

Now that you're gone:

Well, here it is, a snowy Monday morning. I need to split some kindling. I need to de-ice the drive and decks. I need to cut a decent path to the woodshed. I need to do a million things which is to say I need to get back to life, good old daily life, now that we've said goodbye to my brother. He died last week. He died in beautiful Charleston, SC. He died trying to accept a newly transplanted liver. He really tried hard. And then he died.

Sometimes, try as you might, you just can't get some things done. I'm sure you've all had the experience, an attempt or repeated attempts at accomplishing a task that always seems to stay just out of your reach. You think you've got it under control and the next time you look it's back and worse than ever. Leaks are like that, plumbing leaks, roof leaks, basement leaks. You do your best, you hire people who do their best but sometimes that darn leak just drips its way back regardless.

The human body can be just like that especially when it's under stress from trauma or fatigue or age or all of them. The process of going through a transplant is very much like the nagging leak except that the downside, the price of failure, is that you die. In my brother's case it was beginning to look like everything was going to work out. He came home, he was eating, he was joking on the phone. I had my brother back. And then I didn't. The day after I talked to him his heart decided that it had had enough; enough of the ups and downs, enough of the good news-bad news cycle, enough of the stress and medications and inspections. A guy can take only so much you know and when that point came, his body quit. Just like that.

I was glad we had the blizzard the day after Joe died. I was glad that the world had stopped for a while. I'm sorry if the storm inconvenienced you or troubled you, dear reader, but for me it was a blessed respite. I walked out into the deepening snow, out to where a stand of spruce juts up from the prairie and talked to the sky for a while. I said what I had to say and listened for what I needed to hear and took great comfort in doing so. When the tears are frozen to your cheeks and sobbed in breath is stinging your lungs you can get some excellent thinking done. In my case it was the exact setting I needed to accept the fact, to humbly resign myself to the truth that Joe was gone. There's no hiding from a tough truth when it's just you and the snow.

So here it is, a week later and the gatherings and travelling and storytelling and long embraces and the faces I love have all gone home. We're all back where we need to be, some of us fortunate enough to be back at the exact place, with the exact person we love the most, ready to get back to the life we've invented for ourselves. It's all a circle isn't it? Our lives are full of circles that turn back on themselves to reveal the order of things. A week ago I was sitting in this chair listening to my sister as she choked out the words that our brother was gone. Here I am again, still, telling you the story as best I can from that same chair. It snowed then and it's snowing now. I was thinking how much I loved my brother, how much he had done for me over the years and here I am thinking how much I miss him while bathing in the memories.

I had plenty to do last Monday when I got the call. I have plenty to do this Monday in spite of that call. The world goes on doesn't it? The kindling needs to be split and the snow needs to be cleared. The songs have been sung, the dead have been buried and we, the living, had better get on with...the living.