

Widow Woes, Thoughts On Year Two ...

*M*y beautiful, comfortable home is a disaster zone. A riveter blasts through concrete on my first floor. I am upstairs in my office, Barrett's old room, jarred to the bone and unable to think. Doing "paper work," paying bills, and struggling to calculate how many times 5 goes into 390 without a calculator! I wonder to myself does eight go into 40 five times? Really?

I leave the house to go to a doctor's appointment to get the latest X-ray on my broken foot. I am hoping against hope that it will be healed now after a little over 8 weeks. The X-ray reveals the break has not changed from three weeks ago, and I must wear the boot for another month. If in that time it hasn't healed, I will need a foot stimulator to enhance the healing process. The doctor asks, "Have you been using your foot too much?" Now that is a particularly unfunny joke, albeit unintentional. I restrain myself from telling the whole story of a flooded first floor, unexpected, comprehensive plumbing expenses (likely not covered by insurance), my decision to purge cupboards, files and closets on that floor as along as everything else is a mess. I try not to cry in front of him and the sympathetic nurse with whom I have bonded over several months of visits. I murmur, "Well, there have been unexpected circumstances. I had a flood ..."

I return home and see that the house is covered with a deep layer of cement dust. My bedroom is the only respite. And even there the dust is layered thick. Now the worst riveting is over, and a lesser jack-hammer sound reverberates. Even the mournful sound of a train whistle or a honking vee of geese would never be heard in this din. I know I have to get out of here, to go somewhere before my meeting tonight. I settle on a local tea shop where I can sit undisturbed and write my thoughts.

As a social worker, I know that emotions can supersede rational thought when one is stressed, or when there are multiple challenges. What is making my heart ache and why I am near tears is this: in the purging process I emptied two large filing cabinets of dated materials which Bob had kept chronicling our life over many years. As I sorted I relived vacation memories, house repairs, warranties for refrigerators, stoves, dishwashers. I relived our LIFE here on Indian Knoll Trail for the 45 years we shared it. In the hall closet I found the mitt Bob used to play endless catch with Barrett. In a chest I unearthed ski hats and snow pants and long underwear from trips we took to Breckenridge with the kids. I pictured us eating breakfast at the Prospector, garbed in ski apparel, fortifying ourselves for a day on the slopes. And then, still in a purging mood, I tackled Bob's clothes last Sunday afternoon with Barrett and Drew. I made the decisions of what to give away. The last purge, rows of shirts still laundry-fresh, crisp, the tags pinned on the hems. All of his slacks, his sport coats, his suits—fine materials, soft and smooth between my fingers, reminiscent of times we

shopped together and I'd wait perhaps in the dressing room as a tailor pinned his cuffs, chalked his shoulder area. He had nice broad shoulders, looked good in his clothes, enjoyed the process. He dressed well for his business in Chicago and his trips to New York for markets. Some of his shoes were barely worn—he was always trying to find a pair that would ease the peripheral neuropathy from which he suffered. I look in his closet now, nearly empty except for a couple of shirts I couldn't part with. The jackets and tapered shirts I still wear and a couple of cashmere sweaters, soft on my skin.

And then there is the biggest hurt—bigger by far than a trashed house and even his clothes. It is losing his fine, strong sense of perspective. His listening ear. His courage under pressure. His sweet spirit. It is the fact that he would actually be enthused by the tasks ahead, making friends with Grant the young plumber, fascinated by the reconstruction process.

My best friend has died and there is no replacement. Now, tonight I pray to God that I will be a person of grace to all who are helping me get through the chaos. And even in this new layer of grief, I pray that I will learn what I need to learn. 🌱