

Car Tales, Beginning Year Three ...

*M*y old Jeep Cherokee sits forlorn, hunkered among the gleam and glitz of models glaring newness in the afternoon sun. My old Jeep served us well. Never mind worn leather seats, a nick or two on her body. Never mind I've put money into her since Bob died, me on yet another learning curve called "car maintenance." Never mind the wise and well-calculated advice from family that "when you start putting \$500 here and \$500 there it's time to think about a new car." Never mind until that night on my way out. A bitter spring rain slants sideways, and the Jeep gasps to a halting start—every light on the dashboard warning "danger." It gives a shudder and proves suddenly unreliable.

Beginning year three of widowhood, I've come a long way from the early pain of relinquishing his cell phone to Sprint. In these past two years the house has been purged of outdated papers, garage items, even his beautiful fresh, classy clothing. I've purged in fits and starts as I am able. It's an emotional journey. I've kept the few items of clothing I wear often, the cashmere sweaters which retain his smell. I still breathe their Bob-fragrance and remember.

And I remember the day Bob brought the "old Jeep" home. All shiny and impressive. Black, with the right amount of bells and whistles. We love road trips. Take her over hill over dale, near and far, and finally on a 5,000 mile road trip, our last together. We drive out West. We hit friends, family, a wedding. We spend many days alone riding in companionable silence,

gazing at each state's unique offerings. We have our "road trip style" down pat. We are spontaneous, stop on impulse to sight see, only worry about reservations if it seems prudent. We like the adventure of it all. We are in sync, favoring "local color" memories to fast food slam dunks. Bob engages wherever we land. He looks clerks and servers in the eye, inquiring in non-intrusive ways about their lives. Small town citizens invite more conversation. We learn a lot, are warmed by these interactions, and discuss these encounters later as we travel. I admire his effortless engagement, his natural gift. I muse on it as we ride together. I am filled with love. A small regret: I doubt if I mentioned out loud how much I loved that about him.

We reach Colorado's San Juan's, majestic peaks towering. We're pumping gas and buying Cheetos at a roadside general store. Our Jeep stutters upon leaving, goes dead. We're towed back to Montrose, sitting high in the front cab of the tow truck. It'll be a couple of days we hear. We rent a Silverado truck, make the best of it, and drive to Telluride, each vying to take the wheel. We walk the Telluride boardwalk, stopping to eat in a quintessential western outside pub. Mountain breezes and beauty surround us. We reminisce. The last time we were in Telluride, years earlier, we were mountain biking. Bob had a giant partially healed abrasion from thigh to ankle, incurred in a roller blading slide. That day he tore it open on an errant willow branch negotiating the challenges of a bike path. We laugh as we remember how we patched him back together—I dollop triple antibiotic ointment on myriad gauze pads up and down the length of his leg—he winces with each application—I admit I'm no nurse!—he agrees!

Now, I drive my new, steel gray 2018 Jeep Cherokee down the ramp toward the highway. I look back at our good old well traveled car. And I remember another time. We're driving West. The windows are rolled down and the air is fresh. We're driving into the sunset. The sky is big, the clouds luminous. We sing together sometimes, and this evening we sing "How Great Thou Art." We reach across the seats of our seasoned Jeep and hold hands. There is no need for words. We are experiencing a taste of Heaven.

I drive my sturdy and functional and gleaming new car home. The wheel is firm in my hands. I smell the "new car" smell. I thank God that I have a reliable ride. I let go of yet another piece of what we shared. And I am thankful. 