

As I walk ...

As I walk above the beach, the tide is high but not full. I hear the soft swoosh of waves as they roll in, caressing the rocks with their wet, lingering kiss. The beach pebbles jiggle and hum as they roll back out. The sun has risen, continuing its leisurely climb, spraying brilliant color across the sky. The ensuing light holds the promise of a good day, despite small pillows of dirty white clouds tiptoeing around the sun's halo. The air has some weight to it and is moving slowly on the ocean breeze.

A loud, sharp slap of water on rock! Followed by another, and another. A startled gull honks in protest as it rises on the disturbed air. The light dims as a cloud scuds across the sun. The water froths. The errant waves rush back out, tumbling the pebbles, making them cry.

The surface rhythm returns. Underneath, the churn lingers.

As I walk above the beach, soft memories flood my psyche. His beautiful, strong hands that could caress so lovingly. His deep brown eyes that always held a look of gentle mischief, even as one clouded with lost sight. His full body hugs, his whispers of love.

I count my blessings. We had lots of years together. We well and truly loved. We shared and shouldered, argued and laughed a lot. He was my anchor; I was his rock. I carry him with me in my heart as I move forward alone. I am devastated but I am not shattered. I am strong. I will be brave. I will stay in the light. I will ...

My breath catches. The release is loud, carrying a sharp sob. My shoulders hunch, my steps falter. Another loud sob. I can't make it quiet. Did anyone hear me? The tears don't flow but the images come. The oxygen tanks; the ramps we used on his journey down the stairs; the ICU; the greyness that tinged and finally covered his face, melding with the greyness of his beard; the multitude of pills, the charts, the doctors, the nurses; the love and pain on his children's faces, the love and pain on his own brave face.

The images trip over one another in their rush to torment. And then, they start to fade. I push the lingerers away. I bend and put my hands on my knees. My breaths are fast and shallow, but I make them slow down.

I'm fine. I continue walking. Inside, the churn simmers.

As I walk the beach the tide is way out, the sky brilliantly blue. Straggly cirrus clouds skip across the vivid backdrop. The air is light and dry. It is going to be a good day! The dark, blue grey water is almost flat, rippling gently on the fringe, teasing the seagull busy tap-tapping on an empty crab shell. The two fishing boats leave behind crested wakes as they rush out on their daily mission. The long stretch of sand is fine and pale, stained darker where water has just receded.

The early morning brigade of dog walkers has been and gone. A scattering of walkers remains, in pairs, some solo. Soon the families will start arriving, struggling with the myriad equipment for a day at the beach, kids in tow.

As I walk along the water's edge, I give thanks; I am blessed. I give thanks for the gift of time we all had to show how much we loved him. And now time has passed. We made it through. I made it through. I have survived the anger, the deep sadness, the self-doubt, the aloneness, the futility, the inadequacy, the rage. I have resisted the urge to withdraw, have worked at being engaged. I have survived the capriciousness of grief.

I have forged ahead, selling our home, purging a lifetime of acquisitions and memories, made a new little place my own. I have tried to be there when and where I was needed; tried not to be a drain on my family and friends. I have challenged and tested myself to discover who was left behind after the imprint of him for so many years.

She's ok. I can live with her. I can make it.

The water remains calm and still. The churn is buried, deep down below.

As I walk above the beach, the nor'easter they had predicted has arrived with a vengeance. The dirty grey sea is raging. Successive waves crash on the rocks below, frothing and angry. Clumps of seaweed swing and drip on the rail above. Dark grey clouds are low and threatening, but they're moving fast. The wind whips and snaps the flags at nearby houses forcing them to point rigidly to land. The pathway is slick with foam and the detritus of receding waves.

I pause a moment watching the waves as they crescendo and crash high over the railing. I register the spots where they come over the top. A good way to get soaked. But I can make it. I've played this game of chicken before. I carefully navigate the slick seaweed and residual foam along the pathway. Watching the waves build as I walk, I wait a few seconds, let them land, then continue along the path. Missed me. So does the next one, and the next one. Almost there.

I feel it rather than see it. It's not part of the wave pattern, it comes out of nowhere. It builds, it's relentless, it's coming in fast. I can't move quickly enough, turn my face away in time. It strikes! I double-hand the rail as my mouth floods with wet salt which catches on my throat making me gag. The shock of cold water that slammed my body is vicious. I cling to the rail as the dirty ocean is sucked back out. I must move before it builds again. The path is even more treacherous now but I'm almost there. I step forward, step again, and then - I'm face down, pain shooting through my right knee, wet, sticky, slick salt up my nose, in my mouth.

As I lie sprawling on the path above the beach, it finally comes. As surely as the ocean has beaten me, the searing, visceral waves of loneliness and sadness that now hammer me one after the other, take my breath away. The realization of the rest of my life without him is stark, dark and terrifying. And finally, finally, the tears flow, mixing with the salt, seaweed and snot on my face.

"Let me help you up. You need help!" An urgent voice cries close to my ear. I look up. It's hard to see who it is. I start to say "No, thanks, I'm ..." I stop. Raising my head higher, between sobs and gags, I manage to say "Yes, thank you. I do need your help."

The churn has finally erupted. There's no holding it back. I give in. I let it shatter all resistance and resolve. Now I know, only then, can the calm return.