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# Living in the Balance

## March and April 2023

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"It has been a year of pure chaos," my oldest nephew texted as the first anniversary of my brother's death approached. Indeed. I have moved through much of this year on autopilot. Many of us have had similar experiences, and while each death is every other death in that it is an ending, no two deaths are even remotely the same. I have reflected on the other deaths that happened this year one after another and the layers and layers of challenges and losses that seemed a continual tsunami. As I came up for air, I wondered when the experiences....the realities....of "now" would start to become real and would I even know.

In 1967, my best friend from high school and I were freshmen at East Carolina University and we lived on the same hall in the dorm. In February of 1968, her roommate was killed in a car accident during a freak snowstorm near Raleigh. For the first time, we saw death up close and very personal. Three of us made the journey to Maryland for her funeral and frankly I remember almost nothing about the service. What I do remember is being in the car with her parents on the way to the visitation. Her mother said in the kindest of voices, "Last night was the most beautiful sunset. Just like Sue I will always have that." My own grief had engulfed me so deeply that I could not imagine a sunset or a day without this pain of senseless loss.

Many winters have passed and as I remembered her, I was curious if she had an obituary. While the cemetery had no record, the local library sent a newspaper article about her accident. In black and white newsprint was the reality of her death from that day. But what has become so very "real" for me at this moment is not that awful February day, but her living, creative self. I picture her in her room with her art projects all around her. Gifted. Serious. Funny. I hear her mother's voice again. Sunsets. Sunrises. Memory of then and now.

My brother's death became real for me as I listened to *Ordinary Grace*. At the end of the book many years have passed since the tragic deaths of 1961, but in their yearly ritual the brothers and their dad meet at the cemetery to leave flowers and share a memory of each person. Their tradition brought me a moment of clarity. My brother was cremated with a memorial service, but a year later, I have felt stuck. I realize that while there had been some ritual there was no marker...no placeholder for him. No "Remembering with love....brother, son, father."

Our parents and grandmother are buried near my home, and I drove to the cemetery and stood alone over their graves. The deaths all those years ago had indeed happened and here were the makers that are a piece of my history preserved. Grandmother. Father. Mother. But I do not dwell on their deaths. Instead, I think of my father snapping photos, my mother reading to me, and my grandmother making bread. Those are among the countless living memories that hold me now.

I turned and walked to the cemetery office. They assure me that a marker can be created for my brother to be placed on the graves of my parents. I exhale a deep breath. As I stood where that marker will be placed, I think of him as my little brother who ate every awful home ec experiment that I brought home from school and as the brother who was constantly picking at me as siblings do. And I remember the kind and caring man who has left us with two nephews and a niece and their children whom Rex and I hold dear and close. This is the bittersweet "real" of "now," and I am filled with grief and love and life for him and for me.



## About Spiritual Direction —

- Offers a space and time for you to explore, reflect upon, and deepen your relationship with God.
- Provides a haven from the daily busyness of the outer world and opens a time to be still and to reflect on your inner journey.
- Is a companioning relationship grounded in dialogue and discernment.
- Explores ways you may integrate spirituality into your daily life.
- Is not limited to any one spiritual practice or tradition.
- May involve one or two meetings or multiple meetings over time.

## You may wish to consider spiritual companioning if you are —

- Longing for a deeper relationship with the Divine
- Looking for a place to dialogue about spiritual questions
- Seeking ways to connect with the Spirit in a more intentional way
- Discerning ways to live in a more integrated and whole way
- Standing at a crossroads in your life
- Exploring new or fresh ways to be in relationship with God

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I am no longer offering spiritual direction but will be glad to talk with you about the process.

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*The opening photo is my brother with his three children when they were very young. They are now in their 40's with children of their own....ages 8 to 21. The two other photos are my brother in elementary school and with his oldest son, Robby, three months before my brother's death on February 8, 2022.*

