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

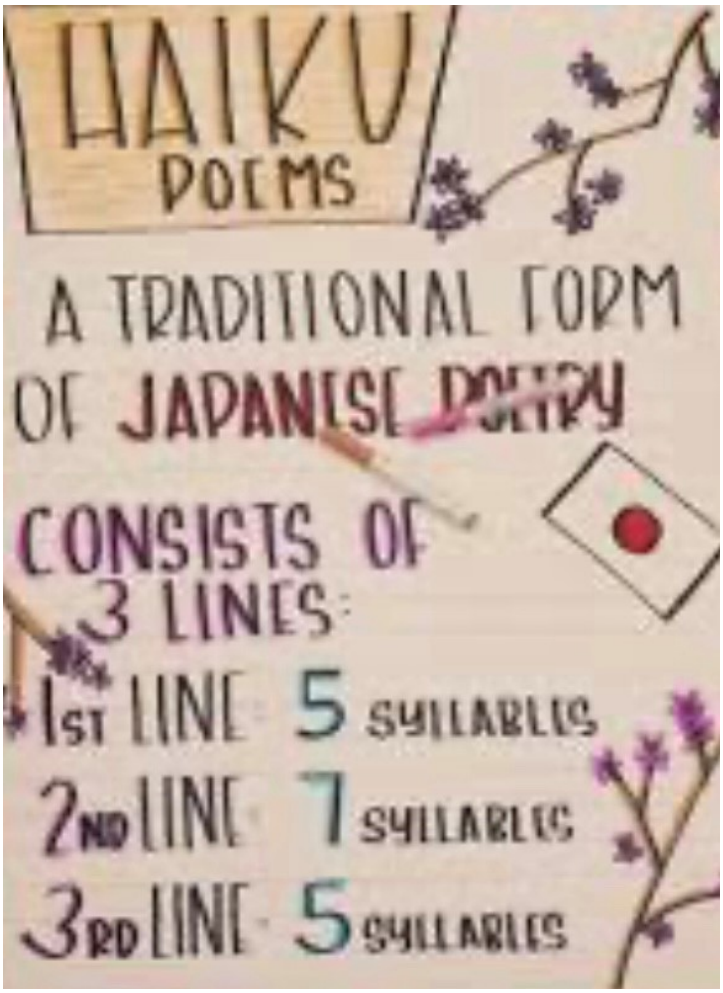
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Memories bring smiles

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 carpel 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 as 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!

5 of the Great-Grands wearing Grandpa Bob’s 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?

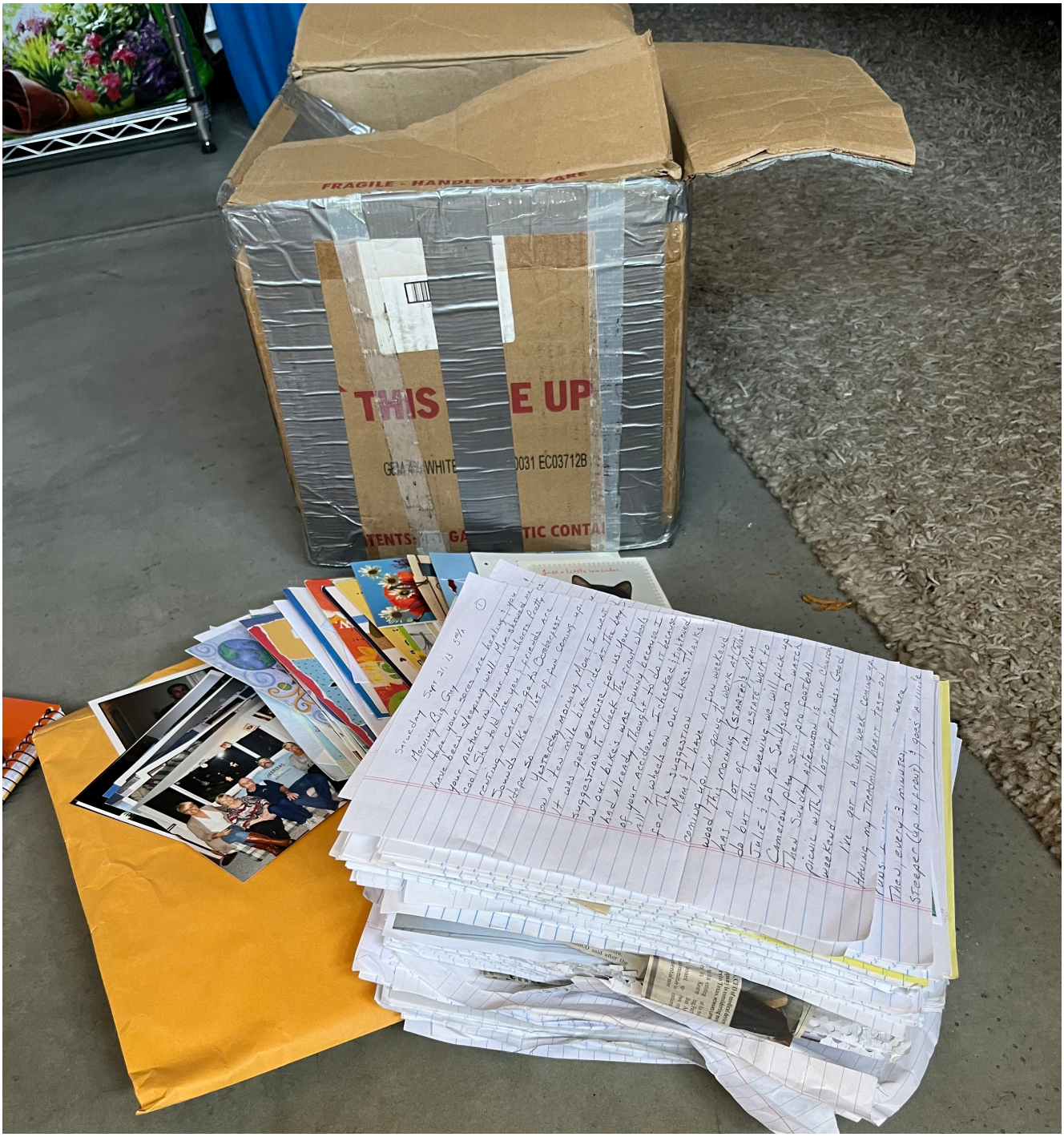
Did it still contain the letters? Were there really letters from Bob as I recollected? Was I only imagining?

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.


FRAGILE · HANDLE WITH CARE
THIS E UP
0031 EC03712B


BANKERS BOX
ROBOTICS
INVENTION

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).

Facebook Official

My goodness. Bob has been on my mind 24/7 this month. And it’s

not a bad thing. I think it's because a year ago right now, things were rough. Bob had declined to where he needed help with almost everything. He couldn't hold his spoon to eat or hold his coffee cup without dropping it. He had a terrible time getting into bed and just couldn't figure that out. He would just plop himself into bed and where he landed is where he would sleep. Even if most of his body was hanging off the bed. Once super fastidious, Bob had forgotten how to shave and taking a shower was a very difficult process that he (and I both) dreaded. He was confused over what Fixodent was for and there were times he tried to brush his teeth with his razor. It was so sad to watch the physical decline that most people don't know is associated with Dementia. Yep, the brain just stops being able to tell the body what to do. The body just stops being able to function without the brain directing it.

Bob was on a downhill slide, and it was excruciating to watch. Thinking back to last October/November brings me chills. But it also is a reminder that Bob was not living a life that he would have wanted. Yes, it was time for him to pass and sometimes these memories of the rough times make me realize that I didn't lose a healthy happy Bob, I lost the Bob that was ready to go. Weird as this may sound, that helps a bit. I know how Bob wanted to live and how he was living last October/November was NOT how he would have ever wanted to live. On that issue, I am 100% clear.

But this year, I still have lots of changes to process. I am still not used to my new life without Bob. I'm not miserable. I'm just still trying to sort through my feelings about everything! I can be positive and upbeat and then downtrodden and miserable in the same hour. I can cry at the drop of a hat over a tiny thing or be perfectly content and smile during the most emotional experiences. Yes, I'm a mixed-up mess.

I've read many books about grief– about 5 stages, 10 stages, etc., but I just don't think that those books cover everything. They barely scratch the surface. Just when I think

I’ve worked through most stages, I come across another hurdle or issue. Maybe I’ll write my own book! Maybe my book would have 50 stages of grief or more!

So today I take another big step in this grief process that isn’t in any of the books I’ve read. Today I change my Facebook status to widow. Yep, it’s finally Facebook official. I know it sounds silly, but my stomach is churning a bit. Dare to move ahead. Here I go.





Bob with me and with his daughters Shelly & Julie
Fall 2021