

Losing Someone: The Price of Love Is Grief

8/27/23

My original plan when I volunteered to lead this service was to talk about balance for two reasons; 1) Mabon, the autumnal equinox, is approaching, which is all about balance, and 2) I have several services that I have already done about balance. So, I had planned to take the easy path and recycle one of those old services. But the closer the time came, the more I realized I would really like to talk to you today about grief.

I shared with you back in June how a long-time friend, Ed Vollmer, left us on June 17th. He was someone I had known since first grade and who was a close friend from the time we were 19 until he passed away. It's been just over two months now and his death is hitting me harder with every passing day. I have read that grief is the price of love so where there is great love, there is great grief.

There are so many ways to show grief. Let me share a story with you. I come from a German background, the kind of Germans who don't show their emotions. Before I was born, my parents had a daughter who lived only seventeen days. My mother gave birth to her three months prematurely, and this was 72 years ago now, so that was a minor miracle. My aunt, my mother's sister, told me that their father's advice to my mother at that time was to "not build a shrine to that baby". As far as I know, there are no pictures of that baby, whose name was Nancy, anywhere. She was never spoken of. The only reason I know of her at all is because we share a scrapbook. Evidently, my mother was too thrifty to let the rest of the scrapbook go to waste. Fast forward to 2004. I lost my next younger sister to cancer. My mother built a shrine to her on our kitchen counter. You go, Mom!

Did you know that when a spouse passes away, the survivor is called a widow or widower, when the parents pass away, the child is called an orphan, but when you lose a child, there is no name. I have two Facebook friends who recently lost their children, one to an overdose and the other to suicide. I have

another long-time friend from high school who lost her 7 year-old daughter, Alissa, in a car accident 25 years ago. I waited for three years for my friend to come back. It took me three years (I can sometimes be slow on the uptake) to realize that she wasn't coming back. My friend had died with her daughter, and I had a different friend now.

In September of my senior year in high school, one of my good friends, Bob Shaw, was killed when he was struck by an automobile. He and his girlfriend were walking on the side of the road. He pushed his girlfriend out of the way. That was my first real exposure to death of a loved one. Unfortunately for me, I never processed that death. It was too surreal, and I was, frankly, too immature.

My next encounter with death of a loved one was my sister, Jeri, who I mentioned previously. On April 1, 2002, she went in for surgery to have a lump removed from her butt. It turned out to be the size of a baseball! Her main concern going into surgery was that she would not come out with a colostomy. The reason she might have needed a colostomy was because with the tumor being that large, it might have required going into the colon to have adequate margins for removal. Well, April Fool's on you, Jeri – the tumor turned out to be malignant, which never even crossed her mind because she thought the tumor had been growing for years since she had been having an issue in that area for a long time.

She underwent six weeks of radiation therapy after surgery. Because she was going through the VA, that meant weekly trips to Albany, where the radiation treatments were given. She had to stay all week for the daily treatments and then could come home for the weekend. I drove her there on Monday mornings and then went back to pick her up on Friday evenings. She did really well after that, was able to go back to work at the day care center, until one day a year and a half later when she had excruciating back pain. It turned out to be another tumor in her back that had grown large enough to break one of her vertebrae. It was inoperable. She went into the hospital in

January, passed away on March 17th. I missed her terribly at the time. Because music is my life, I mourned her in song. I sang “Hole Hearted” by Extreme. The lyrics to the chorus in part are:

There's a hole in my heart
That can only be filled by you
And this hole in my heart
Can't be filled with the things I do

Four years later, in 2008, my father, Dana, became ill. I don't remember exactly when his bladder cancer diagnosis was, but I do remember that I ended up spending my 56th birthday in the emergency room with him as he was throwing up shit, literally. His colon had become blocked, and he was so backed up it came out the other end. He had emergency surgery and, after his recovery, he was sent home with four weeks to live. The Hospice people were wonderful. He left us peacefully on July 29th, nine weeks later.

I have to go off on a tangent here and tell you another piece of my childhood. I went to Elementary School in Minoa where the class I was in from first grade to sixth grade consisted of the same gifted students. The class actually remained together until eighth grade, but at the end of sixth grade, my family moved from our double wide trailer in Kirkville to a five bedroom, three and a half bath home in East Syracuse. I was heartbroken to be torn from my friends, but that's another story. The point of this tangent is to tell you how close that group of friends is to this day. My current husband, Dave Fatta, was in that class. My friend, Ed Vollmer, who left us in June, was in that class. Bob Shaw, who was killed our senior year, was in that class. Two other members of that class, Debbie Cookinham and Rick Foederer, also both good friends of mine, have passed away as well. And the next person I am going to tell you about, David Drogo, was also in that class.

I considered David to be my best friend for many, many years. In third grade, our teacher asked us some kind of question about who we liked in the class. I don't remember the exact question or how it even came up, but the end

result was that David and I became “boyfriend and girlfriend” and remained so until ninth grade, when he decided he liked Stephanie Koch better than me. He got me through seventh and eighth grades, when I was separated from all of my Minoa friends and lacked the ability, skill, or knowledge, whatever you want to call it, to make friends with my East Syracuse classmates. He was literally my lifesaver in my twenties when I had severe bouts of depression and became suicidal. He was always there for me whenever I needed him.

On New Year’s Eve 2012, David and his wife, Barb, and my husband, Dave and I all went to Hamilton, New York to hear our good friend, Ed Vollmer, who was playing at the Colgate Inn. We had hoped it would be the first of many times together. In January, David was diagnosed with some type of leukemia. He passed away on February 13th. Despite these losses, I must say that I am blessed to have had so many deep and lifelong friendships.

I share all of these stories, not only to say their names so that they continue to be remembered and live on in our memories, but also to point out that I do not think that I ever really fully processed these losses. I think that is why Ed’s death is hitting me so hard. I have reached the tipping point of repressed grief and it is now time for me to start fully processing these events.

But first, there is one more story I need to share. I have four adult children, three sons and a daughter. My oldest son, Cory, who is now 45 (how did I get to be that old?) lives with his wife, Claudia, in Oklahoma City. My son, Casey, 42, lives in Miami (last I knew) with his wife, Julisa. My daughter, Jennie, 38, lives in Rochester with her husband, Rob, and their three children, Wyatt, 14, Sage, 12, and Oscar, 4. My youngest, Colin, 36, lives with his wife, Izia, and their two children, Morgan and Robin in New Jersey, to the best of my knowledge. I have not spoken with Casey or Colin in over four years now. I don’t even know why they have disconnected from me. I have never met Colin’s two children and probably never will. I only know about them because Colin has not yet blocked me on Facebook and I can see his public Facebook

posts. Morgan was born on January 18, 2021 and Robin is brand new, born just last month on July 13th.

The grief I feel for their loss is a different kind of grief, but a grief, nonetheless. I keep trying to deal with it by saying they are dead to me, but each time another loss comes, this loss resurfaces and I have to process it all over again, although I have yet to find a successful way to do that processing.

I was talking to my friend, Linny, the other day. She's the one who lost her daughter, Alissa, in the car accident. She tells me that she has found a good way to deal with grief is through humor. She recommended that I look up an author named Darcie Sims who wrote, among others, a book titled, "Why Are the Casseroles Always Tuna?" I have it on order.

What really works for me is talking about it, wearing it on my sleeve, so to speak. I have been saying repeatedly that when we have a broken arm or leg, we wear a cast and it is obvious to everyone that we are healing from a trauma. But when we have a broken heart, there is no such luxury. That is why I feel the need to talk about it and why sharing this with you this morning, being in community, where joys shared are doubled while sorrows shared are halved, is helping me to heal. I thank you for that.

I reached out on Facebook, shared there and asked if anyone else would like to share in a group setting. I had about half a dozen people say yes so we have a monthly online Zoom support group going on. Talking about it, sharing the memories, just saying their names so that they live on in our collective memories, these steps have really helped me to process my grief.

And, of course, being Pagan, ritual is always an important part of everything we do. To that end, I would like to close with a ritual. I have candles here and I invite anyone who would like to, to come forward, light a candle, and share the name or names of people that you would like us to hold in our collective memories. In the interest of not burning down the church, please only light one candle each, but you may say as many names as you would like to. I will start. I light this candle for Bob Shaw, Alissa Schoonmaker, Debbie

Cookinham, Rick Foederer, Jeri Brown, Dana Brown, David Drogo, and Ed Vollmer, as well as my grandparents, Gladys and Carlton Brown, Dorothy and Charles Waterstreet, my Uncle David Waterstreet, my Aunt J'Amy Waterstreet Swenson, and my mother, Catherine Waterstreet Brown.