



# REFLECTIONS from the Editor

by Carla Blowey

I spotted her from the parking lot as she dashed into Wal-Mart that afternoon. I hurried to the entrance hoping it was my friend. She stood alone in the main aisle, head slightly down. She hesitated, glanced left and then right, seeming uncertain as to which direction to go. Then, in a burst of decision, she pushed the grocery cart at mach speed, straight ahead.



I recognized that push. I remembered that walk. I tasted that familiar curdle of anxiety in my throat again. I'd been through it a million times. I knew it had to be one of her first shopping trips since her husband died six weeks ago. My heart hurt for her – how could I help?

My memory went to instant rewind. Our last visit was just three months ago at a birthday party for the one-year-old grandson of our dear friend. Though some of us had been out of touch we gathered from afar to celebrate the birthday of this precious grandbaby named for his father's brother – "Andy" who died shortly after birth, just 27 years ago.

Each of us shared a unique relationship with his grandmother, "Grandy", the one filled with grace who always supported our dreams, rejoiced in our successes and embraced us through our losses. Our special bond with her extended to one another even though few of us spent time together without her. We reminisced over wine and barbecued ribs catching up on the latest moves, graduations, weddings and retirements. Later, we gathered around Andrew for the happy birthday song and danced - a spontaneous eruption of love among this circle of friends.

Who knew that death lingered on the perimeter of joy?

The news was, of course, unexpected and shocking. Her husband was an expert climber and outdoorsman, more at home on the side of mountain than anywhere. I knew better than to justify my shock with that notion but it was a knee-jerk reaction in the excitement of our daughter's upcoming wedding that week.

Beginnings and endings, changes and transitions – life or death rarely waits for when "we're ready".

I know my friend will be okay. She is at the top of her game in the raised awareness/consciousness department. She has all the tools, the innate skills and the spiritual connections needed to manage this life challenge for her children and for herself.

But, seeing her lost and disoriented that day, trying to navigate what would have been a simple trip to the store three months before was heartbreaking. It reminded me that none of us can predict how or when the beast of grief will render us exposed and immobile.

With a heavy sigh, I also remembered that we can't be "saved" from such an experience either, no matter what skills we possess or how much we know.

So, I didn't follow her. I didn't want to be the interruption to the process – I wanted to be the channel for healing. I had to trust – if it was meant for me to meet up with her, it would happen. And so, I prayed for the best possible outcome in that moment for my friend.

I took a sharp left and wandered around the cosmetic aisles, placing a few items in my basket. Checking my list, I walked across the main aisle toward electronics. There she was, straight ahead, anxiously waiting at the check-out counter. I had been called. I pushed ahead, ready to embrace my friend.

Just as I thought, it was her first shopping trip. We talked quietly, hugging often. She was overwhelmed by the realization that one of the most difficult steps to the journey had begun with this outing. The funeral and memorial services were over, the traveling had ceased. The balance of a normal life was far from reach and the grieving, oh the grieving, had begun.

I offered to get together with her at another time and share some resources, but I felt compelled to do more. And then, I felt the nudge. She had come here for a reason – at least I could help her find the items on her list so she could get back to the arms of her children. Taking the lead, I pointed my cart to the open aisle where she followed me to the lingerie department. And that, was all she needed at the moment – someone to run interference while she regained her balance.

I can say with certainty that the key to surviving the death of a loved one is in how we are companioned. My dear "Grandy" and others have modeled that for me. I have been surrounded, lifted and carried by the most amazing companions. I share a unique bond with each of them, and although some of them are acquainted, for the most part the only thing they have in common is their love for me. They are connected on a higher level with the sole intention of loving me through the pain. When they heard the call, they responded without hesitation to my soul's cry for help.

I am comforted by the idea that my friend has many circles of similar companions, old and new, who will appear when least expected and needed most. This holiday season, listen closely for the call, so you too, can be the channel for healing.

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