

Anniversary Days ...

I keep writing my grief journey because there is more to say. It is January and the days are starkly reminiscent of what it was like three years ago to watch fearfully as my husband of 57 years began to fade before my eyes. The snowstorms, the freezing rains, the pewter skies trigger feelings of anxiety. Winter in the Midwest, cold permeating, many months to go, and me, with a dull dread underlying those months leading up to March 7, 2016.

As a social worker I am trained to know about “anniversary effects” when merely the time of year brings back what it was like approaching a trauma, a death. Even now I can picture perfectly the day my father died. I am in the kitchen with our two tiny girls. Bob has left for work and we three are rumped, dressed in flannel, Dawn in her junior chair, Kathleen in her high chair. Cream of Wheat or Malt-O-Meal bubbles on the stove. The kitchen steamy with coffee and cereal smells. Snow flurries outside this early morning, February 14th, Valentine’s Day. The phone rings and I grab it off its cradle. It is my uncle calling from California. My daddy, Clyde Dennis has died. My adored 48 year old father has passed to heaven. Anguish, the pain visceral.

And today, January memories emerge unbidden. My dearly beloved Bob Carlson, beautiful man of nearly all my born days, looking peaked. Skin tinged gray, energy depleted, colder than usual, freezing hands, wearing gloves inside to

keep warm. I lie in bed at night and beg God to give me reassurance that the prostate cancer hasn't returned, that his appearance is merely a glitch on his wellness screen, something that can be addressed, acknowledged by him, that we can open this door together, state our gut-fears, seek help. I often wonder did he know he was declining unto death? Was he in denial? Was I? When I mention seeing the doctor as soon as possible he states every time, "April, I have an appointment on March 8th". It is an irony that he died March 7th.

Anne Lamott speaks of a time when the anguish of death abates and there is sadness, yes, but the pierced heart bleeds less. She puts it this way: "Of course when certain people die there is anguish. We'll never get over their deaths and we're not supposed to." I agree that anguish is rare for me now. The days are rolling on until the day he died. Each night I tuck a flannel pillow on either side of my body, creating a cocoon of warmth. I struggle to pray a lone prayer, or recite the Our Father aloud as we used to do. I pray to sleep the night, to have only lovely dreams of the way we spooned, laughed ourselves to sleep, talked of the deepest or simplest or sweetest memories. I am living out the sadness that all of us in our broken world experience in losses that are profound, wounding, that will never go away. Most nights I am answered in that I sleep well, that nearly all my memories are dear, that I have work to do and people to love and that a quiet snowfall in the still of the night can still brings a kind of joy. I am grateful, O yes, but grief remains. 🌿