

THANKS BE

To indomitable Pam Bales, who bequeathed to me her mom's precious rock collection; pushed and prodded, quip-whipped and all but carried me up and over Liberty and Flume after a particularly grueling chemo session; and, with the usual Balesean mischievousness and cheer, gave me an enormous stuffed Gorilla for good measure.

To John Gutowski, who without even a whisker of complaint let my over-worried mom tug on his neatly trimmed goatee while the first of many impossibly-named chemicals coursed through my veins at LRGH, and whose leavening on-the-trail wit (whenever I recalled it) kept me loose and laughing and, most important of all, determined to get back to Thunderstorm Junction for at least one more side-splitting bit of levity.

To fellow hikers (or are they saints?) Bill and Diane Schor, Nancy and Charlie Foote, Ed Hawkins and Helen Gingras, who came to visit me during a long and trying confinement at Brigham and Women's and offered nothing short of 90 proof optimism, and love.

To David Fisher, my low-key oncologist at Dana-Farber, for his sly sense of humor and awful selection of ties; Michele Walsh, his chief assistant, for tough examining-room love combined with a wickedly inimitable Irish accent; Megan Krug, Medical OPA on the move, for spontaneous late-night discussions about life and books worth reading; and Carolyn Crosby, my PCP, who, an avid White Mountains mountaineer herself, is the living, breathing embodiment of concern, conscientiousness, and care.

To rarer-than-radium friend and faithful correspondent Lianne Prentice, who kept tabs on me every slow step of the way and, whenever I needed a pick-me-up, lifted me high on sturdy angel's wings.

To Junior, my Chocolate Labrador, who took the place of my beloved Israel (summoned by the dog-gods way too soon) – and who, by dint of instinct, spontaneity, courage, inspirational four-legged energy and a sweetness language has no name for, helped me get back on my booted feet and to the tops of many peaks I thought I'd never climb again.

To my scintillating mountain-goat, sleek-as-snow-leopard sons, Harrison and Galen, who have stood with me countless times on innumerable White Mountain summits, blue sky or blizzard, and without whose devotion and no-holds-barred love I would be a hollow vessel indeed. (Note to those who may have wondered: now you know what the "H & G" on my car's license plates actually stand for.)

To my one and only Carla, who has been to me both beacon and sounding-board; touchstone, lodestar, voice of reason and occasional scold; and who, thirty-one years ago, for no other reason than a chance at adventure, agreed to accompany me, my best-buddy-ever Jeffrey Poor and two Mountain Airedale Terriers named Zinc and Zephyr on an early-June, four-nights-and-five-days near-hypothermia-producing 42.6 mile Pemigewasset Horseshoe – thereby changing my life forever, and opening to me almost magically whole inner vistas of freedom and serenity I had long believed would never be mine to know.