Tears of Rocks

July 25, 2010 By Richard Ferri, PhD, ANP

I had forgotten about the envelope the priest gave me. For a while it sat on my desk and I would occasionally spy upon it but always resisted the urge to pick it up. I simply did not want to touch it. If I touched it then maybe it was time to open it up, and do what my priest said to do when I was ready. I did not want to be ready.

The day the priest gave me the envelope of salt was a cold, sunny day in April. It was my late husband's birthday since his sudden death. As the wind and our prayers swept over his grave tears began to flow. I knew I would cry of course but I did not expect such a sharp pain to piece my soul. I knew I had to be stronger than this. The priest pulled the envelope of salt of his Book of Common Prayer and quietly said: "Inside are the salt of your tears. When you are ready open the envelope and toss the grief to the wind." As I took the simple envelope from his hands tears from my eyes feel on it. I could feel the rock salt clump together. I silently slide the envelope into my pocket and cried some more.

That envelope was handed to me about 4 years ago. Since that time my life has changed in ways that still seem impossible to collage together. I left the house that John and I lived in nearly all are married life. It was not just a matter of selling a piece of real estate but a firm yet gentle push from John to move on, I could feel it. I could feel him. John was putting things to perspective for me when I could not even see over the rim of the rabbit hole. I felt trapped in that house. While it was painful to be there it was also comforting. I could feel and sense my past at every turn. When I was alone in the house it sometimes felt like I was alone in the entire world. I realized I was isolating in self-imposed prison. I needed freedom, but I hadn't any idea what that meant.

John and I had been together since I was just 22 years old. I was young, foolish, and unable to see life. Now over two decades had past and I and the world changed dramatically. But nothing changes a man more swiftly and harshly than widowhood. It is a catastrophic event that implodes so deep in your guts you fear speaking of it will cause you to hemorrhage to death. So you walk a very fine line and put one foot in front of the other and claim days when you do not pray for death, vomit, or bleed tears as small victories.

In that first year after John died I was not able to claim many victories. Yet maybe that isn't true. Through the grace of God I remained sober and was somehow able to stay on my antiretrovirals. It was route. My sprit somehow turned into a machine. I did what had to be done just to keep going and maybe that is what kept me alive.

Then something happened that was so startling that I could not even comprehend it as a possible reality. I feel in love again. I feel deeply, passionately and hopelessly in love with a man that had been our family veterinarian for many years. I did not see it coming and I still wonder what the hell really happened.

The short version is that I took in one of my cats for her routine check up and shots about a year after John's death. No big deal. However, when I stood in the exam room with a man I only knew as my veterinarian I felt something move. A piece of ice encrusted my heart melted. A grain of salt evaporated. It left me confused and disorientated. I think I even attempted to flirt - *but my notion of how to flirt was 25 years in the past and I am sure I made fool out of myself*.

However, foolishness aside I boldly asked his receptionist if the doctor had a boyfriend or was seeing anyone. She said no, smiled, and handed me piece of paper with his personal cell phone on it. I called. He called back. We went for coffee and somehow in the middle of heartbreak and chaos we feel in love.

I still have that envelope of salt and have not yet opened it up. I found it in a drawer recently while searching for a pencil. I just stared at it and thought how tangential life is. It just comes and it just goes. Sometimes with great fanfare; other times in icy silence.

Life, at best, is a mysterious crapshoot. Life is anyone's guess and God's inevitable plan. I have come to accept this. However, accepting it does not mean I have to understand it or even like it. It does mean I have to deal with it.

Today I have a love and a joy that I thought died forever four years ago. I am a lucky man. So I am finally climbing out of the rabbit hole and feeling whole again. It is good to finally have my head and heart above the ground.

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