

The Dance of Challenges

By Laurena MacDougall Lyons

With the last of the gold and maroon balloons deflating, and college on the horizon, lots of change is in the air, not the least of which are your preparations for leaving home – at once, both exciting and intimidating. Preparing myself for this change, I have been reminding myself of certain of your experiences that, when I reflect on your role within them. I am comforted by my reconnecting to your ability to dance so well with the challenges that have come your way, particularly in recent years. Challenges that could have pulled you in a different direction, but ones against which you stood strong and redirected the course of the “dance.” Included among them: you have had to stand up to the experience of betrayal by individuals with whom you believed you had strong relationships. You watched from the front seat of a car, as if in slow motion, a woman being thrust into the night sky by the impact of a driver who didn't see her in time, a woman who would not survive her injuries. You struggled to ingest the news of a childhood friend taking his own life before he would have the chance to embrace it...

---The hurtful social experiences you stood up to in recent years have taught you to choose your relationships with greater discretion. You know what it is to be a friend and have learned to use this knowledge as you look for these values in others. The surreal sting of betrayal by those with whom you believed yourself to be in a more connected relationship, though deeply wounding, did not hinder you socially. You found a way to continue to extend yourself in friendship by being a bit more selective in the ways you choose to do so. You didn't turn your anger or your pain into bitterness. Instead, with remarkable resolve, you redirected your energy into redefining your role in existing relationships and developing new ones, and, in the process, discovered friends who appreciated you for who you are and the gifts you bring. In addition, your willingness to consider what healthier boundaries look like, and your courage to use your voice in implementing them, has allowed for you to “grow” not only a more confident self but a healthier social experience.

---Your eyes locked on the impact of driver and pedestrian in the disbelieving and paralyzing moments of that fatal accident, you were able to emerge from the car and approach the scene, able to provide your account of what had happened. You didn't stay silent with this experience. You allowed yourself to share what you had witnessed as many times to as many people as you felt it to be necessary, creating an audience for your story rather than storing it inside, each time the retelling rendering more manageable its personal impact, each time easing the image when you would close your eyes. In time, you were able to let it go. But before the memory ceased to become so prominent, you were able and willing to find a lesson in the experience: *how quickly an accident can happen*. You have utilized that knowledge in the making of a responsible driver – you.

---His sudden death was as painful and confusing as the untimely death of a friend can be, but you chose to separate the person of him from his actions. With great difficulty in knowing whether it was a choice he made, or an accident, you didn't judge him. I noticed that. You have chosen to honor his memory by holding on to who you knew him to be rather than feeding the anger often connected to the questions that may never be answered. You allowed yourself to cry, and your tears were the reflection of the loss of someone you loved. You shared memories with family and friends. You visited his grave on your own. Your choice to write about him in your college essay provided you with an opportunity to give voice to your experience of knowing him, and in so doing altered the reader's experience from one of being pulled into the darkness of his story to one of being drawn to the bright light of the young man that he was. Your choice to share what you wrote with his parents gave them the gift of knowing their son mattered in your eyes, a gift that hypothetical pondering by the many with their questions could never provide.

While some part of me wishes I could erase away every unsettling experience that you have endured, another part of me finds rest in the knowledge I now have in your ability to think things through, knowing that when you do you are better able to move through the challenges in your life. Finding your way through the more challenging experiences, you have discovered that taking time to yourself provides you with the opportunity to hear your own thoughts before they are subjected to the well intended influences of others. Doing this has enabled you to make choices that feel right to you, choices rooted in well-thought-out responsiveness with productive outcomes rather than

leaving you struggling with the chaotic aftermath of impulse. You have learned the importance of discerning and owning your truth, speaking from your voice, an empowering skill to take into your future. I came to trust that when and if you wanted to talk, we would talk, but I also learned that when you were ready, you would draw from a select audience those who you believed could provide a helpful perspective, parental and/or nonparental, according to your requirements for support. Through an intentional revision of boundaries, you have learned to set limits on what you will and will not tolerate and in the process are discovering who your *friends* really are.

Through your experiences, you have held on to humor and a compassionate heart. Both have served you well. Your collective experiences have played their part in bringing you to the threshold of career goals that you hope will enable you to be in the lives of others in meaningful ways. In the end, your collective strategies have had effect of allowing you to emerge from each setback with a plan – either for action or for letting go. While “worry” doesn't go away just because you are 18, there is *peace* in my knowledge that you know how to listen to your inner wisdom and that you are not afraid to do so.

I love you...

Love, Mom

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