

## Tough Tree

On The Yellowstone Highway between Cody Wyoming and Yellowstone Park's east entrance there is a tree that has overcome adversity. My wife and I both saw it as we drove from Cody on the right side of the road before you hit the tunnels and Bill Cody State Park.

This pine tree is growing on a side hill along the highway and is maybe eight feet tall with a four inch diameter trunk. It's holding back a five foot long, three foot wide, and two foot thick slab of Thermopolis Shale from sliding onto the highway. The side hill is steep where the little tree fights gravity and without the tree's determined strength I'm sure that block of shale would slide down the hill in the next rain.

It's hard to tell when the tree's struggle began. While all the other pines on the side of that hill grow straight up toward the life giving sun, this tree has a forty five degree angle in its trunk around the front edge of the huge slab. Then it straightens out and reaches toward the sun.

Many players in the NFL come from extremely difficult backgrounds. I can't imagine growing up in the circumstances that these men faced as children but something in their character allowed them to be shaped by these challenges. They were strengthened rather than broken by their trials and carried that strength as an advantage into the NFL. How many people out there dwell on a negative past instead of growing straight and strong into the future? Yes something traumatic happened in this tree's past and it's scarred and still challenged by it. As the years go by it grows taller and thicker. It sends its roots deeper into the soil, making the weight of its load easier to bear with each passing season.

In the same way those of us who have been victimized, lost loved ones, or made decisions in our past that we regret deeply, need to know that only by focusing on the future will we grow stronger and more able to handle the weight of our pasts. Take a clue from this tough pine tree that didn't give up despite the overwhelming odds against it. Now it stands as an example for those of us who drive by and marvel at its strength.

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