

1862



By Anna Von Reitz

Today, the Day After Christmas, we have definite diagnosis from a canine cancer expert that no, my Labrador Retriever does not have lymphoma and yes, he does have laryngeal paralysis and is a good candidate for "Tie Back" surgery.

So, so far, so good.

After a morning appointment to determine this, I came home to deal with still more wreckage from the Earthquake-- both oddly dating to 1862 and Minnesota.

The first was the breaking apart of my giant Christmas Cactus, a 15th generation of one that Charlie Mayo gave my Great-great Grandmother, Hannah Knight Alexander.

The large Majolica Pot it was in hurtled off a plant stand and broke in a hundred pieces. The Cactus which was just beginning to bloom broke into many pieces of fronds, too.

These I picked up and am endeavoring to root, thinking of that long-ago Christmas when Charlie Mayo came home from Edinborough, and brought my Great-Grandmother a rooted slip of the latest horticultural discovery: a Christmas Cactus.

We have kept it going all these years, through all these generations: Charlie Mayo's Christmas Cactus made the journey to Alaska in 1987, and has been here growing in a variety of pots ever since.

The giant Majolica pot that bit the dust in the November 30, 2018 Earthquake was only the most recent home of The Family Christmas Cactus.

It first came away with me when I left home for college when it lived in a plain earthenware pot and has been part of my adventures ever since. Even now, when it is suddenly split in a hundred pieces and searching for new roots.

The other attachment also comes back to the Mayos and 1862 and Minnesota and the Second Battle of New Ulm. My Great-Grandmother and her husband, Merton Eastlick, were traveling westward with a party of pioneers headed by Dr. William Worrall Mayo the fateful August of that year and all were caught in the midst of the Great Sioux Uprising of that year.

Merton Eastlick and two of the small children were killed outright by the Lakota and Mary Alexander Eastlick was seriously wounded and left a widow with three surviving children. Together with Dr. William Worrall Mayo the survivors limped back to Rochester and yet another story began.

This winter on Christmas Eve I received a gift of Magic from a Lakota Grandmother. She sent me two exquisite Dream Catchers and many other items and totems of faith in life and the Great Spirit that binds us. She did not tell me her name, but she sent me her spirit.

So here we are, all together, after all these years. I am hoping that Charlie Mayo's Christmas Cactus will--as it has so many times before-- grow new roots. And I am hoping that the Lakota Elder read this and know that I understand and cherish their prayers.

We are all in this together.

And as if to make the point all that much more obvious, I sat down after dinner and did the clean up and repair of my essential oils cabinet.

My Great-Great Grandfather, Joseph Alexander, was the "Green Witch" for the Mayo brothers, the early form of a pharmacist. My earliest memories are of his herb lawn and tumbling headlong down a slope robed in Violets and thyme.

Today, I carry on the family tradition of herb lore and use of natural medicine and have a large collection of essential oils in small vials in wooden cases.

Amazingly, only four vials were damaged: Damiana, Hyssop, Violet, and Chinese Lotus.

So tonight I sat at the table in my dining room pouring over my essential oil collection and re-bottled and re-labeled those four oils and contemplated all the nuances of scent pouring over me and my household.

It smells wonderful and alive in my house tonight and I feel very close to my Great-Great Grandfather, his wounded daughter who became my Great-Grandmother, the Lakota whose lives entwine with ours, the plants and the Earth that are our common heritage.

Hyssop, the bitter herb of the Last Supper, Damiana, the herb of women and the moon, Violet, the sweet floral scent of my home state and youth, and Chinese Lotus, the magnificent warm power of sun and water combined.

The air is full of their natural magic and the keynote of all these many elements come back to 1862, all now and present in the winter of 2018 --Charlie Mayo's Christmas Cactus, the Lakota Elder's gift, the memory of the young widow who remarried and became my Great-Grandmother, Mary Alexander, the essential oils whose scents were cherished then and now.

God bless us all in this New Year. May the past be at peace at last.

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