

Firefly Grief

By Andrea Tatley

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don't go back to sleep.

~ Rumi

Occasionally, when my body wakes at 3:00 a.m., with no intention of re-connecting with the dream world, this 13th-century Persian poet, theologian and mystic speaks into my soul, “The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don’t go back to sleep.” At 3:38 a.m., I am following Rumi’s advice. I put my feet on the floor, step over a sleeping sheltie, make my way down the hall, through the sliding glass door and onto the peaceful deck. Gazing up at the sky, gratitude wells up for the clear view and the cool mid-summer breeze. It is hard to understand how the earth can balance temperatures in the 90s during the day and dive to the 50s at night. I wonder, and occasionally worry about Mother Earth’s mental health....

As I survey the southern sky, I am greeted by Jupiter and Saturn and then briefly, out of my right eye, I notice a light and think, “How strange, at this time of the morning... a light.” Then it turns off. The tiny light goes on, back off and on again. I realize it is coming from our gazebo, fondly called the “cat house,” as each morning you can find a small cat-shaped indentation on each cushion. A lightning bug has been spending time together in the pine cluster, with the cats. Community—even the animals approve.

I first chased fire flies in the church yard when I was small. We would bring a canning jar and lid, freshly emptied, and washed clean of the remnants of last summer’s tomatoes. It would sit next to me on the pew during the evening church service and as soon as the last “amen” was spoken, we would grab

our jars off the wooden pew, sprint past our parents to the outside grassy area, where we’d prepare our jars with small fistfuls of grass and sticks. The moments were filled with joyous laughter as we ran through the church yard in hopes of catching a prize to light up our bedrooms that evening.

I am still drawn to the magic of fireflies. Up and down, all around the blinking lights sail, as if they are caught in a glorious nighttime dance of light and dark. Some nights, when I am watching our little residents, I lose track of the light. The little bug darts behind an apple tree or disappears down the creek. I am tempted to wonder if the light will return. On those dark nights, as it reappears in my vision, the brightness is breathtaking. It is not really gone; I am just not in the place to see it fully. So, I shift my position, so that my view is a bit better.

The dance of the fireflies reminds me how both grief and healing seem to dart here and there in our lives. We get excited when we see the light of healing, then, with our hopes high, we experience the painful void left by grief. At times, this mystical partnering is visible and predictable, other times it disappears, reappearing again, often in an unexpected part of our inner landscape. Like the lightning bugs, grief, and thus healing, represent a threshold for us—a transitional time of “in between,” of “not yet.” Memories appear, some bring a dark discomfort, others, remind us of the light of healing. We experience loss; individually and collectively. We grieve, find solace,



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experience the relief of healing, and then find ourselves right back at grief’s door, and it starts all over again. Some days, it feels like we are stuck on repeat. We wonder if the light of healing will return. We cannot always follow grief and healing’s direction, it feels random—just like the firefly’s flight path. Sometimes the light has moved out of our vision, and we need to shift our position to see it.

One thing I have noticed watching lightning bugs is that while you are never sure where the light will appear next, you know that it is there, and that it will show up. We wait and watch for the appearance of the light, with assurance that it will shine again. The process of healing and grieving is like the fireflies of summer. We follow along as best we can, trusting that the flight pattern is taking place, even when it is not always in our view. It seems as if Rumi was right, the breeze has secrets... and so do the fireflies.

Editor’s Note: MCDES Board Member, Andrea Tatley, holds an MDiv in spiritual and personal formation. She has been in the field of grief and loss for 11 years through her work as a spiritual health provider and palliative care specialist, and also as a spiritual counselor for 20 years. Much of her coaching work focuses on nature-based therapy as it integrates with spirituality. She appreciates time in the woods or by a lake with camera in hand, leading retreats and taking groups on heart-opening trips to sacred locations.