

"I think it is hard to love...."

I think it is hard to love. Hard to really feel love. To let yourself love and show it, vigorously, openly. Harder still to carry it, hold your heart out for the world to see instead of hiding it away in moments like this one. When you give in to love fully, you must also feel the possibility of loss, and the risk of loss feels so deep a pit, so dark and deep a hole, it is sometimes easier to stay on the edge and just look down with a flashlight. Stay on the edge where it is safe and you may teeter but can maintain firm footing, especially surrounded by others who love you.

Some might even say it is one of the hardest things we do while we live. I sometimes found it hard to love, easier to put on a sweater and keep out the cold that loomed just beyond, the heart attack or car accident that loomed, the war halfway across the world, and then the disease, the one that was slowly taking me, slowly taking me away from you. But now it doesn't feel so slow. And loving you was hard some days, because I knew our love would have to go somewhere else someday, someday when I moved on. I imagine you out there, gathered together, ripe with pain, questioning why I am gone now, too soon.

And as I processed the end of my life, as much as one can process such a thing, what I thought most about was how my death would affect you: the people I love. Thinking about you after I died was the thing I found so difficult to imagine in the months and years I carried my disease. It was the thing that left me breathless. The thing that hurt the most. The burden, heaviest to carry.

I grasped for some illumination to relieve my grief and begged for respite from despair. We long for yesterday, or years ago, or the time when I sipped from cocktails of warmth and light and hope and joy on a porch overlooking the water, just listening to the waves, not worrying about the next scan or symptom or medicine. A time when this reality was not.

Questions nip at us, all over our bodies. How did it happen? How could it be? Why? The depth of our pain in these moments may be infinite, impossible. These days. These days are dark.

But loved ones, hear me now. Open your hearts as best you can. The light, your light, shall not be overshadowed by this darkness.

I am not lost to you. Our love is not lost. It is right here. It is still now. It is in the hand you are holding, the tear you are wiping, the memory you are reliving, the air you gasp. The hope that now buried, now almost gone, now is determined not to be lost, that will rise again.

It is in fact, I suspect, in that very darkness you feel in your bodies in this moment that I am with you right now. It is in the deepest, most protected caverns of your hearts that are now screaming to be brightened. That is where I reside. That is where I will be always, within each of you.

For it is not pain you feel right now. It is instead, our love. This is what it feels like to love. Love that is spilling out, exponentially, unknowingly, indefinitely. It is so big. That is what hurts.

Don't you see? Don't you feel that the feeling in your gut that won't let up is actually your heart spilling over with love? Don't you gather that your pain is your love, which someday will be ready to be shared again? Don't you see that the night's sky is more open than ever and yearning to be filled with love and more stars?

Your anguish, your pain, that is the love we shared and tended dearly in our time together. It is because we love that we hurt. It is the thing that proves we were in this together. It is the thing that makes clear that we were once here, together, in love and in life.

My love for all of you has been transfigured from flesh and bone into a river, cutting through the dark places of the damp ground in the forest, bursting forth into twinkling starlight looking down at you from the night's sky, absurdly splashing waves chasing you along the shore, blowing through a field of flowers. All without ceasing.

Our love has become something new. Our love has become something even greater, beyond the bounds of beings. Our love has taught you to love harder next time.

Today, the days behind us, the coming days, they have been and may be marked by pain, despair, deep hurt, anger, darkness, and more than we may ever understand. But remember that all of these feelings stem from our love from one another.

And so, I charge you to carry on. Don't stop loving. In fact, love more. Love harder. Love with intention. Love without conditions. Love one another.

Love the people you do not yet know. Love the person who has wronged you. Love the family who has disappeared from you. Love the stranger on the street. Love the person that reminds you of me. Love the person you think is lazy. Love the addict. Love the prisoner. Love the offender. Love the reckless driver. Love the animals and the earth itself. Love the person you judge the most. Love yourself.

Whatever you do, start with love. As often and as genuinely as you can. In your daily routine, in your moments of celebration, in your sleeping and waking, in your pressing forward, start with love. Even when it is hard. For it will be hard to keep loving. I know I charge you with a hard task. But I lay this challenge at your feet because I know how well you can do it. And remember this: when you love others, you breathe my spirit, my hope, my love for you, back into this broken, unknown, confusing, unfair world.

And on days when you simply cannot muster love in the darkness, on days when you are tired, when it is all too much, when I have asked too much, plant a tree. Or flowers. Or go for a walk in the woods. Or enjoy the buzzing bees. Or take the moment to really taste your food and see what is happening in the world around you.

I do not ask you to heal tomorrow, or next year. But I do ask you to keep loving. For I have loved you all. I loved your support on my journey. I loved your friendship. I loved our relationship. I loved our stories together, now your greatest memories to hold dear.

Dig deep inside yourselves as you walk forward from this place. Find the place in your hearts where my love lives, and take it out into the world like never before.

Barbara Christine Macholz Grimaldi  
Copyright 2019