

## Year Two Completed widow musings continued ...

March 7, 2018, approaches, thrusting blatant anniversary memories to the fore. One does not will them into being. They come unbidden in the days and hours leading to the final minutes of my husband's passing. They create again mind pictures as clear as the day they took place. They create sounds of last breaths and sobs all around. They create again the awe of being in the presence of something sacred, life to death. And then death to LIFE! They are beautiful, and they are awe-filled. They are a privilege to remember. They are an honor, honor-ing.

They bring tears, these memories. But they do not rip raw as they did two years ago. Can they still tear at my heart? Of course. Can I still ride an unexpected wave of grief? Can music do me in with regularity? Am I crying in the car? Or late at night when sleep eludes? Yes, yes, and yes. And year two has had its moments of deep grief, more than I would have expected. I make no excuses for that fact. I lost my best friend, the love of my life, only two years ago. He and I were an "item" for 62 of those years.

I allow myself to "go there." That is my way of grieving. I go "there" without effort. Now most of my memories are humorous, often joy-filled, sometimes regretful, but mostly sweet to reflect upon. There is no prescribed one-size-fits-all Grief Journey. I do not languish. God saves me from moments of longing that have no end. "Distractions" can be

beautiful, life-giving, though the word is not particularly beautiful to my ear.

There are distractions of the past and distractions in the present. Last week I found letters Bob wrote to me daily after the death of my father. They take place in the month I stayed in California with my mother and our two little girls. Bob is back home with my brother Jan, working and going to school full time. He works in my parents' printing company in the bindery on a folder and on a cutter, sometimes rising at 2:30 AM to get a job out on time. These letters are so "Bob." They are full of humor, love for me and "the honeys" as he calls them, and longing for us to be home. I laugh and cry as I read them. I see him perfectly. He is undeniably handsome, a true "catch," blonde, green-eyed, and not at all aware of those attributes. There is a congruity in him, in these letters, written in his early 20's. They are who he was all of his life—filled with fun, food, friends, family, and Faith. They are honest. They still crack me up. They are a gift to have found near the anniversary of his death.

Lately I remember our sojourns into the national parks. A Teton camping experience. Rain pelts our tent, thunder and lightening dramatic, terrifying. Finally awash, floating, we ride it out laughing. The time we hike in Glacier, come upon a mother moose and her baby, feel our spines tingle. Our hair stands on end at the grandeur, the primal danger, before she and her baby glance our way one more time to saunter off. Yellowstone memories—after dinner station wagon jaunts, our kids in the "way back," sharp-eyed, longing for a bear

sighting, an errant elk, a wolf call. We smile in the front seat as their sightings may be part imagination, part reality.

And there are present distractions, God-given. They come in the form of cards with words perfect in their discernment, their kindness, their comprehension of my grief, yes, but also cognizant of the fellowship of suffering. I keep those cards as bookmarks in my readings, opening them often for renewed encouragement. Often distractions come in the way Nature has always played a part in my life, but now perhaps, with heightened appreciation. The oaks, the sky, the clouds, the birds, the wind, the rain, the moon. I think of Psalm 19 that I memorized as a child:

*The heavens declare the glory of God  
and the firmament shows his handiwork.  
Day unto day utters speech and  
night unto night shows knowledge.  
There is no speech nor language  
where their voice is not heard.*

The distractions come in invitations from friends for meals, concerts, movies, coffee. From acts of service, (dragging the garbage down the long gravel drive and up again, during the “broken foot” era). And they come from family who text me, call me, feed me, listen, come alongside, are present and simply love.

Year two is over as of March 7, 2018. The Grief Journey continues. Though it is a journey I did not choose, it is a journey that is grace-filled and for which I have immense gratitude. 🌱

*Even the saddest things can become,  
once we have made peace with them,  
a source of wisdom and strength  
for the journey that lies ahead.*

*Frederick Buechner*