

Embracing Grief and Joy: Dahlia's Arrival

(Written August 4, 2026)

I woke up this morning and before my feet even touched the floor, I was in tears. Why today? What triggered this wave of sadness and grief? What brought the stab of pain to my heart and the tears to my eyes? What was it about this morning that made me miss Bob so much?

I spend time with lots of widows, and I hear their stories of grief and pain. I also hear about times that they miss their husbands. Like when they need a smoke detector battery changed, or a storage tub brought in from the garage, or they need a repair to a ceiling fan. Usually anything that requires a ladder brings on a longing for one's deceased hubby. That's not the case with me as I feel fully capable of handling the chores of life. If I can't do it, I know who to call. Those times of need are not the times that trigger my sadness or my longing for Bob. I would hate to bring Bob back to life to have him tick off a few items on my to-do list. Nope Bob can continue to rest in peace and not have to worry about any mundane chores.

But actually, I do know what it is that brought on the flood of tears. I know why I am missing him extra right now. It's because I'm experiencing something truly wonderful that I wish he could be experiencing. He's missing out and I wish he was still here for this joyful time in our family.

Recently, in Texas my 24-year-old great granddaughter Courtney had an emergency c-section and gave birth to Dahlia. Dahlia is still in the NICU at a local Children's Hospital but she's doing fabulous and as of today, she is breathing on her own. The breathing tubes are removed and she's breathing "room air"

–yes, “room air” which is a new term I learned.

Dahlia represents 5 generations in Bob’s lineage. Many in Bob’s family can remember how Bob loved that he had such a BIG group of 4th generation great grandchildren. We took lots of 4 generation group pictures! I may be off a little on the number, but I think at the time of Bob’s passing in November 2021, he had 21 great grandchildren. There were a couple of those greats that were old enough to have babies and Bob would “tease” them and let them know he would like to have a great great grandchild soon thus giving him a 5-generation family tree! We had to remind those young women that we would prefer that they not have any babies at such a young tender age.

They may not have given their great grandpa the 5th generation that he wanted then but I really don’t think he was really disappointed. Maybe Bob was even relieved that they didn’t follow in his (and so many others in the family’s) footsteps and have children at a very young age.

But now nearly 5 years since Bob’s passing, Dahlia comes into our lives! I’m beyond ecstatic to have another precious baby to love and I’m happy for all of Dahlia’s family. But there’s a big chunk of joy that is missing. A little black cloud hanging over me. I’m really missing the man who made it possible for me to have all this wonderful extended family. When Bob and I married, I became a “stepmom” to three “kids” but there has been lots of growth in the following 46 years. That family has grown exponentially to 4 “kids” plus spouses, 14 “grands” plus spouses, and 25 “greats”. And now a “great-great”. Thank you, Bob!

So now if you see me crying a little while I share a picture of Dahlia with you, you’ll understand. I am just wishing Dahlia’s great great grandpa Bob was here to hold her and take advantage of a 5-generation photo opportunity! Boy he would be so happy. I would be too.





When God Shows Up. .

God always shows up for me when I am in church. In the Worship music, in the pastor's message, in the camaraderie of my fellow Christians. I don't know if God shows up for everyone, but I know in the couple of hours that I'm at church, that I can count on various signs from God that he has something He want me to learn, hear, or feel. I go into Sunday church service with an open heart and mind that this time is for me and God and there's always something that I take with me into the week ahead. A scripture of encouragement, a challenge to my behavior, a sweet word of inspiration from a friend, and often a reminder that there are those that need prayer and so I add them to my prayer list.

Today was no different. The music touched my heart. The fellowship was warm and caring. The message hit home. But then... God showed up for the entire congregation. It's like God was saying that he wanted to drive home today's message and show us He was working.

At the end of the service, a woman toward the back of the church stood up and asked if she could speak. She poured out her heart in just a few words mixed with tears. I may not have it 100% correct but it was "The pastor saved me physically today. I wanted my life to be over now I know that's not what God wants." She had heard the message. But today's message that rock bottom is not the end was the message she needed. Was she the only person in the room that needed this message? I doubt it. But she was the

person who stood and humbly and tearfully said that she heard what God was saying. And took it to her heart.

I was wracked with grief for this broken woman. I know loss and I know how devastating the death of a loved one can be. I had empathy for her as did others in the congregation. Pastor prayed over her and many laid hands on her in love and support. I am sure there will be more to the story of this woman who visited our church today.

But the biggest takeaway from this experience today was how God showed a church full of people that He is still active and working miracles every day, every moment.

To see God touch an individual and perform a miracle is something we read about in the bible. Do we see it in our day-to-day lives? God gave our congregation an opportunity to be a witness to a healing miracle moment. At least that's how I feel. I am just in awe of my God!

Somehow, I feel this will be a pivotal moment in not only this woman's life but in lives of others in our church. God touched me today.

FYI: I wrote this on 2/8/2026. Right after this experience at church. I have become friends with the "broken women" in this story, and I finally shared my writing with her this week. I wanted her permission share her/my story.

Guess Who?!?!

(A repost from 2022)

First Valentine's Day with Bob

1979. Bob and I had only been dating a few months, and I thought we had something pretty special going on. Bob was the patrol sergeant at the northern subdivision (SDPD) and I thought it would be great fun to send the grizzly sergeant a bouquet of flowers. I ordered them from a local Pacific Beach florist, and they were delivered early in the morning at the lineup.

I waited with anticipation to hear from Bob. Was he surprised? Did his coworkers tease him? Was he happy to be fussed over by his new girlfriend? I didn't hear a word from him. Now granted, this was long before the days of cell phones and text messages, but I did expect a phone call on my home phone.

I had a dinner planned for Bob that evening at my home in South Mission Beach. I had prepared

a special romantic meal and was eager to hear all about the flower delivery when he arrived at my home. He arrived. Nothing was said about the flowers. I was a bit tense. He seemed a bit tense. Had I done something wrong by sending flowers? Had I embarrassed him? Was it over the top for how early it was in our relationship? Why didn't he mention the flowers or thank me for them?

Well, the truth came out. Within a few minutes of arriving, Bob nervously blurted out "did you send me flowers? I said I had and followed up by asking him why in the world did he have to ask. Who else would they be from? Oh my! He explained that I signed the card "***Guess Who***" instead of using my name. He wasn't sure they were from me. His previous girlfriend always signed cards "***Guess Who***" and he thought the flowers might be from her. Oh my! I didn't know that there was a previous girlfriend who still might be sending flowers so there was lots of discussion about her. Not quite the first Valentine's Day Date I anticipated.

The funniest part was that Bob had spent the better part of his day trying to track down who had actually sent the flowers. He did an

extremely hard press on the florist to see if they would tell him who had ordered the flowers, but they wouldn't. He tried a phone call and then went in person in uniform to the shop to try to convince them to "give up the source". But they stood firm and didn't give him a name. Can you imagine the frustration when the police officer couldn't solve the case?!

The craziest part of the night was that Bob admitted that he was so convinced that the flowers were NOT from me, that he thought about re-gifting me the flowers that night. Fortunately, he had second thoughts on doing that and he lived for us to have another date.





And another.

And another.

And another.

New Word for the New Year!

My Word for 2026

Peace, unspeakable peace.

Peace, unshakable peace.

Peace, unexplainable peace.

Yes, Peace is my word for 2026.

When many people make resolutions to start out their new year, I prefer to focus on a word. That word becomes my mantra for the year ahead. In the past years since I've started this new year's habit, my words have been GENTLE, JOY, KINDNESS, STRONG, and GRATITUDE. Each word was perfect for the season that I was in at the time.

2026 is my year for PEACE. Inner Peace.

This year, my new word came to me easily. A word to whisper when I'm feeling a bit down or troubled. A word to scream when I feel the world is crashing in on me. A word to focus on each morning as I rise to take on another day. A word to silently ponder when I crawl into bed and am recounting my blessings of the day.

Am I being over optimistic that I can have a peace filled year? Maybe it would be more realistic to focus on having a

few peaceful moments throughout the year, but I feel like I should go BIG! I am focusing on peace 24/7/365! Why settle for a few peaceful moments when I could have more? A lofty goal perhaps but with God on my side, I'm feeling it.

How am I going to make this happen? If you know me, you know I usually overthink, over evaluate, and over worry. How will I replace that type of jumbled up mind/heart with a mind/heart of peaceful thoughts? Can I bring peace out of the chaos of daily living? When my world seems messy, can I flip a switch and feel peaceful in that moment? How can I protect my peace and not let it be a fleeting thing?

So Holy Spirit, you've got a big job in 2026. Seeking God's word and relying on His son is where I will turn. Seek the Prince of Peace. Turn to Him. Jesus said to seek peace in Him as *"He has overcome this troublesome world"*. (John 16:33). I think the directions are clear. Maintain a relationship with God. Keep in daily closeness with Jesus.

I have been listening to contemporary Christian music in my car and at home on my TV—what a beautiful way to destress when needed and fill my heart with praise and worship. One can't help but find peace in beautiful music. So I'll continue that trend and make it a habit.

What needs to be removed from my life to give me a more peaceful existence? What makes me anxious and worried? What causes sleepless nights and days filled with agitation? Without making a laundry list here, I know I need to remove ungodly behavior and troublesome relationships, take breaks from social media and news, steer clear of tenuous circumstances, and eliminate negative situations. Once I identify my stressors, I need to get rid of them quickly. Don't give them a chance to take hold of my mind. Turn and run! Away from chaos. Towards peace.

All the guidelines that I could possibly need are in the

Bible, and I need to avail myself of this great book of instructions. Why am I not going to the source of peace to find peace? This year, I will.

Google says there are 263-429 (depending on which bible translation) mentions of peace in the bible. Looks like I have all the resources I need to find God's peace. A good goal would be to read a new scripture about peace each day of the year. Maintaining a daily relationship with God would certainly bring peace to each of my days.

So, this will be my prayer for myself and for you...

"Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way..."

2 Thessalonians 3:16

2024

BE

STRONG

BODY MIND

& SPIRIT

2025
WORD

GRATITUDE
→ FOR GOD

2026
WORD

→ P E A C E



My Heavy Husband

Death brings a big to-do list. Fortunately for me, I am not someone who is daunted by tasks and projects. I think my years of being a real estate agent/broker taught me to take care of the minutia and stay ahead on paperwork. My organizational skills are far above par. That being sad, when Bob passed in 2021, I took on the tasks of dealing with my spouse's death like a champ. I had a notebook full of checklists made by others such as AARP, Hospice companies, and even churches. I had my own checklist to add to that. I was ready to start checking tasks off the lists. Check. Check. Check.

A bit of friendly advice. Have a journal or a notebook handy where you can write down what you do each day. Trust me, you won't remember in a day or so what you did. You'll be more of a haze than you ever imagined. I'm sure you've had brain fog before, but this will be beyond foggy. Brain dead just seems to describe it. Write down everything Who you talked to. What they said. What day did they tell you to call back. You'll be glad you did. Check. Check. Check.

I had preapproved and prepaid Bob's (and my) cremation. We discussed this when he was cognitively healthy and for that I am glad. I not only knew what Bob's wishes for his body were, I had them already in place. We had also discussed that we wanted Miramar National Cemetery to be our resting place, and I had both Bob's and my approval in my handy dandy death file. I gave myself a gold star for handling all that ahead of time. Check. Check. Check.

So, it sounds like all was just peachy, right. Organized me, just sailing along through the final steps after Bob's death. Well, I'm sure you're not surprised to hear that things were not always smooth sailing. Emotions run high. People say hurtful things. Decisions are tough. Family has advice. Friends have opinions. There are hurdles. One of the silliest

things I remember is when I was calling one of our credit card companies to remove Bob from the card, the lady had to read me a disclaimer that one removed, I wouldn't be able to add Bob back on. I told her she could skip the disclaimer as my husband was dead, and I wouldn't need to add him back to the credit card. She said she had to read it to me anyway. I honestly can't remember if I laughed or cried. But that phone call stuck with me.

Then came my melt down. I didn't see it coming. Bob's remains were ready to be picked up at the Funeral Home. They were just going to be handed to me in a basic black plastic box. I had purchased the most beautiful urn online that I would transfer them to that urn by myself at home. So here I am, standing calmly at the front desk waiting to be handed Bob's box. The young man assisting me goes out of the room and comes back with a bag containing the box. That box contains my husband's ashes. He said to me. **"Oh, he's heavy, do you want help carrying him to the car? Was he a big man?"** No words came out of my mouth. No snappy riposte. Not a sound. Well maybe a gasp of air. I just collected up my husband's remains and did a hasty retreat. Once inside the safe confines of my car, the melt down came. Tears and tears and more tears. Gasping for breath. Blowing my nose. Sitting there for what seemed like forever.

What was it in that comment that pushed all my buttons? I have thought about it so frequently and I really don't know. At first, I thought it was because he was making a joke about something so serious to me. Was this funeral home humor? Was this comment normal? Then I thought maybe it was just a statement of fact without any humor connected to it. Were Bob's remains heavier than the average Joe's? Did he seriously think I needed help in carrying the ashes? Then I thought that maybe I was just being super sensitive and there was nothing mean spirited or off tempo in the comment. Whatever it was, at the time, it was the real tipping

point for me. I went off the ledge. I felt out of control. I drove from the funeral hall to the church office of the pastor that was officiating Bob's service at the cemetery. I was shaken and still in tears. I told him that I couldn't deal with this anymore. I wasn't sure I could place Bob's ashes in the wall and leave them there. I had questions. Could I have the service but not leave the ashes for interment? Could I bring the ashes back to the cemetery later? Could I just put this all on hold until I felt up to it? What other options did I have? Could I just cancel everything, take Bob's ashes home with me and call it done? I choked out all these questions while crying. I'm not sure I even got all the words out, but the pastor knew I needed him to listen. And that's what he did. Calmly, kindly, without looking shocked or perturbed. I shared my fears, concerns, and sadness. He prayed and listened. And he heard me. He asked me to tell him what I felt would be the best thing to do. He never judged or said my thoughts were a bit whacky although I'm sure he felt I had gone off the deep end. Honestly, to verbalize my thoughts and having a listening ear was all I needed to get myself back on track. Well, that and prayer! Within a few minutes, the storm had passed. Decisions were made. There would be a lovely commitment service at the cemetery with Bob's ashes in the magnificent urn and then I would hand that urn over to be placed in its final resting place in the columbarium wall. I was breathing again and calm, cool and collected. Check. Check. Check.

I think of this day as one of the worst times in the early days following Bob's passing. I just wanted to take Bob's ashes and run. To where, I have no idea. Just run far from the reality of all that was going on. Run from making decisions. Run from handling affairs. Run from any task that reminded me of Bob's death. Run from my check list. Just hide from it all with my heavy box of ashes.

But now I look at the offhand comment about my **"heavy husband"**

in a different light. Yes, that box of remains that I was passed that day was heavy. Heavy on my heart. Maybe the funeral home staff recognized that and was telling me that he knew how heavy this was for me. Perhaps he meant my husband had a HEAVY life—not heavy as in weight but heavy as in scope and magnitude and meaning. Bob’s life was certainly not light and without significance. A substantial life. And yes, Bob was a BIG man. Big in how he lived with kindness, trustworthiness, honesty, respectfulness, faithfulness, patriotism, and love. I now remember the” “Heaviness and Bigness” of Bob when I flash back to this experience. I can only smile now when I remember that day.

I continually give advice and tell widows how to prepare themselves for handling their husband’s death and just what to do after his death. I think I’ll add a new task to the check list.

Grace, give yourself grace.

Check. Check. Check.





Aubriana

Sometimes love creates love in a strange way.

I have a very cluttered family tree with branches that have gone wild. Most of the tree's growth came from my husband Bob's side of the tree. Saying that Bob's branches have been prolific is an understatement. In the 45 years of being with Bob (and the 3+ since he passed) Bob went from having 3 children to 4 children, 14 grandchildren and 24 great grands.

#25 great grand is due in July. Add to that a hefty number of spouses and significant others—currently there are 14 of those. I think that's the current count but sometimes I'm not even sure who to count as ours! I find I still claim a few ex-spouses like they are still ours. And then I count their children as ours and then the whole tree blooms and blossoms with more and more growth.

But today I'm focused on Aubri. Aubriana Kristeen Ray. A great granddaughter on my stepson Steve's branch of the tree. Daughter to my oldest granddaughter Candice. Aubri has been on my heart so much lately and thoughts of Aubri always lead me back to thoughts of Bob—her great grandpa.

I can't remember a time in Aubri's life when she and her great grandpa Bob didn't "click". They truly had an affinity for each other. It was obvious to others that they had a special connection though it was on a very subtle level. Their time together seemed to make them both happy. Not just as a baby. This connection was evident when Aubri was a toddler and carried into her years as a young girl. When Bob passed Aubri was only 10 and she bravely and tenderly spoke before a hall full of family and friends at Bob's Celebration of Life. The only great grandchild to speak. I can't remember what she said but my heart still is so very happy when I remember that moment. Aubri loved her great grandpa. I love Aubri. Love creates more love.

I think my most special memories of them together are always our trips to SeaWorld. I would tell Aubri that we were old and that we needed her to keep an eye on us so we wouldn't get lost. She would grab hold of our hands and cling to us like we were truly going to slip away into the crowds if she didn't hold tight to us. For a few years we were all member of the "scaredy cat club"—those people that don't like the fast rides, wet rides, bouncy rides, and roller coasters. Just big scaredy cats. But once Aubri grew a bit and her fears subsided, she wanted to bail out of the scaredy cat club. I

didn't. But her great grandpa Bob stepped up. I just don't think he could disappoint her, so he joined her in those bouncy, wet, scary rides while I cheered from the sidelines. I can still picture their wet clothes and HUGE smiles when they came off of Shipwreck Rapids! I can't picture many other times that Bob had such a big smile on his face.

They seemed to need to touch each other a bit. Handholding. A light touch. A little hug. I know she loved me as well, but I noticed she was more drawn to Bob, and they seemed to have a silent language between them. It was sweet and now a precious treasured memory.

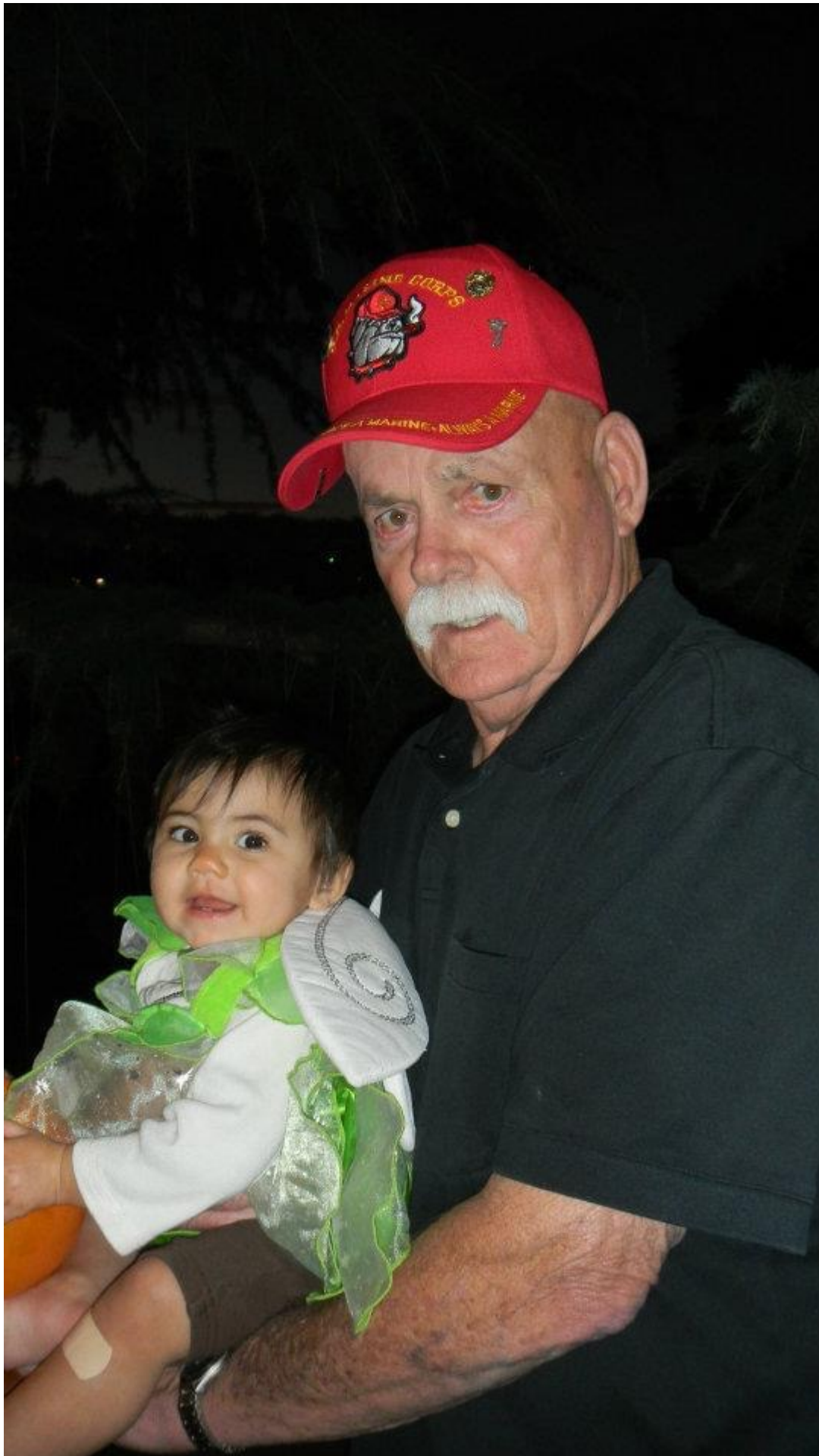
Aubri is a teen now. Finishing up 8th grade soon and heading off to a new chapter. High School. Oh my! Yes, being 14 isn't easy in today's world. My prayers are always for her to know how much she is loved by our Lord and Savior. And I always add a tag line to my prayer that she can always feel the crazy love her great-grandpa Bob had for her. Unconditional love by God and by a great grandpa. What could be better?!

**And of course, may Aubri know that I love her deeply as well.
Love creates more love.**



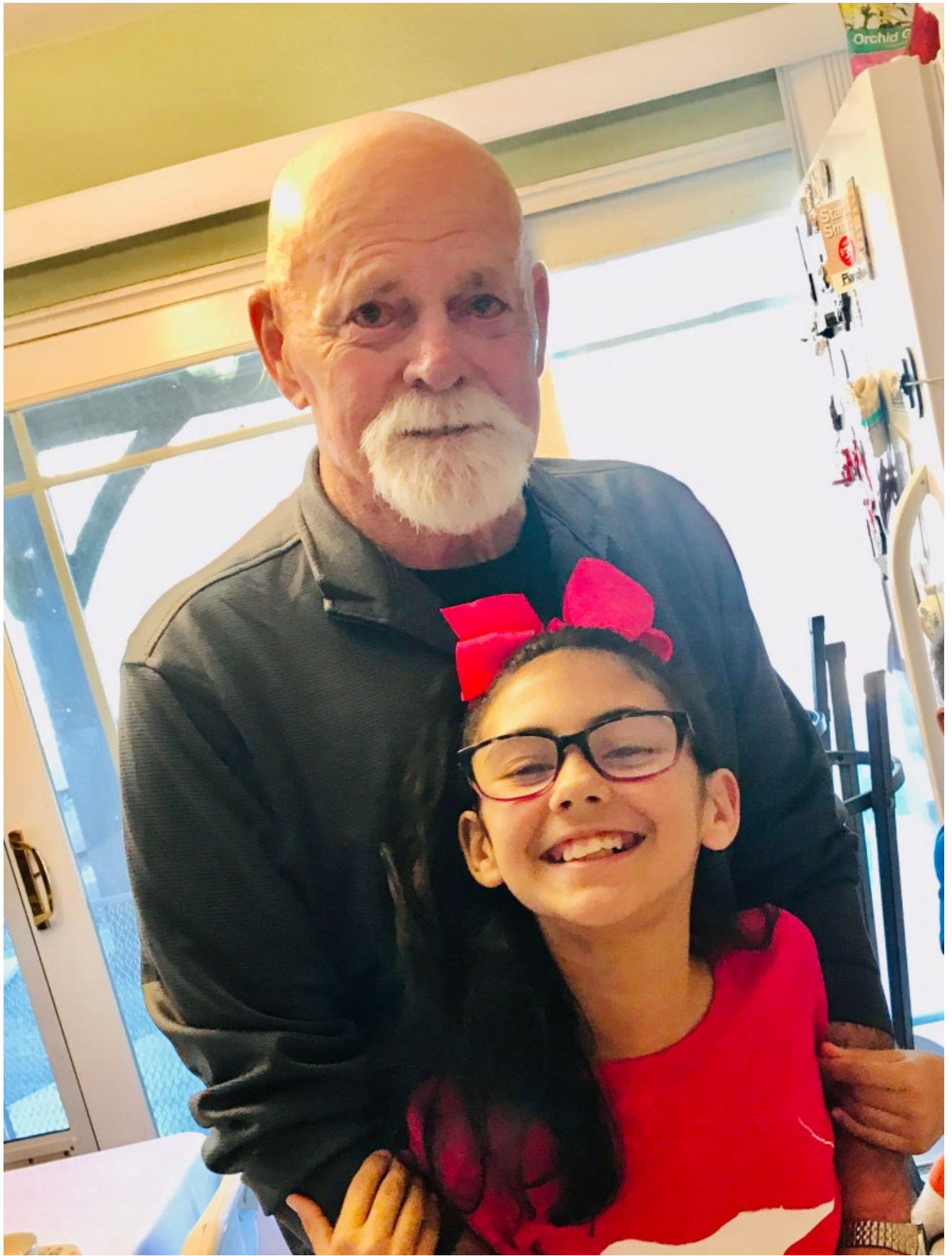






















Hot Off The Press!

It has already turned summer here in my little town of Alpine. It may only be mid-April, but the days have warmed up and the sun is hot by midday. I pushed myself out of the house earlier than usual today to fit in a little walk around the neighborhood while the temperature was still tolerable. Nice change of routine and I even met a few people and few dogs that I hadn't met before. Maybe I need to get out at a variety of times and mix it up a bit.

But my biggest thing I noticed today was the number of newspapers in driveways. Honestly this is the first time that I've seen any newspapers in my neighborhood. Or maybe it's the first time I have noticed them. Not a big thing in the scheme of things but for me it was a trigger. Yes, those newspapers brought back a flood of Bob memories. Just when I think that I have thought just about every thought there is to think about Bob, I find a whole new memory to dwell on.

Not that I minded at all. I relish these little reminders of my guy. If I can go on a pleasant stroll in my neighborhood while all the time thinking about Bob, that a good walk.

I don't remember a time when Bob didn't get the daily paper. I'm sure he was receiving it when we first started dating and it is something that continued through our married life.

He retrieved the paper each morning and took charge of it. During his years of working, the section with the crossword puzzle was neatly folded and into his work briefcase it went. I've been told that the work of his homicide team didn't start until he had finished that day's puzzle. When he had other work assignments, I am unsure where and when he did the puzzle, but I have no doubts that he completed it. Usually quite quickly in his very neat legible printing. Not so bold to use a pen, it was done in pencil.

The rest of the paper stayed at home for me to peruse and for him to read later. We kept a wicker basket near his chair in the TV room and that's where they went until he deemed them all read. Then to the trash. Yes, the basic trash in those earlier days. To the recycling in later years. I never emptied the basket of newspapers. It was unspoken that Bob would take care of that little task after he had a chance to catch up reading all that he wanted to read.

In his retirement, doing the daily crossword puzzles continued. Now at home, if I was around, he would read me the clues and I could join in. But he held the puzzle, and he did the filling in of the letters. Not my job.

Next would come the Sports Section for him. He might report a thing or two to me from the Sports Section but in those days, I only cared about the SD Chargers and the SDSU Aztecs. I wasn't a baseball fan in those days—times have changed. Next for Bob would be the front-page news section, then the Obituaries, then the cartoons. He'd happily report that it was a good day as he wasn't in the Obituaries. He never tired of that silly joke. I did!

For me, it was the local news, the Heloise or Dear Abby advice columns, and the sales advertisements. We didn't have to share sections as we liked different sections! What a balanced marriage we had when it came to reading our newspaper.

Time marched on. 10, 20, 30, 40 years go by without much of a deviation of routine. I can't begin to remember when the change occurred. Like all other things that changed with Bob's cognitive health, they were subtle and imperceptible at first. The newspaper sat longer on the driveway. Then it sat longer on the coffee table. Then it sat longer in the wicker basket. Less and less of it was being read. Somedays, it wasn't even touched. I suggested to Bob that we cancel our subscription, but he wouldn't hear of it. He was very insistent and so the daily delivery continued.

At some point when more and more of the papers sat in the wicker basket with either a rubber band still around them or sleeved in a plastic bag, I changed to just the weekend delivery. Bob's cognitive health had declined at this point, and he didn't notice the change. I saw it as a benchmark, and it saddened me.

The weekend paper delivery continued until Bob's passing. It was just one of the items on my list of things to do when Bob died. Cancel the newspaper. Such a small deal that was such a big deal for me. I'm sure every widow or widower had tasks that they hated to deal with. This was one of those for me.

Quite to my surprise the newspaper delivery man showed up at the front door soon after I had made my call to cancel. He wanted to know what was happening and why I had cancelled after so many years. Had he done something wrong? Was there an issue? No one prepares you on how to say these three words. "My husband died". I eked out the words and watched his mouth fall open. Honestly, I don't remember which one of us was the most shocked. He in hearing the news or me being stunned that he would actually be concerned enough to check on the situation. Whichever, we mumbled a few more words, and he hastily took off.

So today I ended my walk and came inside to write my thoughts while they were still fresh. And here they are, hot off the press! I'm clinging to my Bob memories and although they aren't big news or worthy of front-page coverage, they are priceless memories to me.

So, thanks to those in my neighborhood who still get the newspaper. You may be a dying breed, but you made my day!



Walk Completed!!!

Choices. Choices. Choices.

I've come to the realization that as a widow, my choices are endless. I can plan my day ahead or just wing it on the fly. No one to consult or convince or cajole into doing what I want to do. My choice is my choice.

Well, doesn't that sound selfish? It sounds like all I think about is myself. I can, and I often do. I started out last Saturday with a plan to go to the writers' workshop at the local library and then come home and work in my yard to try to fine tune it a bit for the lovely spring weather. But while showering, I started thinking about other possibilities. Go to a friend's moving sale, go run a few errands and get greeting cards for upcoming birthdays and anniversaries, watch the Padre Spring Training game on TV, settle in on the couch and read a bit? All these tentative plans were bouncing around in my head, and I wasn't sure where the day would lead me. But the decision would be mine and mine alone and I didn't have to decide at that moment. I could see how the day played out. Maybe even a few new ideas would pop up.

If Bob were alive and well, I would be consulting him and finding out what he would want to do. And I would love that! Maybe he would prefer a zoo visit or a walk at Lindo Lake. We'd talk it out, weigh out our options and make a plan. I would give anything to have this be the case but as you know I am now a widow. No consultation from anyone is needed. No one to consult.

I guess this is the case for divorcees, single people, and widowers as well. I never ever considered how much time and effort and compromise it takes to be considerate of another person and include them in your day-to-day plans. For me, it just was part of our marriage. I was independent and made lots of decisions on my own but for day-to-day activities I always willingly included Bob in my decisions. Would he like to go along to the grocery store, did he want to go to Saturday night or Sunday morning church, would he want to swim or do yardwork, where would he like to have dinner, should we have friends over, should we pay Uno or Scrabble? The decisions we made as a couple were never ending and a part of our life. They happened naturally. The two of us were always considering each other and mutually making plans. Now it seems so long ago and so-so very time consuming.

I've become a one-person show. It seems almost surreal that I can just make my own plans and do what only Susan prefers. It frees up so much time and the thought process is so simple. If I decide that I want to go to the market and head that way in my car, I can take a detour to the thrift shop without consulting anyone. If I never make it to the market, there's no one that needs an explanation. I'll take myself out to lunch. Simple to be on my own when it comes to how I spend my day. If I spend a whole day reading a book, there's no one wondering what happened to our plan to get yardwork done.

How does this work for a person who can't make an independent decision? I wouldn't know as I am 100% capable of making decisions for my life (with much prayer when needed). I wonder

if this is one big reason that some single people, widows, and widowers are lonely or miss their spouses terribly. For those folks that can't make a solo decision, could it be that they just don't like making decisions on their own or need someone to approve of their choices. Fortunately, that's NOT me—I miss Bob for a million other reasons but not because I need him to help me make a choice on how to spend my time.

Could divorcees be even happier to be making their own decisions as a solo act? Do they celebrate the daily freedom of doing just what they want without asking anyone? I'm sure as a widow; I don't celebrate the solo decision-making process in the same way as a divorcee would! But I do find it to be a silver lining in my cloud.

So, what did I end up doing that Saturday?

Some of those things and some others as well. And it was a lovely day!

You Deserve a Break Today!

I drove by the local McDonald's and had a flashback that really sent me down a rabbit hole. Crazy the thoughts I have sometimes and where those thoughts lead me.

I remember when McDonald's was built and opened in our small (once rural) town a few years back and Bob wanted to go there and eat. I was opposed to it. Never really gave my negative feelings much thought. I just had other places I would rather eat my meal. I love eating out and a fast-food stop doesn't constitute eating out for me. Well, unless it's In-N-Out Burger.

Bob was well into his decline with Dementia, and I was "in charge". I did all the driving and made all the decisions. Bob usually was very happy just to go along for the ride and never balked at what we did. I was always a take charge person but with Bob's decline, I was 110% in charge. At least I was if he wasn't having a total meltdown but that's a story for another day.

Frequently as we drove by McDonald's he would ask to go there. And without any thought, I would just say no and tell him that we would go elsewhere, or we would go home and eat. It was never discussed more than that.

Now today, about 4-5 years later, this haunts me a bit. Why didn't I do what my husband asked? Why did I discount his request repeatedly?

Were there other things that I didn't give Bob any say in? Did I force feed my decisions on him? And why did I think about this many years later? Lots of questions and not a lot of clarity. But in true Susan fashion I decided that if I journaled on this matter, I might get some clarity and move on from the remorse I'm feeling.

I'm a champion for people with Alzheimer's/Dementia. I think I can support their caregivers and give them sound advice on how to walk the minefield that is Alzheimer's/Dementia. One of the things I'm often found to say is to not argue with your loved one. Not to be critical of your loved one's behaviors. To remember they are still the special person they once were even if they are slipping away day by day. I emphasize treating them with the respect and admiration you once felt. You need to remember that they are not aggravating you on purpose. They don't want to be the way they are any more than you want them to have this disease. They are unable to express themselves. They can't explain or argue why they want to go to McDonald's, but now I realize that if they ask for it, it is important to them.

They are counting on their loved one to take care of all their needs and looking back, I think I had room for improvement. Maybe even in all the 41 years of our marriage and not just in the Dementia years. I can see now that Bob might have thought of me as a bossy person and not just a take charge person!

So, my takeaway from my McDonald's flashback moment (that lasted a few days) is that we all need to honor our loved ones—be they friends, siblings, neighbors, spouses. If they are healthy or ill. Whether they are young or old. If someone asks for something or wants to do something, and it just isn't exactly what you want, be willing to compromise and bend. Say yes. Maybe you won't enjoy the meal, but I know you'll enjoy the moment.

New Year and another New Word!

I pick a word each new year to focus on in the year ahead. I like this better than making a bunch of resolutions. A word gives me a thought to concentrate upon and often becomes my mantra. I ponder long and hard to choose the word that fits how I am feeling, what issues I may be dealing with, and hopefully a word that will speak to me throughout the year. Not just in the moment that I select the word but all year long. That's a huge task. And one I don't take lightly.

In the past years since I've started this new year habit, my words have been **GENTLE, JOY, KINDNESS, and STRONG**. All have a back story, and all have fit the bill perfectly. I've never regretted my chosen word and felt it was the perfect word for that year. Success!

But now in early December, I find I'm already pondering my word. My head is a jumble of words that all speak to me. But I need a word that will speak to me ALL YEAR! Is it patience, generosity, authenticity, simplify, connecting? Maybe I need several words or even a sentence?! Where do I feel my focus needs to be in 2025? What goal for self-growth do I have in mind? Where is a weak chink in my mental makeup? What is a character flaw that I should work on? What "Fruit of the Spirit" is lacking in my life? See what I'm dealing with? There are a million words that might be my word!

I have three more weeks to sort this out but I'm still worried that I won't have the right word by January 1st. In past years, the words came to me clearly and I didn't vacillate once I zeroed in on the word. I felt drawn to that word and the connection was instantaneous. That's not happening now. I like the word but only briefly until I think of another word. Nothing is sticking! Each word could work but it doesn't feel like the perfect word. Am I being overly picky in my selection process?

As I type these thoughts up, I'm questioning where I'm going with this writing today. As I'm wondering if a word will come to me in the process of writing about my word, I see a handwritten note on a 3"X5" card taped above my desk. It reads: ***Take your eyes off yourself and focus on God.***

So, I change my focus to God. I take my eyes off Susan. And then the word came to me in a flash. **GRATITUDE.**

My word for 2025 is going to be **GRATITUDE**. What a perfect way to change from self-focus to Godly focus. What a way to live every day in 2025. Grateful to the GIVER of all gifts and grateful for all the gifts He has blessed me with. Living with an attitude of **GRATITUDE** will be an amazing way to live throughout 2025. My word will be on my lips and in my heart all year long.

GRATITUDE will be such a meaningful guiding word in 2025 that I think I'll start focusing on it early. Like this very instance! Why wait until January 1st?

So, I will finish the year out **STRONG** as that is my current word for 2024. Strong in body, mind, and spirit.
And full of **GRATITUDE**!



2025
WORD

GRATITUDE
→ FOR GOD