

GOOD BYES

Where you used to be, there is a hole in the world, which I find myself constantly walking around in the daytime, and falling in at night. I miss you like hell.

-Edna St. Vincent Millay

If you're reading this, you're alive; and if you're alive, you've likely gone through a forced separation of some sort—a death, a friendship ending, a divorce or breakup, the kind that leaves you doubled-over and reeling. My friend Deby shared a graphic from The Writer's Circle that blows the old five stages of grief out of the water, as it includes many disconcerting occurrences such as emotional outbursts, disorganization, isolation and more. Depicted in the shape of an inverse omega, the graphic shows how grief takes us way down into the pit before we can climb out the other side. Of all we can feel, grief surely must be the iceberg of emotions, with so very much roiling under the surface.

But one characteristic Deby highlighted is panic, saying it's one of the hardest to articulate. As soon as I read her comment, it was my gut—an immediate clench—that took me back to those wrenching days and nights during my long divorce. There were the night terrors over losing my kid, my house, my ability to work. There were dark daydreams of drowning in bitterness so deep I'd stay in the muck forever. And, of course, no matter how crazy the thought: *Whatever will I do without this person?* Whether it's love or hate, from friends to parents to spouses, we cannot imagine going on...so when the ax falls, from disillusionment, disgust or death, we clutch for breath and wonder whether the sun will ever rise again.

In keeping company now with several friends deep in the pit, I am reminded that grief is not something we're taught to do well in America and, oh, how we shortchange ourselves because of it. Our ability to grieve and mourn is directly proportional to our ability to love and connect; we cannot have one without the other. We can keep too busy to break down, stick our heads in the sand to ignore the impending disaster or go kicking and screaming into that dark night, but it *will* catch up with us down the road...through bitterness of spirit, dwindling health or the never-ending ache of loss unexamined.

Of the many things I'd do over, perhaps the most strange is my newer-found willingness to dive headfirst into that dark pool so I could break the surface so much faster than I did in the past. Even now, as I navigate relationships and lives that are shifting and ending, I want my *byes* to be truly *good*.

Go deep. Deeper still. Your grief will not last forever, but the gifts from it will.

Do you welcome, wallow in or run from grief?

What kind of growth and wisdom have come from your darkest seasons of loss?

One Verse for Thought:

Even in the unending shadows of death's darkness, I am not overcome by fear. Because You are with me in those dark moments, near with Your protection and guidance, I am comforted. -Psalm 23:4, VOICE