


elizabeth edwards saving graces

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finding solace and strength from friends and strangers

Dear Reader,

September, 2006

There is nothing new under the sun. And yet we write and compose and paint, because, as the old political joke goes, “You may have heard this joke before, but you’ve never heard me tell it.” Each telling is different, because it matters what you see, it matters what you emphasize, it matters how you spread your words, your blessings. And, in truth, we are all buoyed, or maybe I am just speaking for myself because I am buoyed by the thought that it does matter that we are the ones to speak or act, that our condolences, our hugs, our spoken outrage really makes a difference. So I have spent a lifetime speaking out and reaching out, and in this book, I am just doing what I have always done, but I am doing it on the pages of a book.

In so many ways my life has been completely ordinary. There are whole books and whole web pages given over to children who grew up in military families – as I did, even special ones for those of us who grew up in military families overseas. The women’s college, graduate school with no job at the end, law school, marriage, parenting/coaching/chauffeuring/teaching – these are the staples of thousands of lives, probably millions of lives. Even the death of a child – which our family suffered – is sadly too common, and breast cancer unfortunately even more so. Yes, it is true. My life is probably a lot like your life, except that one day my husband made good on a notion he had talked about before we were married, and he ran for the United States Senate, and won, and found his feet quickly, and ran for the Democratic nomination for President and then, as the Democratic nominee, for Vice-President. I know, that last part does keep my life from being just like yours, but – and here’s the important part – the parts of my life that matter the most are like yours.

Maybe it was the political campaign, maybe the breast cancer, certainly the death of our son, but I’ve thought about our lives and what makes them worth living, what makes the choices we make mean something. And in that thinking, I keep coming back to the same thing – it is our connectedness, the invisible string that can be blood or history or a life – changing common experience or a shared cause, and you either reach for that string as a touchstone, as a crutch, or you don’t. I believe that there ought to be two definitions of life – one for those who feel that string in their lives and one for the very different life that must be experienced by those who do not. And this story, my story, is about how much softer a landing I have had in bad times because I have that

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string. And it is the story of how you have to start building the connections before the day you need them, but, luckily, it is not so hard to do – I have done it in the ways my father taught me, by reaching for the hands of strangers, by waving to the fellow who empties the garbage cans on my street (he likes UNC basketball) or speaking to the bagboy (he watches Charlie Rose). My life is richer and fuller because they are a part of it, and maybe sometime, when one of us needs the other – and we never know when that might be, the bridge between us will already have been built.

Now, you may have thought about these same things – but bear with me, because as the joke goes, you may have heard it all before, but you never heard me tell it.

Elizabeth Edwards