

5-15-20

Confession: I am an NPR Junkie. The voices that float into my living, driving, and walking spaces provide me with information, perspective, and sometimes even comfort. Earlier this month, Morning Edition issued an invitation from NPR's poet-in-residence, Kwame Reed, for listeners to write poetry about the impact the global coronavirus has had in their lives. The verses were to begin with the first line of Nancy Cross Dunham's poem, "What I'm Learning About Grief." Reed knitted together a crowdsourced poem from the submissions, which I read during Wednesday's Vespers Prayer and share again here (below).

Our NMCC poet in residence, Kate Davis, has extended the challenge to us now to create our own poem starting with the prompt, "What I'm learning about grief...." To participate, please submit your lines to Kate by June 1 and she will compile them into our own collective poem. (Kate.davis@comcast.net) I hope you will join in the project—and invite those around you of all ages!

I hope it blesses you:

If The Trees Can Keep Dancing, So Can I

What I'm learning about grief
is that it sits in the space between laughs
comes in the dark steals the warmth from the bed covers threads sleep with thin tendrils
is a hauntingly familiar song,
yet I can't remember the words...
What I'm learning about grief
is that it rolls like a heavy mist settles into the crevices lingers on the skin.
Visits, then visits again
Lurking under my chair.
And, when I'm not watching
Reaches out her tiny claws
And bats my ankles —
Grief sneaks up on you.
You find yourself on your couch with a well of rage living in the pit of your stomach and nowhere for it
to go.
And, It chokes you.
What I'm learning about grief,
is that it can come like a whisper or storm through loud as thunder
it leaves a hollow, to be filled with a new planting.
And, when you wake for another day that feels oddly the same as the last, It crawls right back into your
lap.
an ocean of tears So, you vary the crawl with the butterfly, the backstroke with breaststroke. At some
point, drowning is no longer an option.
What I'm learning about grief
Is that it is a language.
Suffering is its own speech
it will not go away just because you won't look it in the eye

He rides shotgun when you go by old familiar places
Eventually, you will get closer and he will say
"See, it's not so bad. I got your back."
This pandemic, this tragedy, this fulcrum of life is a shovel unearthing secrets we wish would stay buried
I learn that I am ashamed I love solitude.
Hard times call for soft people. There is softness in stillness, in staying home, in distractions deleted, in a
togetherness that stretches great distances.
What I'm learning about grief
is not found in mint leaves, floating in a glass of tears boiled thrice over.
It is an acquired taste which we never crave
It likes nachos
Staying up late
Watching Scandinavian murder shows
Sleeping in
And eating cake for breakfast.
it drips, like water, It gets in everywhere
through the small unseen fissures in the ceiling. You can ignore it like dust.
Just keep yourself too busy with laundry and living.
Grief shows up unannounced
Like when your husband tells you last October
That he's never loved you
And wants permission to leave
So you burrow the ache into carefully guarded well
And wonder if that means the memories have to go there too
What I'm learning about grief
is that it can turn you into someone you don't want to be, can help you become someone you never
thought you could be
is that it transcends color, race, Religion, gender.
is that it's an old lover that won't leave. trying to hold your hand again –
that it aches in the arches of feet
that its mother is loss, its father, change
Make room for it.
Is that tiny losses add up
The missed first party my son was to attend
The school days he yearns for with his friends I tell him it will be over soon
What I'm learning about grief
I learned a long time ago.
Knead grief, as you would bread.
Weave grief, as you would thread.
there is no vaccine against it — we can't develop antibodies against it, it is something I have and
something you have — but in these times it is something we have
It is anger and denial
It is chaotic laughter from splintered memories
It is jagged cries and single tears

It is numb and indifferent
It is the pinprick of light, promising
A slow semblance of normality returned
What I'm learning about grief
Is to acknowledge its presence
Its many forms and guises
Then, to use it, while reaching out
Connected To everyone who is braving this same storm
What I'm learning about grief is that it is still learning about me
Learning that I am strong and resilient
If the trees can keep dancing,
So can I.
May it be so!

Love & Blessings,
Heather