

Unraveling

Category: Coming Undone

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | May 1, 2023

I entered the world as a rag doll—so poorly sewn together that one pull on a single thread could cause me to unravel. And throughout my more than seven decades of life, many threads have been pulled. Whether I'm receiving exceptionally good news or dealing with inconveniences that I magnify into tragedies, I all too easily become undone and succumb to a tsunami of tears.

At age six, when I lost Laura, my first and only best friend, to the popular girls, I refused to leave the comfort of my room and books. I already understood the pain of not being whole.

Decades later, I sat in a hospital hallway. My son, whose leg had just been broken when a basketball teammate fell on it, was in an examination room on my left, and my daughter, whose friend had accidentally slammed the van door on her hand, was in a room on my right. Meanwhile, the hospital social worker, in a tone that conveyed both sympathy and accusation, was grilling me about how I was handling being a single mother of two teenagers—implying there might be more to these injuries than I was sharing. My sobs prevented me from answering. The more emotional strings she pulled, the more I unraveled; I feared I might become a pile of errant threads floating in a sea of tears.

Coming undone is second nature to me; it is coming together that is hard. Grandma, a first-rate stoic, used to remind me that things could always get worse. Ma repeated her favorite “this too shall pass” dictum. And Dad made me a cup of hot Ovaltine with mini-marshmallows. But with these loved ones now no longer here, I turn to my adult children. My rational son tells me that nothing is worth my extreme reactions: “Get it together, Ma, and move on,” he sagely (albeit naively) suggests. My empathetic and sympathetic daughter allows me to emotionally dissolve before helping me to problem-solve. With her support, I find a way out of my maze of despair. And of course saying yes to the pills prescribed by my primary care physician has helped me to create order out of chaos—to reattach the many loosened and tangled threads.

The process of unraveling and mending exhausts me, but to live requires that I keep patching myself back together—one day at a time.

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