

## VIEWPOINT

By Jennifer Lares

### Year Five and Still Crying



(Photo credit: sudok1)

I could still hear the TV, even as I sat with my eyes closed. I was pinching the bridge of my nose and trying hard to swallow. "Are you OK?" my husband asked. "Not really," I said. I wasn't.

The scene we were watching centered around the main character lying in bed and actively dying in a hospice facility. Her friend sat by her side and had that look on her face – fatigue mixed with anticipation. She was waiting to hear the next rattling breath through lengthening delays that would soon become silent. As I was watching, I was taken back to my own experience in a similar setting – the bedside ritual of supporting someone who is actively dying. I learned so much about death then, so many unwelcome but important lessons.

**You don't know it.** Just because you are aware of it and near it daily, you receive no preferential treatment when a loss of your own occurs. I had ignorantly thought I was more prepared for it than other people. I assumed I would process it at an elevat-

ed level with a significant familiarity that would soften the impact. I was quite stupidly mistaken.

**It's not your job to try to control the situation.** I had swooped in thinking I knew what was about to happen and decided to try and get in front of it. I didn't realize the pace was not up to me, that I was along for the ride just like everyone else there. In doing so, I made other people uncomfortable. I am thankful that someone pointed this out to me early on, prompting me to fall back.

**It can be hard to be yourself.** The combination of exhaustion, stress, challenging family dynamics, and the uniqueness of the loss itself made me feel detached from who I was and how I behaved. My patience was low, I was beyond tired, and I was lost. It wasn't just me, as we were all on our grief journeys in that moment. Mine felt foreign and confused. This was a position I had never been in before, and I found it wildly uncomfortable.

**Loss is not a linear experience.** I had

hoped there would be a time when the feelings would become faint and triggering images or sounds would have no effect. I imagined there would be a formula: by year one, this will no longer impact you; by year two, and so forth. Meanwhile, I was in year five, trying not to cry while watching TV. There is no formula or magic timeline.

Things will hurt, sometimes unexpectedly and sometimes anticipated. The impression we leave on each other, the contributions to each other's lives, can come with consequential suffering as their parting gift. Even while we carry sorrow, the love that created it makes it a worthwhile burden. **KB**



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