

Apricot Tree

By Jim Burnett

Before I lay this mortal by, I want to become an apricot tree. Many years ago, I bought a house with a large yard that included three trees. One was a nectarine tree, bearing wonderful fruit year after year; one was a white Dogwood tree which celebrated the coming of each spring with an abundance of blossoms. The other tree... well, it was my mystery tree. According to leaf and bark, it was obviously some kind of fruit, but no one knew what kind. It had been barren – blossom-less – for many years. Each year, I tended and pruned each tree, but the mystery tree continued to withhold its fruit. Then, one fall as I was pruning, I decided that I would replace the mystery tree the coming spring. To simplify its removal, I pruned its branches, then cut back its limbs so that none smaller than two inches in diameter remained. All winter, that stark skeleton-of-a-tree stood deathlike – its doom sealed by my decision and my cruel saw.

That spring, however, I wore my procrastinator's mask, and as the weather warmed, the mystery tree began to put forth fresh green sprigs which soon became leaf-filled branches. Because of its seemingly renewed burst of energy, I granted it a stay of execution. Nobody had seen this tree bloom in several decades, but this year, it bloomed! And as the weeks passed, blooms became fruit. My tree was no longer a mystery. There, alongside the nectarine tree, was an apricot tree bearing round, robust fruit – not many, but nevertheless, real apricots. Oh! and what apricots they were! Several decades before, I had plucked and devoured sweet, ripe golf ball-sized apricots from my Grandmother Zander's tree in Southern California. The apricots in my backyard were twice the size of those, and as they ripened, they radiated an inviting, irresistible golden glow. The tree produced only a couple of dozen of its golden fruit and I think I ate every one, directly from tree to mouth. To say that tree's fruit was good, is a gross understatement; I had never eaten – before or since – such luscious fruit!

Then, almost as quickly as its last precious fruit was plucked, the tree died. Before any leaf had fallen from the other trees, it had given up its fruit, its leaves and its life-energy. I thought at the time, "What a way to go!"

A couple of weeks later, as the last bits of the tree were reduced to glowing embers and wispy smoke curling up into the sky, I said to myself, "That's the way I want to go – just like the apricot tree! I want my last efforts on Planet Earth to be spent bearing fruit of such quality that I will be fondly remembered.

It's choice -- not chance -- that determines your destiny.
Jean Nidetch