

LESSON FROM A SPIDER

I May Hurt. But I Can Heal.

By Nan Zastrow

This morning I was deep cleaning the bedroom and a small black spider, the size of an aspirin, came running across the floor. His little legs were going as fast as they could to outrun my heavy shoe focused on his demise. I hate spiders and even a small one sends shivers down my spine. I quickly stomped him out. Done. Gone. Just that quick.

This triggered a grief burst about how fragile my husband's life was. A vivid, unsettling burst of consequential dimensions! A tiny spiders' life was so insignificant, but it was creating giant waves within me! It was a revealing moment when I realized I never had a chance to say "goodbye" before my husband passed to the next place. It was just that quick. Regrets? Maybe. Missed opportunity? Obviously! But I never would have guessed that day would be the day.

Words of encouragement couldn't change the circumstances.

No time for tears. No time for saying words unsaid. Moments turned to seconds.

Nanoseconds. Things were in motion and wouldn't stop.

A beautiful heart stopped beating. Time stood still.

Death unveiled itself in its repulsive disguise.

Nothing can ever prepare you for death.

It happens, whether unexpectedly or as an inevitable conclusion to escalating events.

Realizing the words of encouragement, I spoke couldn't pull my husband through.

His power to stay was visibly reversed. His ability to maintain faded.

And it wasn't my choice or actions that would allow him to live or to die.

Sometimes we can't outrun or control the story we have yet to tell.

Later that day, I picked up my "clutching cross", put on my Gary necklace, and headed to the cemetery to have words with God and Gary. I needed to grasp a measure of peace in the wake of this unexpected emotional grief burst. I wanted to find solace in a place where I could feel His presence. I needed comfort. I needed to be alone with nature. With God.

I instinctively planted flowers at the cemetery...glancing over at Mom and Dad's stone. Then moving to Gary's and Chad's...realizing the stories of death in my life were growing.

Others were joining the unwelcome club. I clutched my cross until my knuckles were white.

I sobbed. I Prayed.

I lashed out in disbelief. I uttered the words I needed to say.

No need to plead. It was too late for that. I didn't believe in bargaining anyhow.

So, of what use would it be!

Release. Verbal retaliation. Protest. It exhausted me.

It made me feel better. Redeemed.

Knowing God didn't need to hear me say those words. He already knew how I felt.

Then, I drove home, my eyes crusted with tears. I hurried to my own wilting garden.

Knowing procrastination and avoidance had already done some damage.

I dug some more. Planting pink flowers, green and red coleus, along with bright pink impatiens, snickering at the absurdity of a name that reckoned with my attitude.

Darn this grief. Why am I taking it so hard!
Reprimanding myself for grieving.

Filling the flowerpots Gary prepared last fall as if he knew I would be needing them.

I found satisfaction digging in the dirt.

Feeling the sweat on my brow dampening the brim of Gary's garden hat now gracing my own scalp. I wondered if he'd chuckle how much I looked like I was on a safari.

I felt tired, worn, dirty and all messed up.

This was grief. It was like the work of grief. It was the toil, the sacrifice, the crazy loss of self-control simultaneously. It hurt.

It was expression. It was a work in progress, the beginning of reflection, growing, redirecting, and healing. I wasn't feeling it yet, but I knew it couldn't be far behind.

The sun was warm, baking actually. But it was melting my wounded spirit.

And then the sprinkling of refreshing water gave life to the thirsty plants struggling to adjust to new ground, new territory.

Transplanted into a new environment. Demanding a new life. Demanding nourishment.

I get it. I know the way. I've been here before. It's familiar now, though it will take me time to absorb it all again, in a new way...with a new perspective...a renewed purpose.

This is healing. I will adjust to this new life. This new environment.

I've just been transplanted to virgin ground...a healing ground. Where time often stands still and only memories of the past can fill the void.

This is what "forever love" feels like. It's the kind that hurts, and hurts. Again, and again.

This is grief. "Grief is love with no place to go."

It's okay to grieve. It's okay to "feel." It's okay to miss him. Everything that happens is okay. I have the power!

That spider's purpose that day—no matter how long his life was—told me I couldn't outrun the Plan. I had no power to control the outcome. I can question. I can protest. I can feel self-pity. I can wish. But I can't change what has happened.

There is a reason. A purpose that I have yet to achieve. Every one of God's creatures great or small, has a purpose. I am a small creature, with limited power but grief has the power to transform. To challenge. To build me up with everything I need to survive. I may hurt, but I can heal.

I choose to survive. I have the power to do so.

God gave us permission to grieve. But, also, in the words written by Tom Zuba, God also gave us permission to LIVE.