

## **The Waves** by Emily Mockett

We headed north to Canada after Julia died; we just had to keep moving north. With the hypnotic change of scenery at 70 mph up the I-5 corridor past Shasta, past Portland, past Seattle, I thought grief would be challenged to keep up. But it had hitched a ride in the front seat. My husband had taken the car seat out of the car before we left. I hadn't wanted to remove it yet, but we needed the room. Our chaotic disorganized packing for an unknown destination and indeterminate duration left no form of efficiency or compactness. Julia was dead and she didn't need the car seat. The cold reality of that was my introduction to the dark frigid barren landscape I would have to make my own way through. My big toes were in the icy surf, and I would have to swim the Pacific.

At a B&B in Oregon, a kind inn keeper heard our story. We were on a "healing journey" and we told her about Julia. This graying mother of four, grandmother actually, listened earnestly as the tears welled up almost immediately. She too had lost a baby, a boy, years before, she confided. Comforting as it was to know I wasn't the first mother in the history of time to lose a child, I was also stunned to see the pain of her loss residing right there just under the surface fifty years later. Here I was only one week after my life changed forever, realizing the sadness was my possession and I would have to learn to walk with it.

In the weeks and months that followed I could say I was feeling better only in the sense that I was getting used to feeling so badly. It was no longer such a surreal contrast to my life lived up to the birth of Julia. I was accepting my suffering and it was growing familiar. I told Julia "you do not suffer, you have found your way, and someday I will find my way, but for now Julia I suffer, I suffer the greatest sadness born from the greatest love I will always have for you". I bathed in my suffering.

Like the waves of the ocean and the labor of birth one cannot attempt to control grief. I let the grief come. The ocean was fierce and unforgiving at first. The waves crashed down repeatedly and each time I believed I would not surface. In the moment of each chilling submersion it seemed as if the tears would never stop and my stolen breath would go unreturned. But each time I was wrong. I always surfaced. The water left my eyes and the air always came back to my lungs. Time after time, I went under, and time after time I came up. I put up no breakwater to my crashing grief, I let it come, I experienced it, but then I let it pass through me. I did not cling to it. As a wave moves past, as a labor contraction subsides, I let go of the sadness, welcomed the calm, and rested from my grief.

My ocean of grief ever so gradually transformed. The waves came less frequently, then less violently and moved through me more swiftly. The water imperceptibly was also getting warmer. At the same time I became a better swimmer, trusting further with each survived wave that “this too shall pass”. And they always did. And they still do.

The death of one’s baby will always be sad, but one will not suffer always. I believe now that the grandmother who wept cried not because she still suffers 50 years later, but because her heart had been permanently opened years before by the suffering of her loss. Opened to experience the joys and sorrows that *will* come to all of us in a far more enriched and connected way. For my life experience has changed in this way as result of my loss of Julia. I am humbled, more grateful and awake to the marvelous spectrum of emotion that colors each day. I will never be any less sad my daughter died, but I can say to Julia now that I do not suffer, and I am finding my way...my way through the waves.

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