

Amidst the Weeds

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@2017 & @2020 by Jeanne Felfe

I told myself I was a writer. It was a lie—I was a poser. I would write in fits and starts, enthusiastically for a spell, only to stop cold, not laying pen to paper for months, and often years. This pattern continued for decades, as evidenced by my knee-high pile of file folders containing story-starts and ideas. I had always assumed it was due to my soul-crushing job and special needs child.

My mother truly was a writer. She struggled to write in the age before the internet or digital, spending hours on her craft and achieving a degree in communications at the age of 40. And although I was proud of her, I also watched from the sidelines as rejection after rejection assaulted our mailbox. The child me stood witness to the devastating effect it had on her soul. I think it filtered into mine in some way, the results of which I wouldn't know for many years.

In 2011, Mom learned she had a rare form of cancer, a death sentence which came as a relief to her—she'd been trying to escape the burdens of her physical body since I was a child via unsuccessful suicide attempts. When I was a newlywed of 19, I found her in bed, sobbing on the phone with her therapist. She'd taken a bottle of pills—it wasn't the first time, nor would it be the last. I drove her to the hospital myself, my emotions slamming against fear, then raging in anger—afraid that this time she would succeed, and furious that she'd done it again.

Not to my surprise, but blended with feelings of guilt, her cancer diagnosis also came to me as a relief. At 55, I was emotionally exhausted from waiting for a phone call telling me she'd finally succeeded in killing herself. I know that sounds heartless ... like I didn't love her. But I did. It's because I loved her that I could wish her Godspeed on her journey, knowing she'd suffered enough. Living under a looming suicide threat is like being in prison, trapped by a force unseen. At least with cancer, she now had an out, even if not a graceful one—it was anal-rectal melanoma.

I wasn't with her that sunny day in June when the cancer released her to wherever it is people go after death. But I didn't need to be. Her spirit showed up in the peach-colored hibiscus—her favorite—I happened to be planting at the very instant I got the call. I took it as her way of telling me all was well and she was finally free. What I didn't know yet ... so was I.

Months later, I began writing like a churning hurricane. I'd retired in December and thought I would spend my days writing and finally achieve my dreams. Then I stopped, again, only this time the itch wouldn't go away. I tried to ignore it, but the passion to write burned in my every waking moment, even in my dreams. I had all the time I could possibly need, why wasn't it enough? I sat down and had a long, hard talk with myself, asking why and waiting for an answer.

It came in June, almost one year to the day after Mom's death. I was elbow deep in garden muck, enjoying my favorite pastime. The characters from a short story I'd written in 2003 began

yakking in my brain. I actually got angry at them for teasing me, because I knew they would just stop once I sat down with my computer or a pen, and leave me hanging. But I remembered asking why and heard the answer as loudly as if Mom were standing beside me.

“Write. You no longer need to worry about me. I’m fine now. Write.”

I knew what she was trying to tell me. The years of being the mother-by-default because of a multiple personality and suicidal adult were over. The threat that I might somehow cause her death by succeeding at writing where she’d failed—at least in her eyes—was eradicated amidst the weeds.

Two weeks later a new writer friend asked me if I was going to participate in Camp Nano, which started the following day on July 1. After researching to understand what it was, I decided I was in. I spent my afternoons writing long-hand by the pool and typing up my scribbling in the evenings. Although two weeks of the month were already committed to family, I managed to eke out 21,000 words, the most I’d ever written.

Over the next three years, I studied how to craft a novel while writing *The Art of Healing* (which has now been released as *Bridge to Us*). The name—while it certainly fit the theme of this love story between two broken people who must heal in order to love again—held a deeper meaning for me personally. It reflected my healing from being forced to be an adult while still a child, coming to grips with the hidden reason I wasn’t writing. Fear.

Since then I’ve published *The Art of Healing* (June 2016; re-released as *Bridge to Us* in August 2019) and won awards for many short stories, and have over 30 published shorts, poems and essays. I began volunteering for my local writer’s guild, and became an active participant in multiple critique groups. I’ve almost completed my second novel—*The Things We Do Not Speak Of*—and have rough ideas for the second novel in what became A Love Lost and Found series when I re-released, and am pages deep into two other novels inspired by my 2017 trip to Tanzania and Rwanda.

While I miss her in ways I may never fully comprehend, my mother’s death awakened, renewed, and released my inner writer. The itch I’ve felt my entire life can now be scratched. I’m on fire and nothing can stop me.

Thank you for reading

My Women’s Fiction, second chance love story novel, *Bridge to Us, A Love Lost and Found Novel*, is available at <http://BridgeToUsBook.com>

My newly released short story, *Love at Sea, A Love Lost and Found Romance*, is available exclusively from Amazon and free on Kindle Unlimited at: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/Bo83SSVDVV>