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I was 34 years old when I was diagnosed with stage 2 cancer, having no family history or odd genes. My cancer story is a familiar one. There was fear, terror, chemo, nausea, surgery, pain, radiation, more pain and a slow non-linear recovery. And perhaps most devastating, at the core of it all, there was this: I lost my sense of self and my capacity to believe in a future.

Climbing to the top of mountains saved me.

I started thinking about climbing a mountain right in the middle of my chemo treatments. My oncologist had suggested I lose about 15 pounds and I thought, well, maybe I could take up hiking. I said to myself, if I can go through chemo and I can go through radiation, then I can climb up a mountain.

During treatment I started walking around the block. Then I started walking around the block twice, and then walking around the park. When I finished chemo and began to get a little sense of wellness back I started to do some hikes. Each time I went out I went a little farther and walked a little bit longer.

It was totally unexpected to me how much I liked the actual climb up. It was hard. But it felt really good to huff and puff and feel my body aching in a positive way. And it felt even better to improve.

The first time I reached a summit I started crying maybe 500 yards from the top. When I finally got to the top it just crashed over me: I was this strong individual. I was myself again, only stronger. I had set a big goal and I had reached it.

For the first time since my cancer diagnosis, I felt like it was going to be OK. And I felt I was going to be OK. It felt like the sun had come back and that no matter what might happen from that moment on, nothing – no illness, no experience – could take that summit away from me.

And that felt really, really good.

We need to protect big wild landscapes for many reasons. One very important reason to me is that time spent in the big expanses of wild nature can heal and restore us – body, mind and soul.

Greater Canyonlands is one of the most exquisite and awe-inspiring places in the world. And it not only has mountains to climb, it also has a labyrinth of utterly amazing canyons to descend – and climb back out of! Preserving Greater Canyonlands as a national monument would be a gift to the health and well-being of all of us.

