

Beginning Year Two ...

*I*t's Friday, a chill, penetrating, near-spring day. Melting snow puddles on the deck. I search for color in the fields beyond, but it is a gray world, a colorless taupe. I am fresh from cobalt skies and brilliant sun, magenta bougainvillea and the golden bloom of the Palos Verde tree. Fresh from beautiful faces and endearing charms of diminutive great grandchildren. Fresh from family barbecues and lingering patio evenings, breezes ruffling hair, soft on skin, sunsets glowing on the horizon. I am fresh from Arizona.

I am now home to year two. March 7, 2017, has passed. My husband has been gone one year and a little over a week. Widows have said to me, "year two is worse." I utter a silent, "O no!" I dare not ask "why" though part of me wants to know. I remember that once a client (a widow) told me that year three was her hardest! So I am going to continue to write about this grief journey. And as every death has its unique variables, so goes the grief journey. I, too, am a bit of an observer regarding the trek I am on.

My friend Paul sent me a poem last September: "Grief," by Barbara Crooker

Grief

*Is a river you wade in until you get to the other side.
But I am here, stuck in the middle, water parting
around my ankles, moving downstream*

*over the flat rocks. I'm not able to lift a foot,
move on. Instead, I'm going to stay here
in the shallows with my sorrow, nurture it
like a cranky baby, rock it in my arms.
I don't want it to grow up, go to school, get married.
It's mine. Yes, the October sunlight wraps me
in its yellow shawl, and the air is sweet
as a golden Tokay. On the other side
there are apples, grapes, walnuts
and the rocks are warm from the sun.
But I'm going to stand here,
growing colder, until every inch
of my skin is numb. I can't cross over,
Then you really will be gone.*

This morning, feeling down, I revisit some of my musical haunts, knowing the tears need to fall. I guess I am still *standing in the middle of the stream*. When Brad Paisley sings "When I Get Where I'm Going," he sheds his melodic light on the thoughts I had when I first heard those words, "when I get where I'm going on the far side of the sky, the first thing that I'm going to do is spread my wings and fly...". I recall how, when Ellie sent this tune to me, I played it in the grocery store parking lot just days after his death, tears streaming, and thought of how Bob would look up at the sky in amazement and say, "wouldn't it be so cool to fly?" Yes, I guess I AM *still standing in the middle of the stream*.

What's better, starting year two? I am getting used to being and living alone. I find my (our) home to be a comfort, a

respite, a place of dear memories rather than a negative reminder of same. I have tackled his part of our team responsibilities as a matter of course. I am learning to ask for help when I need it and to handle what is only mine to do. (I have no compunction about grabbing an able bodied grandson or visiting friend to hoist the Hinkley Springs water bottles into place.) I complain less. (Who wants to hear a widow's laments day in and day out?) I am aware that I DID complain to Bob more than was necessary. I am blessed with enormous support. Family is a gift that keeps on giving, every single one of them, top to bottom. Friends are a boon. Their hearts are open to my grief, and yet I know each of us have "grief stories" and fun stories and challenging stories, so it is not all about mine. I am infinitely curious about others' lives. Most days I have a sense of well-being, an understanding that God is giving me strength, courage, and has blessed me with provisions galore.

What is still hard? Tuesday, a late client night, picking up the Szechwan Chicken at Fu Yuan carry out. The nice owner with whom Bob had a regular and friendly repartee saying on this cold winter evening, "spring is coming!" I grab my mini-meal for one, and struggle with a tearful thank you. I drive home crying and thinking of how we ate Chinese on our separate couches in the living room — Chinese for two. I drive home thinking of spring, and all that spring meant, and all that I have written about before — the pale greening he loved so much, the yard plans he'd have, the way we'd walk or cycle the prairie paths, the budding and the warmth and the color coming back into our gray world.

And today. I write propped up in our bed. The deck is to my right and on my left is the chair I see him sitting in now. He's gotten up first, brought me my perfect cup of coffee (just the right amount of cream, just the right amount of sugar, microwaved for 40 seconds) and he's in that comfy chair with the fur wrap over his knees. He's already making me laugh as I am attempting to tell him about one of my crazy dreams. He is editorializing, throwing out one-liners which are hilarious. Even in the last couple of months of his life he could do the same, keep me laughing though he himself was suffering and in pain more than we knew.

Today, the beginning of YEAR TWO, I am still in the middle of the river. I see the *apples, grapes, and walnuts* on the other side. I sense the sun, even on this gray day. I know that parts of me are still numb, and I resist *crossing over*, because I fear losing my best friend even more than I have lost him now. But my feet are not stuck. I feel myself moving, the sand beneath my feet loosening, shifting. I am going to trust that by God's Grace I can begin wading *to the other* side, that I will never lose my Love and that though "weeping may endure for the night, joy comes in the morning." I am going to hang on to the sure promise that I will see him again. 