

WHEN I REALISED I WAS LIVING IN A CACTUS HOUSE



Learning to trust the Gardener with
where you live, work and grow.

When I Realised I Was Living in a Cactus House 🌿

I had a realisation one day that I had cactuses all over my house, and when I thought about why I had chosen them to be my houseplants, I realised that I had picked them because they didn't need much attention.

Without realising it, I had chosen them because they could cope with being left alone, neglected and without even one of their most basic needs being met - water.

And then I realised how much that reflected the way I had been treating my own needs. I had been giving myself the bare minimum, expecting myself to cope with very little, and somehow believing that surviving was enough.

Looking back, I found it rather interesting that I had surrounded myself with plants that were designed to survive with very little nurturing. And although it took many years for the penny to finally drop, I was beginning to understand that I was a Fern and that I actually needed something very different.

However, the problem was, I had picked the house myself. And I had also chosen a location and set-up that looked great on paper.

It had a south-facing garden, sunshine from sunrise to sunset, lots of natural light, many windows, and a quiet location, and I thought all of those things would be great.

And at first, they were because unresolved trauma, low needs and alcohol reliance were covering up my true needs.

But what looked good on paper wasn't necessarily what was good for my Fern. The south-facing windows meant that the house was flooded with brilliant light for much of the day. After many years, I realised that I didn't need relentless sunshine. I needed filtered light, softer light and some shade, because I wanted to be able to see the sunshine and blue sky without feeling as though I was sitting underneath a giant glare all day.

I had a basement to retreat to, but being underground made me feel depressed, so going below ground level was not the answer either.

What I needed was something in between: natural light, but softened; sunshine, but with shade; the ability to see the sky without being exposed to brilliant light all day.

It was beginning to dawn on me that my needs were much more specific than simply, "I need lots of sunshine" like 'A Place in the Sun' would have us believe is a necessity.

About two years after moving in, something started to change and I began to feel increasingly drained. I would have enormous crashes in energy that made it difficult to know how I was going to feel from one day to the next.

After giving up vices and feeling my feelings, I couldn't escape and started to feel trapped, and what made it particularly difficult was that I didn't just feel trapped in the house; I felt trapped in my own body.

I couldn't rely on myself to have consistent energy, and because I didn't know how I was going to feel at a particular time on a particular day, even making plans became difficult. I couldn't confidently say, "Yes, I'll meet you then," because I genuinely didn't know how I would feel when the day arrived.

I hated that feeling of being trapped. I could understand, looking back, why alcohol had sometimes felt like the only thing that could get me out and about, because it gave me enough of a push to leave the house and go somewhere else.

I wasn't necessarily trying to escape life; I was trying to escape the feeling of being stuck inside the same four walls and inside a body that I could no longer predict.

Working from home with nowhere to go left me feeling directionless and purposeless, where I didn't have community, I didn't have covering and I didn't have connection.

I was a solo Fern fighting to stay afloat in a Cactus world.

What became particularly strange was how closely my energy seemed to follow the light. The sun would come up and I could feel relatively fine, but somewhere around 10 am through to 2 pm or 3 pm was often the worst part of the day.

Then, as the sun shifted over the house and the intense brightness began to calm down, I would start to feel calmer too. By evening, I was back to normal.

It was almost as though I was morphing into the weather, the environment, the conditions and the house around me. Honestly, it felt like a curse.

Then I started noticing what was happening outside. I lived on a dead-end lane where there was very little traffic, and because it was a two-way road, cars would come down the lane and then have to turn around and come back out again.

There was something about that which eventually felt symbolic to me, because it felt as though everything was going nowhere. And that's exactly how I felt.

I had originally thought that the quietness would be peaceful, but I eventually realised that I didn't necessarily need less movement. I needed the *right kind* of movement.

The quietness had become stagnant rather than peaceful.

There were no trees and little greenery, and I didn't have that feeling of being surrounded by living things or being tucked into somewhere that felt sheltered and peaceful.

I also lived in an industrial area next to a power plant and surrounded by commercial businesses that were predominantly masculine in nature - trucks, lorries, heavy machinery, drilling, cars, boatyards and men doing very practical, physical jobs.

During the day, I could hear the recycling plant and the stone quarry, so there was a constant background of machinery, engines, drilling and industrial activity.

I was also right beside the sea, and for a long time I thought that being close to the water should automatically make me feel good because the sea is beautiful.

But I eventually realised that being beside the sea wasn't necessarily the same as being nourished by my surroundings.

The whole environment had a very different energy from what my Fern seemed to need, and I was beginning to realise just how much the character of a place can affect how you feel when you live and work there every day.

I had done so much work with the Lord, and I had finally come into a season of blossoming, but I knew that my environment was no longer able to keep me afloat. I had grown, but my surroundings hadn't grown with me.

I was becoming more of who God had created me to be, yet I was still living in conditions that were not supporting the woman I was becoming.

Eventually, I realised that I didn't actually need constant movement. The sea was always moving, the lorries came and went, the industrial machinery carried on throughout the day, and there was a constant sense of activity and exposure in the environment around me.

Whereas what I seemed to crave was more softness, shelter, flowers, plants, shrubs, trees, foliage, greenery, leaves gently moving in the breeze, and stillness.

I needed pretty, feminine and nurturing.

I needed my Forest. My eco-system.

I dreaded the thought of another winter in that house. I couldn't face another season of the lonely wind howling across the garden. The weather would come in from the north-east and when you're 100 metres from the sea, you feel it.

The last three winters, especially, I had felt the cold right down to my bones. My spine would hurt, my fingers would hurt, and I felt as though I had whiplash in my upper spine.

Then summer would come around, and the intensity of the sun would leave my neck feeling stiff. My body seemed to be all over the place, constantly reacting to the environment around me.

That's why the thought of going through another winter in those conditions felt overwhelming, because I had already begun to understand just how much the environment was affecting me. It was draining me.

The view from my kitchen window was of a tall granite wall, and I had no flowers or established plants in the garden. There were just painted walls, and even the grass would become dry and brown. I could see one tiny tree in a nearby garden, and that was it.

When I really stopped and looked at the whole picture, I realised that the environment I was living in wasn't giving me much back. It wasn't bearing fruit. There wasn't much growing, there wasn't much softness, there wasn't much shelter, and there wasn't much that made me feel nourished by my surroundings.

What I really needed - truly needed - was to be surrounded by trees. Tall trees, lofty trees, magnificent trees. Trees that represented growth, strength, honour and protection.

And that was when the Fern metaphor really started to make sense to me, because I had chosen Cactuses for my house because they could survive in harsh conditions, and yet I was living in conditions that were making me feel increasingly depleted.

The truth was, I didn't need to become better at surviving. I needed to understand that I was a Fern, and that the conditions that allow a Cactus to cope are not necessarily the conditions that allow a Fern to flourish.

I began to understand that I didn't necessarily need darkness, and I didn't need to hide away from the world, but I did need the right kind of light.

I needed filtered light rather than relentless glare, and I needed to be able to see the sunshine and the blue sky while also having shade and shelter.

I needed trees, greenery, flowers, life and something that felt as though it was growing around me, because I realised how much my surroundings affected the way I felt.

Perhaps the most difficult part was realising that I had become so affected by the environment that I was no longer living with the freedom I wanted. I couldn't make plans easily because I couldn't trust my energy. I couldn't consistently say yes to people.

I couldn't simply decide to go somewhere because I didn't know whether I would have the energy when the time came. I had started organising my life around the limitations of the environment, rather than living the life I actually wanted.

And that is what being stuck in a small pot can feel like. The Fern may still be alive, but there isn't enough space for the roots to spread, and eventually the plant starts to struggle.

It doesn't mean the Fern is broken. It may simply mean that the pot has become too small.

Looking back, I realised that I had picked the house myself. I had chosen a location that looked great on paper, but I hadn't yet learned how to recognise what my Fern actually needed.

I had chosen the house according to what I thought would be good for me, rather than asking God where I would truly thrive.

That became a profound realisation for me, because perhaps I didn't just need to find another house. I needed a place that God had chosen for me. I needed somewhere where the conditions would support me rather than constantly ask me to adapt to them.

Somewhere I could feel at home in my own body, where my energy could settle and where I could breathe.

Somewhere with greenery and life around me, where my surroundings felt nourishing and my environment gave something back rather than continually taking from me.

There is a difference between choosing a house because it looks good on paper and being planted somewhere that allows you to flourish.

I had been making decisions based on what seemed sensible, desirable or practical, but I was beginning to understand that God knows the ecosystem I need far better than I do.

He knows the light I need, the pace I need, the surroundings I need, the people I need and the conditions in which the person He created me to be can actually come alive.

Perhaps this is part of surrender. It is saying, “God, I don't just want to choose what looks good. I want You to lead me to what **is** good for me”.

I didn't want to keep forcing myself into pots that looked ideal from the outside but left me depleted on the inside. I wanted to trust the Gardener enough to let Him decide where I was to be planted.

Because maybe the house I needed wasn't simply the house I could afford, the house that looked impressive, the house with the best view or the house that ticked every box on paper.

Maybe I just needed a place where God knows my Fern will thrive.

And perhaps that is something other Ferns can learn to notice too. Instead of asking, “What's wrong with me?”, they can start looking at the whole ecosystem of their lives and asking, “What is this place producing in me?”

Does it bring out life, joy, creativity, peace, connection and energy, or does it leave them feeling depleted, guarded, miserable and like they are simply trying to get through another day?

Because sometimes we can spend years trying to fix ourselves when the deeper issue is that we are living somewhere, working somewhere, or staying in relationships that simply aren't giving us the life-giving conditions we need to thrive.

We can become very good at coping, but coping isn't the same as flourishing, and being able to survive somewhere doesn't necessarily mean that we are meant to stay there.

For me, there was something very powerful about realising that where I was living bore no fruit. Nada. Nothing. In fact, it had taken everything from me - my health, my energy and my wealth. I hadn't had good finances since living there.

And perhaps that was something I needed to notice, because God can sometimes use what we are experiencing to make us pay attention to what we have been tolerating, what we have been missing and what He may be inviting us to change.

I eventually realised that I didn't need to become better at living in that house. I needed to be replanted.

I had been trying to make myself fit a pot that had become too small for me, and I was becoming increasingly aware that I needed a different ecosystem around me.

Instead of asking “How do I make myself survive here?”, the question was, “God, where have You planted me next, and where are You asking me to grow? Show me.”

Because not every place where a Fern can survive is a place where they can flourish. Sometimes a Fern isn't failing. Sometimes they are simply root-bound and the answer isn't to try harder inside the same pot. The answer is to recognise that it may be time to be replanted.

When God shows you where you were always meant to grow, you will finally understand why some places never felt like home. And that's when it will all make sense.

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