- 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
- 2/3 cup virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1/2 cup ketchup (yes!)
- 2 1/2 tablespoons soy sauce

Take your sweet time whisking in order to combine the liquids well. I like to sing a few rounds of "Prince Ali" from Aladdin with Little J, to pass the time.

Submerge a pound of chicken thighs in the mixture and refrigerate for at least a few hours.

Place chicken in 13" x 9" rectangular baking dish, and pour sauce over.

Bake at 375° for one hour, turning every 20 minutes so that the parts that are peeking out of the sauce get a little crisp.

Bon appétit!

**Recipe is an adaptation of one found in *Apices of Life* by Nina Simonds.*

Winter Blooms (not published) ~ January 11, 2010

Our street here in Sugartown is littered with Christmas trees, naked and lying on their sides, waiting to be carted off. Still, it's almost impossible to believe that the holidays officially ended just over a week ago.

On the way to preschool the other day, Little J announced, "I know how we can make Christmas better next year, Mommy. We can have colored lights on the house instead of white ones, we can put blow-up decorations in the front yard like M and T, and we can leave the tree up longer, not just take it down so fast."

Hmm ... duly noted.

I have to admit that, on his last point, I'm in total agreement. Something about the holidays seemed to be too fleeting this year. Usually, by New Year's Day I'm totally ready to get back to normal, be all done with the festivities, get organized, and get started on my resolutions. Not so this year.

Back when winter solstice was celebrated as a last hurrah before the barren months of winter, the feasts, lights, and parties marked the beginning of a long bout of hunkering down together and waiting out the season. These days, the end of festivities sees us doing just the opposite. We say goodbye to our relatives and go back to work. We hit the gym and try to wean ourselves off so much comfort food. We think about getting in shape for the summer and (gasp) taxes. This year, I want to agree with Little J and say, "Let's hang on a second."

Here in Sugartown, it's been bitter cold (for California) and I haven't seen the sun in days. So I'm for starting a new tradition, a post-holiday continuation of togetherness, downtime, and comfort food, at least until the camellias are done blooming and the daffodil greens start poking their heads out of the ground.

The last several weekends, we've been cooking and feasting with the relatives just over the bridge. This is a good start. Now it's time to add game nights, potlucks, slow-cooked meals, and sleepovers, date nights with D, and movie nights, craft nights, and playing cards (yes!) with wine and other concoctions on hand. I'll keep up the daily walks with the lady friends and try to wean off some (not Ms. Vargo's cheese pie!) of the gluttonous food, but we've got a long way to go before spring, and I'm planning to squeeze in as much cozy time as possible. Let me know if you'd like to join in on the post-holiday festivities. I'll be sipping hot toddies by the fire with the girls.



*Par moi! The
mantle.*

One for Inspiration ~ January 17, 2010

On the day before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King, Jr., gave the soaring speech that not only prophesied his untimely death, but inspired his followers to continue the fight for their human rights.

No matter how many times I hear this speech, I get chills and my eyes well. His words scrape the heavens and pour down inspiration. To have a listen, search “Martin Luther King Jr.’s last speech” on YouTube.

One for Renewal ~ January 18, 2010

Before Little J was born, weekends were all about Liane Hansen, *Weekend Edition*, and NPR. For the past several years, Saturday and Sunday a.m. has meant Dr. Seuss, breakfast in bed, and four peas snuggling in a California King-sized pod: D, Little J, Virgil the cat, and me. NPR is sort of a thing of the past.

But yesterday, D managed to catch a gorgeous piece by Liane Hansen. Renewal can be as simple as using hope to punch holes in the darkness.

To have a listen go to NPR.org and search: “Liane Hansen, Rev. Kyles Remembers, January 17, 2010.”

One for Beauty ~ January 19, 2010

When I was first diagnosed with “the real O.C.,” Ms. Miller sent me a link to a website that changed my life: crazysexylife.com.

Crazy Sexy Life is the home of Kris Carr, Crazy Sexy Cancer Survivor, documentary film-maker, and author. Before I started chemo, I’d read her book *Crazy Sexy Cancer Tips*, and so had my BFFs M and C. I loved the book because it taught me how to deal with my diagnosis in the way that I try to deal with everything: with confidence, hope, and a sense of humor. But it also taught me how to deal with the other ways I tend to deal with scary things: freaking out, panicking, and going out of my mind. My friends loved the book because it offers an amazing perspective on how to deal with life in general, because life is shocking, unpredictable, and sometimes insane, even if you are not dealing with *The Big C*.

Over the years, Kris Carr’s website has evolved into a hub of priceless information for the Crazy Sexy Survivor, the Healthy, and the Worried Well alike. Once you’ve clicked around, you’ll be inspired. I promise.

Why “One for Beauty”?

For Kris Carr, living with Stage IV (ta daa! [I don’t know, I feel like that phrase always needs some sort of flourish]) cancer is about digging deep, finding the inner beauty in the scary places.

Private: One For Love ~ January 22, 2010

My love (yes, love!) for Audrey Hepburn runs deep. She is a Persephone with a capital P. Her story was filled with enough cycles of adversity and redemption to last the rest of us many lifetimes. And she handled it all with grace, charm, and compassion. But this post is not about Audrey. Ms. Miller has been encouraging me to write about Ms. Hepburn for ages. But the mere thought of the task paralyzes me. Admiration, unfortunately, can turn our love into lame clichés the minute our fingers hit the keyboard (as evidenced by this paragraph).

This one (for love) is about my father, sort of.

I've spent a lot of energy and good intention over the last six months trying to compel my sweet and talented niece to give her dad a chance, and another, and another. Meanwhile, I haven't spoken to my dad in two years (just between you and me).

But, in an effort to turn around and smooth out the fabric of my life, I'm planning to meet with him tomorrow, at the beach, for a picnic, with my family. Just to be together. Just to feel a gentle swath of calm ok-ness stretch between us for a while. And maybe to share a hug, the big kind we called "the morning squeeze" when I was a kid.

The man (a dapper NBC reporter in his heyday) has also lived a life of adversity, the kind that haunts and haunts. And he didn't handle it as well as the lady he's standing next to in the picture above. But when I look at his face and see the exact same expression that I would have (were I interviewing Ms. Hepburn in my late twenties) I see the me in him, and the him in me, and realize we have way more in common than I'd like to admit.

I can think of one hundred reasons why I shouldn't see him again. But the two reasons why I *should* feel so much more important.

So this is one for love. And forgiveness.

Have a gorgeous weekend.

Jennifer



*My father (right) with
Audrey Hepburn and Mel Ferrer*

“My talismans: my husband, my son, my will to survive, the beauty in every fold of the fabric of my life. I’m putting them on display in little snapshots of my life on this blog, to distance myself from the dragon, and to share something with you that I wish I’d seen long ago.” ~ Jennifer Wilson Cooper



In *Four Seeds*, Jennifer Wilson Cooper invites us in and shares with beauty and inspiring grace her life with cancer. Jennifer identified with Persephone being pulled down into the underworld over and over again. However, like Persephone, Jennifer refused to be a victim. If she was going to be forced to repeatedly return to the underworld, she would take control of what she could and create her own beautiful domain, hopeful and expectant for each change of season.

Four Seeds exemplifies Jennifer’s intention to surround herself with beauty and love and to focus attention on renewal and inspiration. Worldwide, *Four Seeds* readers continue to draw energy from Jennifer’s inquisitive mind and creative spirit and her strength and tenacity in living out her dreams.



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