

It's a BEAUTIFUL thing!!

I have probably mentioned that I am attending a Writer's Workshop at my local library. Not because as a newbie blogger, would I consider myself a writer but because I'm trying to step out and try new things and expose myself to new possibilities. Could I write more than my "Bob Blog"? Who knows!

This past session we were given 5 minutes to write a response to a prompt. New stuff for me. I only write about Bob, grieving, and widowhood. Not just a random topic chosen by someone else.

I was asked to write a response to "What was the most *BEAUTIFUL* thing you saw recently?"

Here goes:

Our 34-year-old son Kyle is a dad—second time around but it's still extremely heartwarming to see him in this role as a father. He's a hands-on father taking a huge part in all things pertaining to the care of his one+ month old son and his 23-month-old daughter. He is in his happy place as a dad, and it is so gratifying to see. His father, my husband Bob, was the same way as a father to Kyle. Bob took the lead with so many childcare responsibilities and helped in all ways when we had our son. It's clear to me now that our son learned from his dad! I appreciate now what a great father role model my husband was for our son.

It's *BEAUTIFUL* to see. I get a more than a little choked up when I see him with his children or when he talks to me about my sweet grandkids. Yes, it seems like just yesterday that Kyle was our precious newborn son but time flew by and now he's a dad of two. I know we all ask the same question about life. How did the years go by so fast!

But sadly, my hubby isn't alive to see the results of his love but it's *BEAUTIFUL* still.

(So how did that happen?! I ended up writing about Bob, grieving and widowhood)



Kyle and PJ



Sweet Family Picture!



Kyle & Emma

A-D-A-P-T!

The word that popped in my head on a walk recently was ADAPT. As I took a leisurely walk, I had this word pop into my mind and instead of waiting to write down my thoughts once I was home, I started recording on my phone. I “talked texted” this blog to myself. I’ve never done this before, and really like that it seems to follow the theme of this blog. Adapt—do things differently.

I think widowhood and grieving is not a process of healing or getting over your grief or completely mending. I think it’s a process of adapting to the changes that happen as you navigate life alone. I think adapting to the changes is the answer. Not surviving, not getting over it, not putting it behind you, not moving on from it but adapting to it. So, I’ve been exploring what that means to me and maybe as a widow or widower or someone grieving the loss of a deep love, you’ll look at it this way as well.

My life is going on without Bob and I feel God has a purpose for me at this stage of my life. I’m paying very close attention to the God “nudges”. I am being obedient to His word, and I try to go where He sends me even if He just sends me across the street to visit a friend who needs a helping hand or He sends me to a hospital to visit a friend who is anxious. I’m saying yes to those “nudges” more than I ever have at any other time in my life and in that way, I feel like I’m adapting.

There are some changes I do NOT ever plan on making. I cannot imagine not missing and feeling deep love for Bob. I don’t want that to change. I don’t imagine ever not grieving his illness and his death. I can’t imagine feeling like I survived

this 100% and came out on the other side. I just don't see those things happening. And I'm good with that. That grief is part of my story with Bob. That won't change.

What I do see happening is coping, adjusting, and accepting my new lot in life. One time I thought that grieving and widowhood was like survival of the fittest. Like if I was tough enough, strong enough, smart enough I could get through it. But now (or at least for today) I don't feel like I want to get through it or over it or beyond it. I want to adapt. Adapt. Adapt. Adapt. I keep saying that word over and over and over. I'm trying to think about what adapting would look like, what adapting would feel like.

I'm going to look up the definition of that word and ponder it and see if it's really the right word. I'm not sure why I feel so inclined to label everything and give an exact meaning to everything. Is it a coping mechanism? Is it a survival method? I am not sure why I feel like I must be so analytical about this. So, here's the definition— to make something suitable for a new purpose or a new use. Also to modify. I think that's a nice description of what I'm doing with my life right now at this stage. So, my new take on widowhood, loss and grief is to adapt!

I'm praying God will direct me in the right path in his perfect way. This favorite scripture says it all! "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight" Proverbs 3:5,6

So, adapt, modify, go in a different direction, change, transform, — all of those seem obtainable. They seem doable. They don't seem traumatic, and they don't seem drastic. Can I handle adapting? I'm not going over huge obstacles, not making drastic changes, not trying to put something behind me, and not trying to get over something that's insurmountable. I'm just making minor changes. I'm adapting. I'm just moving ahead

even if that means I must modify my former plan. Like reacting to a plot twist!

So, what I would suggest for you if you're grieving a loss is to just go ahead and grieve. If you're missing your loved one, don't try to change that. If you're a bit concerned about your future, so be it. Just start making minor changes, taking a few baby steps and moving in a little bit different direction than you thought you were going to go. Adapt.

As I get very close to the three-year mark of my husband's death (Bob passed on 11/11/21), I get a little melancholier and even a little bit down in the dumps. There are a few more teary days and gloomy moments. The lump in my throat is a bit bigger. It's these times when I think even more about what we might have done these last few years and what we might have done in the years ahead. I miss him. I miss our life. I miss seeing him in my future. Life has changed but I'm ever so grateful that I had Bob and had his love and that will never change.

Adapting has a soft sound to it. Making small changes is necessary. Nothing major nor drastic. I think that's important for you to remember if you're going off on a new path that you need to do it with care. You don't want to just start out on some crazy rocky steep uneven terrain. You want to start out with a somewhat smooth level path, wouldn't you think? You need to acclimate to the new surroundings and conditions. Take a little venture out of your comfort zone. Dip your toes in, test the water, try some new foods, make some new friends, connect with old friends, go where you haven't gone before, learn a new dance, try a new lipstick, read a different style of book, take a class, explore your faith, love on your family, pamper yourself, exercise more, and travel. Just try to adapt to doing these things without your loved one.

You can do it. I am.

“

It is not the strongest of the
species that survives, nor the
most intelligent. It is the one
that is most adaptable to
change.

—
CHARLES DARWIN

Even Darwin agrees with me!!

Revived, Refreshed, and Restored Memories

Emotions were running rampant in me when I started reading a book recently. I had been notified by the author of the book that his book was soon to be released. He had written a book that tells the story of the Sagon Penn Case in San Diego. If you lived in San Diego in the mid-eighties, this name and homicide case will probably ring a bell. Perhaps you'll have some recollection of this murder of a SD Police Officer and the attempted murder of both another SD Police Officer and a civilian ride-a-long. This case took over the news that March of 1985 and for many years to come it made the headlines. Bob was a Sergeant at the time in the Homicide Division and his Team, Team 4, was On-Call and took the lead on the investigation. Our household lived and breathed "Sagon Penn" for many years.

I wasn't eager to read the book. You see, I already knew the story. I knew about the officers involved, I knew about the killer, I knew about the first trial and the second trail, and I knew about the outcome. I knew the aftermath of the tragedy. How interesting of a mystery would it be if I already knew how it ended? I was actually leery to read the book as I wasn't sure that I wanted to relive some of the feelings I had at the time based on the outcome of the trial. So, I didn't order the book.

I mentioned the book to our son Kyle. Kyle wasn't even born until 1990 and was only vaguely familiar with this case/story. He thought it might be an interesting read, so he was able to download the book for free on Libby (the County Library free download program). My feelings about reading the book changed instantly with this text received from Kyle.

"I've been reading the Sagon Penn book. Dad (and you) appears in the 10th Chapter! The book is really interesting and well written. It is so nice reading about dad-especially his quotes. I can read them in his voice and completely imagine him saying them. I can picture him transcribing them onto yellow legal pads. I'm reading intensely just to find the next time Dad appears."

Yes, that got my attention! So, I immediately went to Amazon and ordered the book. And when it came the next day, I found myself like my son, reading it intensely. What was my takeaway from the book? Yes, it was a well written story about a tragedy for the SDPD. I wasn't surprised at how the book evoked sad memories. But what surprised me is how it much it made me think about and remember the man who was a Homicide Detective. A man that was well respected in his field. A man who was a leader to his team of officers. A man who possessed keen investigative skills. A man who was an extremely competent report writer. A man who upheld the law. A man who was well thought of amongst his peers. A man who loved his job and eagerly went to work day after day after day. My husband.

To be honest, I quite often think of Bob as he was in his later years. The retired older Bob. The Bob with cognitive issues. The Bob with health issues. The Bob with Dementia. It was so wonderful to spend some time remembering a different Bob. Perhaps I could even say that the Bob of his working years was the "real" Bob. The Bob that I hadn't thought of in a while. The Bob whose life became overshadowed by the drastic changes in his later years.

The book was filled with names of people Bob worked with who were part of his Homicide team, coworkers, dispatchers, patrol officers, crime scene investigators, lab technicians, attorneys, Police chiefs--and each of their names and their part of the story brought back a flood of memories of the 30+ years Bob served on the Police Department. I was a proud loyal Police wife, and it was nice to feel those strong positive feelings again. I had renewed pride in my husband!

Quite often when our son Kyle and I are sharing stories and memories about his dad, Kyle ends with a simple comment--"*He was such a silly guy*" or "*Oh that silly guy!*" The Bob of the 60's, 70's, 80's would NEVER have been described as a "silly guy"! Mellowing with age, his retirement, having grandchildren, having our child very late in his life, and then dementia changed Bob's world. It was bittersweet to be transported by this book back to another time in Bob's life and remember him in a different light. I was grateful for the reminder of the Bob of earlier years even if reading the book was difficult at times.

I'm glad that I overcame the very strong initial impulse to not read the book. Although I still find the whole incident to be tragic and upsetting, the joy of finding my Bob amidst the sad story was a blessing to me. It's crazy how a story as heartbreaking as this one propelled me back in time and refreshed my memories. The book actually filled me with many good memories that are totally unrelated to the story.

I know that for many people the release of this book was dreaded and even painful. I get that. Why would anyone want their tragedy to put on display--once again? So don't take this as a recommendation to read the book. For me, the book was just the avenue that brought lovely and misplaced memories of Bob back to the forefront of my brain.

Bob's life is now a collection of memories to me, and it was nice to have some memories added to the vast collection. And for that, I am grateful.









A look at Bob over his many years on the SDPD. A favorite is always the picture with Chief of Police Bill Kolender.

My Bob Haiku!

I've been attending a Writer's Workshop at my local library. I'm not really intending to write a book at this point but I'm trying to improve my writing skills for my Bob with one "o"

Blog. It's a really enjoyable experience and I will continue to attend if only just to be around the interesting and creative people that I've met there. Retirement and Widowhood open up lots of free time to explore new things in life. This has been a wonderful one of those new adventures.

This Saturday we were given a writing prompt. This is all new territory for me, and I actually thought about sitting this one out. I only write about Bob (and myself) and I haven't ever written on other topics. So given the phrase ***"Upside Down and Right Side Up"*** and being asked to write a Haiku right then was daunting. Write a poem and use the Japanese style with phonetic units in a 5-7-5 pattern seemed like I was being asked to walk a tightrope. No can do.

But I did.

And here it is.

And of course, it's about Bob (and myself).

Death is life changing

Upside down and right side up

Is this normal now

Death, grief, and sorrow

Upside down and right side up

Missing you daily

New life does go on

Upside down and right side up

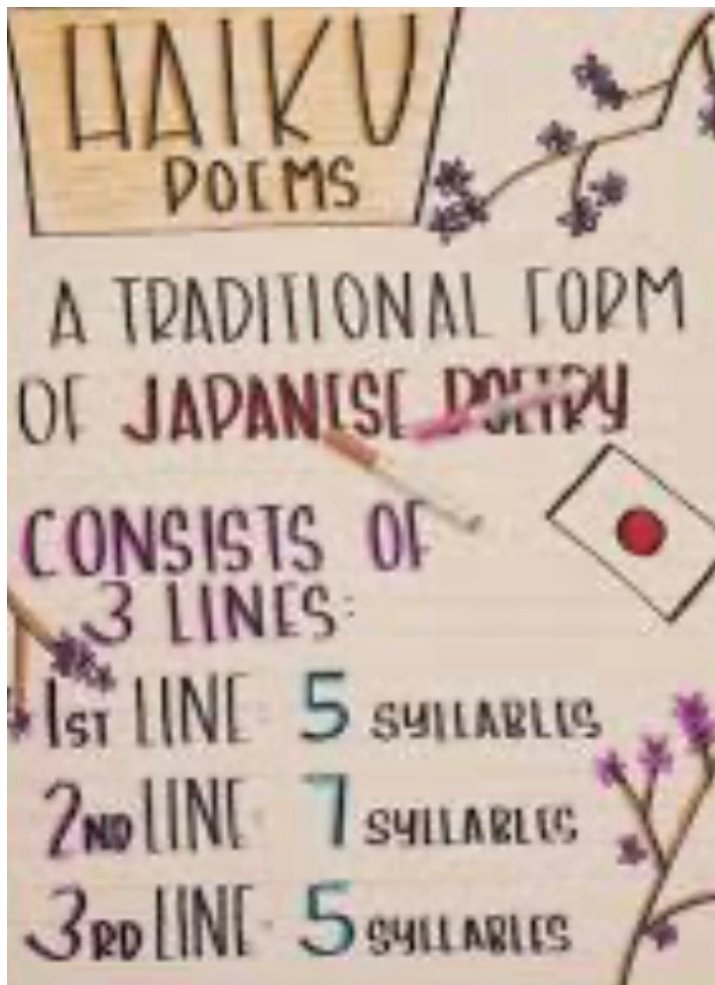
Loving you forever

Memories bring smiles

Upside down and right side up

Joy returns, heart is healed.

...Susan 7/13/2024



Photographs & Memories

(wouldn't that make a great song title?!)

True confession. I spend quite a bit of time on Facebook social media. I admit it. Not a horrible amount of time where I have carpal tunnel, sore thumbs and a trigger finger but if you're one of my Facebook friends you know I share my life with posts and pictures a bunch. I feel it's a bit like journaling. Or at least that's my rationale. It could possibly be my addictive personality but that's a blog topic for yet another day...

My favorite part of Facebook is Facebook Memories. It's fun to have photo memories pop up each day chronicling events that happened in past years on that same date. I especially love seeing Bob in his healthier days and I am glad that I have the pictures of Bob even in his years of cognitive decline and poor health. I pour over all the pictures and soak in the memories—thinking of the good times and feeling the love! The pictures and attached memories are so needed—a blessed reminder of the wonderful life I had with my hubby. I truly cherish all the memories. Even in the throes of caregiving, I was grateful for Bob. Tired, struggling, frazzled, sad, but happy to be Bob's wife.

Now there's a new thing going on. Bob's been deceased for long enough that now I have new Facebook Memories that don't include him. When these Bob-absent photo memories pop up on Facebook, I'm a bit saddened. I didn't want a life without Bob, and I wanted more time and more memories. But the overall takeaway is that these new Bob-absent photo memories are a reminder that I am continuing to live. Living a new season of life without Bob being physically here. Bob's memory is now my "partner"! (Thanks to author Mitch Albom for that expression)

There were times that I wondered if I would mentally,

physically and spiritually survive Bob's illness and passing. I was a wreck in all those aspects. When you're in the thick of it, it is excruciatingly hard and the thought of living a somewhat normal life seems quite impossible. But here I am 2 years and 7+ months later, and I am not only living a "normal" life but leading a happy, thriving, productive, and enjoyable life.

And I have Facebook Memories to prove it!!

Being Honest about Lying!!

I learned so many new things as a caregiver for someone with dementia. Things I never had given much thought to before. Things that I never hoped I would need to learn. Behaviors and skills that seemed almost to go against who I was.

One was a biggie called "therapeutic fibbing". When I first heard this term, I was more than confused. Basically, it means telling little white lies or partial truths to your loved one who has Alzheimer's/Dementia. That was totally against my belief system, and it seemed to go against my principles. But I began to do it. A lot.

When Bob would ask me if he could go to my house for lunch (when we were in our house), I would tell him that I was out of food, and it would be best that we stay at his house (which was our house) and have lunch. It was much easier than trying to convince him that I didn't live elsewhere. He was satisfied. A lie? In a way.

Once Bob didn't drive and had actually had his license taken away, he would ask where his car or his car keys were. Instead

of rehashing that he didn't have a car or license anymore, I would tell him that the car was getting a repair taken care of or getting detailed or a friend had borrowed it. I just made up a new story each time he asked. He was satisfied. A lie? In a way.

Bob told the story about all the baseball hats he had. He claimed his parents threw a party for him when he played football for the Chargers (I must have missed that era!). Bob claimed that everyone brought him a hat and that's where his baseball hat collection came from. I agreed and said it was a grand party indeed. He was satisfied. A lie? In a way.

Sometimes Bob would think that an old boss or work associate was joining us for a meeting, and we needed to get to the meeting place. Often it was a story about it being the police chief or a higher up who needed his help on a big case. Instead of explaining that none of this was happening, I would agree and load Bob up in the car and head somewhere for lunch. Sometimes he would forget about the meeting he was supposedly having by the time we got to the restaurant. If he was still going on and on about the meeting with the police officer, I would secretly talk to the waitress and ask her to come tell Bob that he had just gotten a phone call and the police officer wasn't able to come and he would be in touch for another meeting. He was satisfied. A lie? In a way.

Another lesson learned was that there is no blame or guilt once someone is diagnosed with Alzheimer's/Dementia. You can't be so hard on yourself for your behaviors and actions. You just have to give yourself grace. I can't compare being a caregiver to someone with dementia to any other types of caregiving, but I am sure there is no easy caregiving job. I just know in our situation that there were many times that I didn't handle Bob's caregiving with tender loving care. I am sure there were times that I did not look at him with love in my eyes. I'm sure there were times that my voice was harsh and my words were mean. I am sure there were times when my prayers

were more for me than for him. Do I regret these things? Do I blame myself or have guilt? No, I don't.

Now that's the biggest lie yet. Of course, I do



Me and Bob's 4 children wearing Bob's most favorite hats!

New Year/New Word 2024

A few years back I started choosing a word instead of making a New Year's Resolution. Or maybe those words chose me. But either way, I kept focused on that word through the entire year. I found it more helpful to have a word to guide me than a list of resolutions that I quickly forgot.

In 2021 my word was GENTLE followed by JOY in 2022, by KINDNESS in 2023.

My new word for 2024 is **STRONG**.

What I want for myself is a **strong body**—a healthy active body. Many of you know that this year I have lost 65 pounds. Caregiving, Covid, and Bob's passing did not help my already lousy eating habits any! But now I am feeling healthy and energetic. I want to continue exercising, walking, eating right and taking good care of my body. Becoming a widow, you quickly learn that you are on your own. I am solely responsible for taking care of myself. I want to feel capable and strong and able to live on my own for many many years!

What I want for myself is a **strong mind**—a mind without judgment, without bias, without gossip, without negativity, without moodiness, without hatred, without unwanted thoughts, and without stress and anxiety. Maybe I should say MIND AND HEART as I think they are connected. What you're feeling in your heart is affected by what you put in your mind. What is in your mind shows your real heart. I want both to be in perfect alignment. I think a good summation of what I want for my mind and heart are the Fruits of the Spirit. *(But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy,*

peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23)

I know that's a huge ask but that is why my word is strong. I need to focus every day on being strong and having the strength needed for all my wants!

What I want for myself is a **strong spirit**—a faith that doesn't waiver. A faith that is strong enough to get me through rough periods. A faith that I feel so strongly about that I live it out every day and share it with friends and family. A strong unshakable cornerstone faith.

So, where I am going to go to get this strength—the strength I need to be strong in body, mind, and spirit?

Here's a few favorite scriptures which will tell you that answer—

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" Proverbs 3:5-6

"in their hearts, humans plan their course, but the LORD determines their steps" Proverbs 16:9

"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength" Philippians 4:13

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" Isaiah 41:10

So, I'm heading into 2024 on a high note and clear path.
Thanks for being with me on my journey!

PS: Last year I started 2023 being very sad and weepy about moving into yet another new year without Bob. This year, I have come to realize that Bob is right beside me and I can even hear him cheering me on.



A Box of Love

God always gives me just what I need exactly when I need it.

Father's Day is a tough day without my hubby Bob. It's a reminder of what I don't have. On Mother's Day, I am always a mom. On Father's Day I totally feel like a widow. Some holidays are harder than others. Father's Day is one of those.

I'm sure I wasn't thinking it was going to be a special day when I woke up on that Sunday morning.

But God...

Yep, He turned that day right side up in a huge way.

Our church had a guest speaker for the Father's Day Service. Todd Durkin spoke of being a godly earthly father and also reminded us that we all have a heavenly Father who loves us unconditionally. As part of his talk, he showed us a collection of letters that his own father had written to him while he was in college. He read some excerpts from some of

these letters and spoke of how much it meant to him to have a father that cared about him enough to write to him.

Oh yes, people used to write letters and cards and send them in the mail! It's not something that many people do these days since it is much easier to text, FaceTime, or message. He reminded us that there is power in the written word and that parents today should try to practice this habit and write to their children.

I almost jumped up out of my seat at church. I wanted to go home and find Kyle's box of letters from his dad! I have been storing a lot of Kyle's belongings (mainly Legos) since he graduated from college in 2012.

I thought that somewhere in the HUGE collection of items I have been saving for Kyle was a box of letters. I hadn't opened that box since the day Kyle handed it to us as he packed up to leave college. I wasn't even sure I still had it. Had this box been thrown away in our move? I hadn't thought about it in so many years. I just wanted to get home and see if I could find it.

And there in my garage was the cardboard box. Right on top. In plain view. Prominent and easy to get to. I had a racing heart and shaking hands as I reached for the box. Was this the one? Did it still contain the letters? Were there really letters from Bob as I recollected? Was I only imagining?

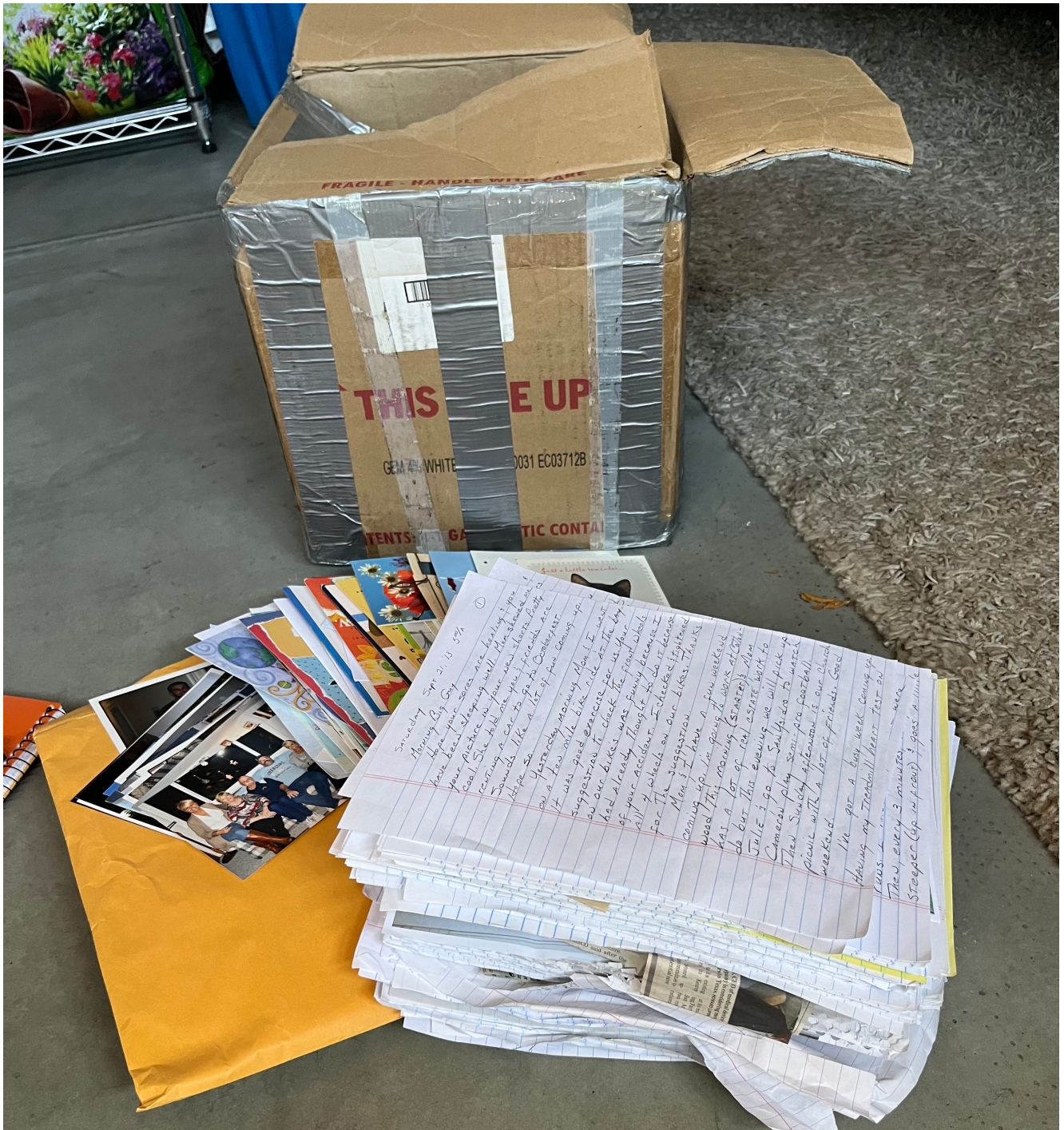
You can't imagine my happiness upon opening the cardboard box and seeing the letters. Nearly a 6" stack of handwritten letters. Neatly printed in pencil on lined paper from a tablet. Stacked in the box along with greeting cards and pictures we had mailed to Kyle during his 4 years in college. A treasure trove.

With weepy eyes, I read a few of the letters. Just a day-to-day accounting of what we were doing out here in Alpine while he was in New York. Every letter told him of how much he was

missed and how much he was loved. Nothing earthshattering but it rocked my world this Father's Day in 2023.

God knew I needed a boost in my spirit on Father's Day and gave me that and so much more. Being able share this with our son on his first Father's Day was such a blessing for me. Both of us loved reminiscing about the letters. Kyle said he had LOVED getting these nearly daily letters from his dad! They meant so much then. And they mean so much to Kyle now. A piece of his dad. A piece of his dad's heart.

A box of love.





Bob Voyage!

So, my sister-in-law Pam texted me this morning with the words ***"Bob Voyage"!***

She called it a Freudian Slip. I call it a perfect slip up!

I'm off today to visit family in Derby, Kansas (near Wichita) and right now I'm sitting in the Dallas/Fort Worth airport on a layover for a couple of hours. Good time to get these thoughts on paper (or the internet).

The families that I am visiting in Kansas are granddaughters and their families that came into my life while I was married to Bob.

Marica is the daughter of Bob's youngest daughter Shelly and Alyx is the ex-wife of Shelly's son Aaron. Joining us for a few days is Candice, the daughter of Bob's oldest son Steve. I love these three women and their families, and I am so grateful for having them in my life. Between them there are 10 great grandkids, and there is another great grandson due July 5th. Vibrant, fun filled households full of love and life. Plus, they welcome me with open arms and want me to spend time with them. What could be nicer?

Oh, do I wish Bob were with me on this trip? Of course, but I can't dwell on that. I anticipated our future as a twosome, but life took a different turn. My adventures like this week of vacation in Kansas are going to continue. And even though Bob isn't here, he is living on in his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. And in me.

I love when they share memories of their grandpa and remind me of fun times that we have all had together. And there are lots of silly tales and stories of cookies and doughnuts! Quite often, there are tearful moments when I miss him and wish he were here to enjoy these special times with family. More often now, I'm grateful for my life with Bob and all the wonderful

family that I gained when I said “I do” way back in 1980.

So yes, it’s a **“Bob Voyage”!**

8,765.82 Hours of Widowhood

I just passed into another stage of widowhood. I’m no longer a NEW widow. Bob has been gone just over a year now. I will no longer be experiencing birthdays, holidays, and special occasions for the FIRST time without Bob.

It’s now the second Thanksgiving season without him and the hurt has lessened a bit. Is the hurt less or am I coping with it better? Is the pain going away or am I becoming immune to the sting? Is the sorrow lessening or am I a stronger person now? I have no idea. I just know that I can smile more, feel more pleasure, and face these milestones without caving in completely. The percentage of happy moments to sad moments is shifting. Happiness and joy are winning!

I receive emails daily from Grief Share Support Group. Some are meaningful, some aren’t. Some just speak straight to my heart. Here’s the zinger that I pulled from a recent email.

“That is why you must train yourself in biblical hope where you are absolutely convinced that God is and that He has a world to come for you and that on the other side everything will be okay. That certainty has to be bigger than the certainty of your sorrows.”

One of the consistent testimonies in Scripture is that faith can grow strong during the darkest times of adversity. It is during those darkest moments that I have come to know personally that my Lord is the **God of hope.**

What does this mean to me? My sorrows are certain. They aren't totally going away anytime soon. Or ever. I miss my husband and the life we had together so very much. I miss sharing my life with him. I miss his touch and kiss (sorry grandkids if that's gross!). I miss the things that we never got to do that I had thought we would. I miss reminiscing about our trips and adventures together. I miss his silly stories and jokes. Yes, my sorrows are certain.

But on the flip side, my God tells me that on the other side everything will be ok. I cling to that certainty as it is a bigger certainty than my sorrow.

How reassuring. No wonder I can smile.



"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4).