

Before and After

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Food. At long last something we can do. We can all do food. Herb-garlic chicken, roasted vegetables, fish tacos, soup and salad—the list on mealtrain.com grows upon the arrival home of local resident Sally Vanebo after her near-fatal collision with a tree at the end of November. Bringing food is one the oldest methods we women have to show we care. Many of us have kept apprised of Sally's condition via caringbridge.com, and now have a tool at mealtrain.com to organize deliveries of nourishing meals brimming with love to aid her in her recovery. It's what community is all about—kinship.

Local resident Margie Neilson captured what community is all about in her January 1 message to Sally: “It's those random acts of kindness, lively humor and quiet inspiration that you have unknowingly bestowed on so many of us which have launched such an outpouring of genuine devotion.” Random acts of kindness, lively humor, and quiet inspiration—things to keep in mind as we savor our connections here in our small towns.

Since Sally's accident followed by another auto accident involving Nehalem resident Cecile LaPointe, and yet another in which a friend's stepson John Lindstedt of Seaside was severely injured, I began to wonder about how our lives are frequently divided into before and after and how they change, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse upon a single moment. Before and after the kids were born, before and after the divorce, before and after the sudden death, before and after the accident or diagnosis. I wonder if each of us can remember a before and after in our lives and what growth or change in our path it brought about. Some say if you come across a fork in the road, take it. Others say if you come across a fork, look for a spoon. I say be ready to choose because we never know when our path will fork off into an entirely different direction than we anticipated. I'm all about getting ready—ready for the tsunami, before it happens, ready and fit enough to run, before someone is chasing me. Spiritually ready with a solid net in place before life knocks me flat.

But I also believe in the power of renewal and redemption. All we have to do is look at the world of nature, as great a teacher as any. In a recent issue of the *Smithsonian*, writer Lyn Garrity looks at the aftermath of the catastrophic Mount St. Helens eruption in 1980 in which plant and animal populations were nearly obliterated. Some species, however, managed what seemed impossible through techniques of survival like the underground retreats of mice and voles during the explosion. Others plants and aquatic species were protected by snow and ice. Organic matter from insects and dead trees aided soil formation that created a foundation for recovery. With the creation of new lakes and ponds, frogs and toads reappeared. Gophers churned up debris and microbes essential for creating soil. To see the region today is a reminder of how far we can come from devastation.

Sally's goal as she begins her after phase in life, is to return to the Neahkahnie Mountain, *Home of the Gods* as it's called, where Sally has hiked to the summit over and over again in the before accident phase of her life. She's invited members of the community to join her in the spring, a time of renewal

and new life. Again, it's something we can do. Like the mountain, Sally, strong, impenetrable and rooted, has showed us tenacity and perseverance as a way to get through. Everything is always changing. The mountain reminds us of this. But we are the roots of this community, and like the mountain, we're deeply connected and strong at our base. Anything's possible. How wonderful to be reminded of the reasons we love this place.

We sometimes think that we get a chance at a fresh start once or twice in a lifetime, if we're fortunate enough to survive a before/after incident. But in reality we're each given a chance with each new day. Even in the midst of darkest winter, we know that spring comes.