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Stephy's Place Reflection by Kevin Keelen

*It Comes in Waves*

For those of us who grew up on the Jersey Shore, there's a very high probability that when you were young, you were hit hard by a few ocean waves and got tossed around pretty good until somebody taught you how to body surf. It's something that we have to learn, as the waves can be treacherous.

There's a new song out by Dean Lewis called *Waves* and these are some of the lyrics:

*“There is a swelling storm  
And I'm caught up in the middle of it all  
And it takes control of the person I thought I was...  
It comes and goes in waves, it always does, it always does...”*

There's no doubt that grief comes and goes in waves. In early grief, the storm is raging, and the waves are huge and violent; they knock us down, but we get up, we have to get up, and we brace for the next one, and it always comes. The waves can hit so hard that they wipe us out for a few days, days in which we may not want to get out of bed, or go to work, or do the shopping, or make the lunches, or... you get it. In a raging storm, all we can do is batten down the hatches, hunker down and stay safe. And like all storms that pass, we are left with the remnants and damage, as we slowly, but surely, begin to rebuild.

We've been hit by some nasty storms here at the Jersey Shore, and those of us who come to Stephy's Place have taken a huge hit, a devastating hit in our own personal lives. I remember after Sandy, how I couldn't imagine towns like Sea Bright or Union Beach ever making it back, and now as I drive through those towns, they don't even look familiar, they have not only rebuilt, they've built up. In early grief, and there is not timeline for that, the storm is raging and ruthless; the waves are huge and come in fast, - one after another they come as they take us and tumble us in the sand and the rocks. In time, however, it seems that for most of us, the storm begins to subside, and the waves begin to spread out a bit. Thank goodness. We need the break. We need the space. We need to breathe.

It's ironic that during these short breaks, some of us may begin to feel a bit guilty for not being knocked down and broken in pieces. But even during these 'breaks,' we are still bereaved, which means we are still broken in pieces. We need these moments of survival to regroup and reassemble ourselves as best we can to get through the day, one day at a time, one step at a time. Building back from grief takes patience, - patience with the exhausting slowness of it all, with the deep pain, with the raw emotions, with the unpredictability of when the waves will hit. We have no choice but to be patient as there is no speeding up or controlling the process.

When people ask me what I do, sometimes I kiddingly tell them that I give surfing instructions (even though I've never been on a surfboard LOL). We all learn how to ride these waves, we learn from the pain, and we teach ourselves and one another as we come together to mourn and heal. When we come together in our groups, perhaps we can allow ourselves to see others on the shore who have made it through similar storms while grabbing for the life preservers that are thrown to us along the way.

I have seen so many of us, including myself at different times, when we looked very much like Sea Bright after Sandy; something so wrecked that any return seemed unimaginable. But like those towns along our beautiful shore, so, so many of us have rebuilt and built up to become something/someone unimaginable.

It always comes in waves, so let them come and wash over us, knowing they will not drown us as we encourage one another to get up again.

As the famous surfer Jon Kabat-Zinn said, "*You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.*"

Peace and Serenity, Kevin