

You're Not the Boss of Me

Excerpt

Growing up I didn't have anyone to listen to me, understand me or to protect me and I never had a friend. All I had was an old pepper tree in our back yard. That old pepper tree heard all of my deepest secrets, saw all my pain inside and out, and saw me at my worst and at my best. Most important of all, though, is when that pepper tree showed me that a friend doesn't have to talk, they can just listen.

One time when I was about eight years old, my life was about as awful as it ever would be. I hadn't eaten in several days and I was getting weak. I leaned up against that tree and thought, "I wish I could just die. I wish I could close my eyes and never wake up." Just then a little gust of wind swept by and shook all of these little round red peppers out of the tree onto my face and arms. It felt like the tree was crying, and when I stood up he creaked, like he was hurting, too.

No one had ever cried because of me. No one had ever cared what happened to me. Feeling this great, loving kindness from this tree gave me strength. I put my arms around him and I hugged him, saying, "Don't worry, I didn't mean it. I won't leave you. I promise, I am going to get stronger." And I did.

Ever since then, whenever I was scared, tired, cold, or hungry, all I needed to do was climb into the old pepper tree and the wind and its branches would sway back and forth with the wind like a lullaby. This old pepper tree gave me a reason to live. It showed me that it was possible to be loved and cared about. I learned compassion and determination from that old tree. I kept that strength buried deep inside of my soul, through lots of troubles and pain. But I held on. I knew that if that pepper tree could be strong and caring, I could too.

