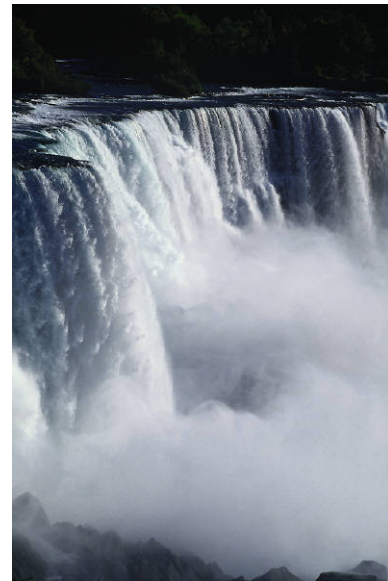


## WATCHING NIAGARA FALLS

I notice my thoughts aren't smooth these days. They're short and fragmented like bits flying around in space, randomly ricocheting off each other. This is what happens when you've had huge loss all of a sudden. There's a big empty space somewhere in your interior, a big empty dark space. Interestingly, when I close my eyes and imagine it, what I see is that there are little holes of light cut into the dark, much like a starry night. So it's not all bleakness.

It makes sense to me that all my thoughts about daily routine, all my observations of the world around me, all my memories, all my emotions – all of this - just seems to blend together and cascade endlessly into this new black hole. It makes me think of Niagara Falls. All those water drops flying around everywhere, bouncing off each other. Those are my thoughts.



I've had moments when I've beat myself up about this inability to keep my mind on track, but what's the point? After the mental pummeling I just keep ricocheting anyway. Now I've decided I'll go with the flow and write about it instead. That helps me see it from a step back, and from there it is okay. I can be apart from it and watch Niagara Falls and like the image. Then it's not so bad. All those tiny drops making that collective roar sooner or later, in one way or another, dissolve into relative calm in the pool below. Thoughts that are allowed to pass through do settle, just like freefalling water eventually stills.

I have to allow this freedom of movement because it is a necessity right now. Trying to discipline it and force it into the long straight line I want it to be is wrong. This is a process and part of the process is to allow thoughts to emerge, reveal themselves and pass through. Part of the process is to sleep and dream of having surgery to repair a nasty nick on my precious heart. Part of the process is watching Oprah interview Johnny Depp just because my hand turned on the TV at 10 o'clock in the morning when it never ordinarily does that. Part of it is crying with my mother as I watch her open the sympathy cards and listen to her read them out loud to me. Part of the process is choking each time I answer "yes" to verify my father's name, age, birthplace and residence as the funeral home employee checks the Death Certificate before releasing it to me.

I am 47 and I am lucky. No one close to me has ever died. Now my father has and I don't like it. I do, however, like Niagara Falls. I like to close my eyes and see it and remind myself that those are my thoughts and that it is okay. It is even beautiful. If I let my thoughts slip over the dams my mind tries to build, what I

find is that I like them. It's not because they're nice and pretty. Some of them are. Lots of them aren't. I like them because they show me my reflection. If I watch them, they show me where I am right now, and where I am is sad, a little bit lost, a little bit lonely, a little bit awed and a little bit angry that this is what it takes to begin to understand what the word "final" really means. I end up feeling better at least knowing where I am, but it doesn't help me not want my father back. How can I ever not want him back? That would just be absurd.

There are facts of life and one of them is that death means permanent physical absence from life on this planet. What that means is no more hugs. No more his smile making me smile. No more talking. The fact is he is absent now and I am here without him. I will have to learn how to balance that truth with the yearning I feel so that I can live with both. Watching Niagara Falls helps me do that.

Right now the world is a strange place. It is not the place it was when my father and I lived here together. I've been scattered. I haven't been able to write, except I just wrote this. It reassures me to know that's what will happen if I just quit building dams and allow myself to sit and look at the waterfall. Everything will be okay, and I will heal.

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