Anger and Me

Grief is a roller coaster of feelings but my grief journey, like everyone else has, was no amusement park I want to visit again. I was stuck on this ride far longer than I want to admit because for much of the time in my early grief not only were my hands up in the air but my brain was also disengaged when it came to feeling recognition.

Guilt and anger were the most “comfortable” feelings I utilized during my grief. I used guilt as a “coffee break” from the excruciating sadness I felt but I had more difficulty addressing my anger. I denied my anger. I admitted that I carried anger with me “once in a while” but I never fully identified the clutch I had on it. I thought I recognized when anger surfaced but it came in so many disguises that my compromised brain had difficulty identifying it.

While attending a TCF meeting recently, I remembered stating at a past meeting that I felt anger for a longer period than I wanted to admit. My statement garnered a couple head nods but fewer comments. However, this meeting was the personification of anger. It spewed like lava. Irritations, annoyances, bitterness and rage blanketed the table we encircled. I would not have recognized this in my early grief. Since that time, I realized that anger is such a noxious feeling to admit to, that usually people have difficulty taking ownership of this emotion. (I certainly avoided the title in my early grief after my son Zac’s death)

I was so grateful for the roller coaster of feelings because the unpredictability of this ride helped me survive the daily movement through grief. I realized anger was my constant companion, holding my hand, nodding its head with a knowing look of “we’ll get through” reassurance. I needed anger. I needed a friend because many of my human friends could not support me. Death was too uncomfortable to allow them to think about it. (It may be a “catchy” disease or they might have to break the taboo of admitting their fear of it) Nevertheless, I needed the support and although not a functional way of experiencing life, my anger helped me through some of the most unbearable situations in that first year of my journey.

I read that I had to get back into life but how could I when I was starting a new life and this one was so unfamiliar from the one I had recently experienced? This was foreign territory and I hated it. I had to go on living but I did not want to. Regardless of whether I was actually suicidal or not (I was not seriously suicidal and did not have a plan but entertained the idea through wishful thinking) I did not want to live this way. Anger squeezed its knowing hand whenever an uncomfortable situation occurred; I looked to anger to help me through. It was my knowing friend, my supporter.

Daily, it helped me through the mundane tasks of ordinary living. I had to shop. I had to eat. I had to work. I had to sleep. However, why didn’t everyone else understand or see my pain. My entire body, heart, and soul ached. Were they incapable of seeing this? Others still laughed. Didn’t they understand that seeing that bald kid who looked like Zac pierced my heart and made me want to run from the store? Didn’t that store checker understand that my son died and regardless of whether the coupon expired that they should offer me this discount? Moreover, didn’t anyone count the number of items the shopper ahead of me had and realize that it was over the posted limit? Why didn’t my coworkers understand that my grief was not “over” after three months and that I could not move on yet? However, my friend anger did. Again, I receive the head nod of understanding and I was able to react with anger in my heart at the oblivious store checker, the unaware coworker and the innocent bystanders in every mall who did not recognize that the bald man who looked nothing like Zac still reminded me of him.

Anger gave me comfort. Anger allowed me to move through time. Although I did not always act on my anger by allowing others to see it, it constantly accompanied me on my journey. Yes, my comrade carried a double-edged sword but carried it right by my side for as long as I needed him. He was loyal. He listened and stood by me and agreed with me when my human friends would not. I could not have survived without my friend anger. He was there after the fog of my numbness lifted when I allowed myself to feel the pain of my grief and move on through the recognition of other feelings during my journey. While I could not do this alone, my companion anger was a “comfortable” feeling that helped me move through many steps and stages of my grief because my modus operandi was more a “solitary griever.”

My friend anger silently walked with me until I no longer need to use him, when I could say good-bye to him and to Zac. I needed a companion that first year. My computer and books gave me information and provided a distraction from my reality and my focus on job provided a path to move on while I allowed myself to recognize feelings. Nevertheless, anger held my hand and supported me through my spiral of feelings until I could ultimately make my life changing decision to choose life.

I recognize my occasional anger but it is no longer a welcomed friend in my present world. When I became aware of my choices during my grief and that I could have control in my life because of those choices, I chose differently. I chose to live. I decided that I wanted a positive life. Moreover, I know I have this option with every new day; I can either celebrate it or complain and try to control it. I choose to attract good things into my life.

And, I am grateful. I am grateful for my one-time companion. Although usually seen as a negative element in our society, I was able to use and then reframe my friend’s value. My friend ultimately showed me who I had become, where I was headed and ultimately helped me decide who I wanted to be after this life that I chose took that fork in the road. I know Zac is proud of that resolution and my learning in the process.

Robert Ingersoll said that anger is “a wind which blows out the lamp of the mind.” If it were not for that roller coaster ride and my decision to end it, I would not be who I am today. If I had not made the choice to live after Zac’s death, the lamp of my mind would still be extinguished.