

July 18, 2021

This One's For You

Dear Friends,

I am so grateful for the break that Stephy's Place provided these past two weeks. We all usually need a break from something, and the relief it provides can be surprising at times. In grief, it's very hard to catch a break. Just when we think we may be rounding a corner, we shouldn't be surprised when we get smacked square in the face again. Each week when I write these reflections, I often 'lean into' my own deep well of grief in order to be authentic in what I have to say. It was nice to not have to 'lean in' for a bit, as helpful and cathartic as it can be to do it. It was nice to have a break. If we can catch a break we should always grab it!

Sad to say, but grief bore its ugly head again for my family on Monday July 12th when my mother's last living sibling, my aunt Marie died after a long struggle with dementia. Her dementia came on extremely suddenly just four years ago, immediately after her husband, my uncle Joe, passed away. They had been together since High School and his loss rocked her emotionally and physically. This was an incredible experience of observing the magnitude of grief and how it can sometimes crush us in our tracks. I remember the feeling of helplessness and powerlessness over what was happening in my dear aunt's brain and body, brought on by both disease and grief combined. Although Marie and Joe never had any children, their nieces and nephews, my cousins, took beautiful and loving care of her ever since Joe died.

When I received the news that my aunt Marie died, I felt happiness along with the sadness of the loss, as it was now a blessing for her to be free of her struggle and finally be with her beloved partner and spouse once again. I picture them together now and it makes me smile while my eyes moisten in the missing. They were awesome and special people. They will not be forgotten.

In preparation for this reflection, before I got the news about aunt Marie, I was reading an article in NPR about 'survivors guilt' and how many people who have survived COVID-19, and also many of those who have lost a loved one from COVID, are having similar experiences. I

will talk about survivor's guilt in another reflection, but I was struck by a quote in the article from a survivor of COVID. Debbie Kosta was on a ventilator for almost a month and nearly died three times in ICU. As she continues to get stronger in her recovery, she had this to say:

“The way I deal with it... I say to myself, ‘OK, you know what? I’m alive. They’re not.’ Going to get back to walking again, then slowly, slowly walk a block, walk a block more, walk a block more after that- ‘This one’s for you. This one’s for you.’ So, it’s like my health is dedicated to them.” (*Racked With Guilt, Some COVID-19 Survivors Are Asking, ‘Why Me?’* by Hiba Ahmad, NPR July 17, 2021)

This one's for you Aunt Ree. Rest in Peace.

Sincerely, Kevin