

## Introduction

My heart was broken and shattered into a thousand pieces when my soulmate, best friend, wife, and lover, Babe, died. I wrote about grieving while I grieved to give an account of the emptiness threatening to overwhelm what remained of my defense mechanisms. I wrote about grieving to chronicle the emotional storms buffeting me. I wrote about grieving to connect at a visceral level with all those who walk the journey with me. And, I wrote about grieving to discover a path through the intense suffering I experienced to share with those who also deeply grieve the loss of a loved one.

I began writing this book less than a week after Babe's funeral. As I journeyed through the grieving process, I learned grieving and its soulmate suffering, hurt like hell. At first, I thought I was unique in my suffering. Reality peeled away the scales from my eyes. I soon recognized the millions upon millions who shared the same journey. *Dancing Alone - Learning to Live Again* is for these millions upon millions who want to believe the power of love will lead to healing the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain they experienced.

I learned those who grieve are invisible to many people. I now know what it is like to walk among those who grieve. In the past, if I caught a hint of their suffering, I kept them at a safe distance. I offered a short hug, 'I'm sorry for your loss,' and 'Let me know if there is anything I can do.' I now walk among them invisible to those who have not yet experienced grieving.

As I grieved, grieving gradually unveiled its gifts to me. It gave me a chance to stand outside myself and see what had long lay hidden from me. It became an ongoing mentor teaching me what is important and what is superficial in life. Grieving taught me that life is a gift; and, love is all there is.

I am still journeying toward my destination; I now have a heart filled with hope. I know there is a way through grieving. I know love determines the destination. Love wins. Love always wins. Love conquers grieving.

*Dancing Alone - Learning to Live Again* is for all who grieve who want to believe the power of love will lead to the healing of the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain experienced from a devastating loss. Experiencing life as it was, is no longer an option. The grieving path calls us to live. It is a call to love.

As you read this book, you will meet M. I created M to walk with me in my grieving journey. I needed a sounding board and my fictitious character, M became my sounding board. She led me with her wisdom, love, and insightful, probing questions. M, like Babe, listened to me, she was not afraid to criticize me. She helped me to relearn to learn to love again.

Throughout the book, you will read my journal entries where I periodically express my deepest thoughts and raw grieving emotions. I related each journal entry to an aspect of grieving I experienced. I kept a box of Kleenex nearby. I often wrote my journals with tears running down my cheeks. "*Tears are the blood of the soul*" according to Paulo Coelho. Journaling acted as both a cathartic and healing process for me.

As I journaled, I gained insight into my grieving; I saw how it was affecting me and those around me. I became aware of what I was doing or not doing to come to grips with my grieving. Journaling provided an unsuspecting benefit to me; I recognized small steps of progress. Each small step gave me hope and allowed me to summon my courage to continue.

We are, after all, brothers and sisters, who share club membership. Suffering crosses borders, gender, religions, race, and ethnicity. Atheists and agnostics suffer as much as believers. "Grieving hurts like hell"

The onset of grieving is where my story begins, it is not where it ends. *Dancing Alone - Learning to Live Again* is my experience of the grieving journey. I learned grieving isn't easy, I had to learn how to love all over again.

## Chapter One

### Sorrow

*Sorrow like a ceaseless rain  
Beats upon my heart.  
People twist and scream in pain,  
Dawn will find them still again;  
This has neither wax nor wane,  
Neither stop nor start.  
People dress and go to town;  
I sit in my chair.  
All my thoughts are slow and brown:  
Standing up or sitting down  
Little matters, or what gown  
Or what shoes I wear.*

*~ Edna St. Vincent Millay<sup>1</sup>*

Imagine awakening in a parallel universe. You and your life partner left a great job, friends, and colleagues to pursue a dream. The dream vanishes more quickly than the morning dew turning into a nightmare. In this parallel universe, you're alone. Your life partner is no longer alive. Your children all live more than a thousand miles away. You're frozen, unable to think, move, make rapid-fire decisions. And, even if you were not frozen, you stare at your reservoir of strength and courage and find it empty. You want to scream for help; the words form in your mind but silence rules and a monsoon of tears begins.

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<sup>1</sup> Sorrow by Edna St. Vincent Millay, retrieved from

[http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/edna\\_st\\_vincent\\_millay/poems/20181.html](http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/edna_st_vincent_millay/poems/20181.html)

Fear and anxiety fill every cell in your body. If you're to survive, you must do things foreign to you. You face impossible choices. You want to hide, go back to sleep, and hope you'll awaken and your world will be right. You want to be alone. You fight despair and depression with hope nowhere in sight. You were always strong, filled with confidence and courage. Now you question your strength to handle this parallel universe; how you'll manage daily affairs. You question life. The parallel universe is not Camelot. The parallel universe is invisible to all who do not know the suffering and deep sorrow you carry when someone you love dies. You're learning a new language. It is the language of grieving. It is in this parallel universe where I find myself ...

### **How Do You Mend a Broken, Shattered Heart?**

I try to survive moment by moment. Most of my moments are filled with tears, a stomach twisted tighter than a cord of rope, and eyes and mouth that have forgotten how to smile. I go to bed hoping tomorrow will be better than today. It can't be worse, but it often is worse. I desperately hold on to the prospect a rainbow will appear on my horizon. I need a glimmer of hope, and all I see are charcoal clouds surrounding me. I'm lost on a road I've never travel before.

Before my world turned upside down, Babe and I shared dreams over morning coffee. We were spontaneous; we'd take off on a moment's notice and head to Vegas, the Rockies, or the Gulf. We turned life into a continuous adventure. We filled each moment with love, a deep abiding love. Arguments were few and minor. Each moment together was a love song we thought would never end. Then, without warning, our world spun out of control. Our happy, joyful, adventurous world turned chaotic.

A riptide caught hold of us and swept us far from shore. Any reluctance I had to enter this world vanished because the riptide took hold of Babe and was carrying her far away from me. Where the riptide carried her, I would follow until I could follow no more. I was not aware of the depth and breadth of suffering, pain, and loss I was about to experience. I quickly learned you don't know until you know. I did not know I would soon become a grieving man. And, only when it happened did I know.

I remained by Babe's side day by day clutching her hand telling her over and over "love wins, love always wins. It will win this time too." All the while I spoke these words, I lied next to her watching her life slip away. I felt powerless to alter her suffering. I refused to listen to doctors who told me my hope was an illusion. I was angry at doctors who declared her dead before she stopped breathing. I held tight to prayer and the belief a miracle would happen.

Being next to Babe was my job. I rose at four thirty, prayed, exercised, showered and cleaned up. I made a to go breakfast and cup of coffee and headed to the hospital or hospice to be with her. I thought of nothing else. My only thought, my only actions were to hold her hand, tell her I love her, tell her love wins, and pray for a miracle.

Nurses, CMAs, and doctors bombarded me with pleas to accept reality and tell Babe it was okay to die. I told them of the deal Babe and I made, we wouldn't quit on each other. I wasn't about to quit now. I ignored them. I sealed my prayer and thought patterns in my vault, and only I held the combination. I never denied the reality of her diagnosis. I considered the possibilities of multiple outcomes. Only God knew the outcome, I reasoned.

I prayed unceasingly for a miracle. I said countless rosaries, novenas, and prayers of petition to saints. Babe's 32,000 Twitter friends prayed for her. Our five daughters and I watched and waited; our prayers went unanswered until August 19. Then, one prayer was finally

answered. Five hours before Babe died, I finished praying a rosary for her and asked God, for the first time during her struggle, "Your will be done, Lord. If you want to take Babe home, your will be done." I added, "But I'm still praying for my miracle. Please heal her."

My prayer was answered, but not the way I wanted it answered. Babe died five hours later. When she died, my tears began to flow and continued to flow unannounced, unpredictable, at the most inopportune times. I am left to negotiate my way, alone, through the parallel universe. I thought I was the only one who grieved this deeply. I quickly learned I am one of a growing legion of people who suffer as I do.

## Chapter Two

Neither my daughter Pru nor I slept the night Babe died. I heard Pru wandering in the kitchen. I saw light from under the bedroom door, I knew she was working on her computer or texting her sisters. Sometime around three, my body gave in and allowed me two hours' sleep.

At nine a.m., the doorbell rang. Pru was on the patio talking on her cell to her husband, Daniel. I answered the door. It was M. We said nothing; we embraced. My tears started as a slow trickle and gave way to an overflowing river of tears. M won't let go of me. She held me tight; I knew she too was crying.

Babe and I met M at a conference on health, healing, and love. She was the keynote speaker. M, at the time, was a renowned academic in the psychology of healing. M has a brilliant mind with a common-sense touch. During the conference, M and her husband Peter had dinner with Babe and me. We quickly became friends. M's husband Peter died when a drunk driver ran an intersection plowing broadside into Peter. It happened on M's birthday. M ended our embrace, she took a step back and looked at me, she said, "Let's go for a walk."

A single, small puffy cloud is the only mar on an otherwise perfectly blue sky. Any other day I would be grateful for the brilliant sun and blue sky. Today I don't feel any sense of gratitude. M and I walked a hundred yards in total silence. We walked by a home with two fenced in dogs. They normally bark at me when I walk by, today they look and remain quiet. It is if they know what I am feeling.

M said, "I understand. I know how you feel, Ray. You and Barb shared a deep, deep love I've rarely seen in other couples. It was special."

I nod, and tears return and roll down my cheeks as water overflows a river's banks during the spring runoff. I reached into my pants pocket for Kleenex. It is already damp from wiping



tears away. "Babe was so good, M. I prayed and prayed and prayed. I did everything I could," I said through tears and a runny nose.

M said nothing. She silently walked beside me, giving no answers. I wondered if she was listening or just being a good friend, getting me out of the home Babe and I shared. We walked a quarter mile before she spoke, "Don't look for answers, Ray. I tried and tried and tried. The best I can tell you from my experience, there are none. Suffering is a mystery no human being can avoid. There is no remedy because it is unavoidable. I have no words to make you feel even a bit better. Suffering is yours in the same way Peter's death became my suffering. Unavoidable suffering offers no explanations, no answers, all we can do is bravely face it. You and Barb couldn't help me. You were my friends. You supported me. You listened to me. You heard my story a hundred times as if you were hearing it for the first time."

"I can't stop the tears, M. If I knew Babe was okay. If ..."

M grabbed hold of my arm and turned me toward her, "She is okay Ray. She is okay. I promise you angels will come to you and support you. They will be in the form of people, some you'll know, and others you've never met. Trust me. It happened to me. Without them, I don't think I could have survived Peter's death." M searched my face, searching to see if I believed her. I shrugged and looked away.

I whispered, "I have to go back and prepare for Babe's funeral."

"The girls love you and Barb. Let them take care of it. Go along for the ride and make the decisions. Let them make the calls and do the organizing. When they leave, we'll have coffee. If you need anything, want to talk, want to cry, or want to scream, text me. I'll be over in ten minutes. It doesn't matter the time. Promise?"

"Promise, M. Thank you."

We turned and headed back to the house. When we reached my home, M stayed in the driveway and hugged me. “Remember to call for any reason, any reason,” she said. M got into her car. I waved to her as she turned the corner.