

Kayaking With God: A Year Has Passed



She, the daughter kayaker, skimming through the voyage, buoyed on possibilities and faith,

I, the mother rowing behind in a plodding wooden boat

Tending my oars; certain that one or both were broken

God at the helm

Pulling me along

While I desperately cling to the anchor,

Gulping proven, familiar waters.

Using vessels of our choosing, we voyage
Sometimes clutching loved ones
Disappearing over the horizon,
Sometimes sand grains together, sometimes tidal waves swept apart,
While others tread water from grieving shores.

August 29, 2016: Capsized

My eyes searched the faces of the deputy sheriff and four shadow people at my door.

Their eyes searched back.

I spoke first. "What's wrong?"

Did they know about the meals we fed to the stray cats cruising our neighborhood?

Our mobile home park policies forbade feeding the cats, but had the office powers decided to call the county sheriff's office?

Please God, let that be the reason.

The deputy sheriff's body filled the doorway. "May we come in?" he asked.

An ant in the doorway, my hands shook as I opened the door for the giant anteaters. I asked about the cats. No, they hadn't come about the cats.

They told me that Jill's earthly voyage had ended when her kayak capsized and she had drowned in the Nolichucky River in Tennessee.

Inside, I collapsed into their kindness. Outside, I ramrodly talked about Jill and marveled that one of the support team resembled her. Merciful shock held me together until I could sit alone in my rocking chair. I rocked all night, loving her, rocking over the pieces of my shattered heart and life.

Tennessee Kindness

Their names are ordinary: Brenda, Rick, Sue, Tom, Don. They are the Tennessee angels. Their kind words and deeds firefly flashed hope in the darkness of grief and loss. They helped me with the details of a death and the practicalities of everyday living, including a place to sleep and hold a memorial service for Jill. Brenda gave me comfort with her words when she said that she knew the angels were there to meet Jill on the Nolichucky and guide her home to heaven. Rick gave us a beautiful cabin to sleep in, Don, a welcome, and a good meal. Tom and Robbie and many of her other friends created a memorial service for her and Billie sent her to heaven with balloons. They will always shine in my memory.

Her campsite on the Nolichucky, hit me like a lightning strike. It stood empty but displaying her creative tree shower curtain, campfire kitchen so different from her sleek suburban comfort kitchen Her camper, a humble tag-along, but her haven. I couldn't deny it. All I could do was cry inside because I knew she wouldn't be back to enjoy it. She'd have to visit from heaven after this day. My heart felt as empty and alone as her campsite looked, yet I could feel her love for the home that she, and not everyone else, had envisioned and built for herself.

Wisconsin Homecoming

Jill's earthly life began in Burlington, Wisconsin on January 25, 1973 and one of the celebrations of her eternal life took place at a singalong at her friend Pat's home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on September 24, 2016. Many of her friends were there in body, others in spirit. Their songs are part of her heavenly music.

We traveled back to Michigan through the Upper Peninsula and scattered her ashes in Lake Michigan because she had requested to have her final earthly resting place in water. I look at the sunshine dancing on the lake and watch her dancing in it.

Reality Settles Like a Cold, Wool Blanket

It hurts so to try to tie up the loose ends of a life. Calling people with the news, reading cards from sympathizing friends, trying to be brave but drowning inside in disbelief and sorrow. Staring at her boxes of personal papers and diaries and coasting days and weeks to gain the courage to go through them.

Knowing that she is with God but wishing she were still with us. Being desperate enough, arrogant enough, despairing enough to demand of God, "Why did you take

her?” Acknowledging in the depths of my soul that God didn’t take her, the laws of physics and biology took her with some human imperfections thrown in the mix. In another sense, Jill took herself to God. From the time she was little, she reached out of God and He always reached back. She never stopped reaching.

August 29th marks a year since Jill eased her kayak into the Nolichucky River to begin her final earthly journey. Her friend Sue created a memorial page for her on Facebook and her friends have posted memories and pictures of her. This is her one year in heaven memorial.

Jill’s Inlets, Coves, Harbors

Single Voyager, Multiple Harbors

She sojourned in many harbors

Sharing her kind and gentle spirit

Flashing her self mirror to reflect her faith,

Knowing that earth voyages are short,

But setting out in misty early morning,

Paddling into the eternal sunlight,

Splashing the face of God.

From “Gone Sane,” Jill’s memories of her 2009 trip to Alaska in her red pickup truck.



~ Growing ~

Come, brisk sweep cobwebs from this mind's dusty edges

and gently polish dullness from worn soul

Watch blooming petals unfurl in fragile splendor

Enjoy newfound freedom in an awesome world

As day dawns brimful with new thoughts and things

pack away the old dead hopes and dreams

Plan now for great feats and feasts to come.



Technical Vertigo ~

Modern society

Mythical privacy

Phone tapping

GPS tracking

Computer hacking

Airwave snatching

can't Mapquest

heart of matter

hearts of darkness

We're still

lost in space.



~Flight~

*Eloquent speeches made
about leaps of faith
certainties and meant to be's
while we're sadly collecting memories
of angry words and mistaken deeds
Conversations filled with jousting
wrangling passionately and endlessly
Where's the trust and where's the peace?
We're too damned clever to be happy
Honey keep on looking*

*for that angel that you seek
I am just a woman
can't fly yet, but I'm learning
Love told and shown in understandable ways
we share that simple need
Both struggling, hurting
seeking, trying to be
what we are, what we're not
never giving each other comfort
Love's not a game of sacrifice
Love like this makes the angels cry
I spread my wings and flew today
Cause I like who we are when we're free
One day we'll know the strength of our wings
And reach our best possibilities
find the ones who see us clearly
and truly love reality
We'll reach through the past
beyond the pain
and make loving a beautiful thing
So honey don't stop looking
for that angel that you seek
You'll find her one day
You'll find him inside
And we will find joy
as we fly*

Being a person who drives a little red Chevy truck with a kayak in back, I had to feel right at home in a place where the first thing I saw when I paused to call Mama was a really buff guy driving a Ford 4-wheel drive pickup with a blue river kayak in the bed. Perhaps I am not as weird as I thought I was!

Mom reassured me that all was well and teasingly told me to go get the hunk with the pickup and river kayak. I just smiled. Wouldn't have known where to begin at that point. I was married for 13 years and the thought of starting any sort of romance so soon after the divorce started a landslide of conflicting emotions. I decided to wait until I was ready.

I also didn't think I was in his athletic league. The hunk was using a whitewater kayak. I'd resolved to stick to still water-- lakes, marshes, rivers with currents that allow two-way paddles, ponds and coves-- until I was with a group and had received rescue training. But seeing him got me thinking about how much fun it could be to join a kayaking group.

~ River Sippin' Straw ~

Thousands thirsty in ol' Albuquerque

Rio runnin' low,

river sippin' straw

makes great Snake sparse

and grows green onions tall

over in Idaho

where birds once free

disappear

lacking wetland sites to breed

Migration routes

piped underground fore(stall)

showers low pressure

within urban sprawl

from LA up to West Valley City

*Wayward wind(mill)
dancing with sun panels
hydro boost
from additive green power
not world drained dry
or cooked by fossil fuels
renewable, clean, wise, sustainable
elk may drink, fowl roost,
sequoia tower
Children bequeathed sails,
not spaceships of fools.*



An older gentleman at another table spotted my kayak. He spoke to me of trips he'd taken-- his sailboat was parked in the lot outside with a for sale sign on it. I looked at the little ketch wistfully. So many islands I would love to go and the

boat was small and neat. Just what I would want if I could afford to make a solo voyage.

I listened to his tales with interest, grateful for the congenial company, then rolled down the road to take a peek at a big windy lake buzzing with jet skis at full throttle. My little boat couldn't compete, so I hit the road once more. By evening, I was a long way south.

The Pits

~ To Date ~

Note to perspective Mr. Right:

Honest plain speaking may get you laid

If you can also be kind

But if we're laying all my faults on the line

Make an appointment-- it may take some time!

Contrary World Views ~

In the world of Glass Half Empty

opportunity is hardship

with a countenance like stellar dust

success a wired trap

gained at others' expense

challenge a pitted path

spotlighting deplorable inadequacy

infernal optimism a bucket of sweetness

poured over sour grapes

there's no accounting for or changing minds or tastes

ponderous practicality plods hand-in-hand

with sad circumstance

know-it-all negativity stands best friends to "I can't"

discouraged is the most frequent adjective and the only verb

there's no hope for

our riled, vexed, irked, peeved, must-have-it-all insatiable souls

all trails should be approached with cursing and grave caution

for we know not where they'll lead

Life's a fearful frigid wasteland

filled with grim possibilities

~

In the world of Glass Half Full

frozen words may catch on fire

and comfort all the world

the sound of the colors of your breath

euphoric, elated, ecstatic

rises through warming air

to please noses with

aromatic ideas

irrepressibly, irreversibly, unjustifiably

Love copes and hope floats

Dreams are gladly grasped for

Folks grow great at

spotting opportunity's open door

and silver linings in dark clouds

appreciating, celebrating

living with less while living more

~

The choice is yours.

~ *Relatives* ~

I do not regret

never seeking to find

my whys

in bourne child eyes

Unfettered love

free flies

bountiful

not rationable

Earth's only

unlimited resource

We all belong

to each other.

~ *Evolving* ~

Hereditary pieces of Eve,

Every women of knowledge

Sees many things

Multiple sides

Standing

In work shoes or stiletto boots

Sun and wind and rain

*She remains
Mother of the Human family
who Adam did not leave
Alone after Eden
even in pain and uncertainty
Because there was need
for each to succeed
and for caring
Adam and Eve
existed mutually
courageously
refusing to live life
Hiding
Building new dreams
When hoped-for Eden
Could not be achieved
They were not the Only
Beings
Every culture has stories
Of love, creation and heaven
And each must define
Sustain their own belief
Without disdain. Without shame.
Without breaking
their (olive) branch
or the trunk
of the family tree*

Peace.

I began each morning by thanking God for all the blessings. Ended my days that way, too, usually. I'd sought God in these parks and found peace. This was my pilgrimage. Had no need to go to Africa, India or Israel. And if God was displeased, I was surprised. I felt like I was learning to fly. Becoming. Moving in the right direction at the pace I was supposed to be.

I'd broken my word by divorcing. Although I knew God did not approve, I felt forgiven and accepted, liberated, and encouraged to keep growing and going. Both my ex and I still have so much more living to do...



August 6, 2009 Yellowstone, Wyoming

Yosemite's apparent seismic activity and coastal tsunami warning signs, as well as earthquake museums, remind me of how very dependent we are upon a planet we do not always treat well.

~ Stewards ~

At Earth's fiery heart

A core of life

Phoenix rising

Human occupation of her crust

So very recent

In planetary time a blinking eye

Sun worshipers beneath fragile skies

Dwell in thin layer between magma and void

We are guests in this house

Those too rude she'll cast out

Trust we so greatly in space hospitality?

It is good to breathe

Exploring inner and outer space

In the comforts of home

Neither rented nor purchased

This place is ours on loan.

August 12, 2009 Entering BC

The next stage of my journey makes me re-examine my views toward security, fear and authority.

~ Differences We Make ~

Vast voracious annoyance--

food disappearance

*from unlocked staff room fridge
scattered over weeks
always different lunch bags
pilfered
but staffers compared notes
sum totaled
sandwiches devoured
a missing orange
a face glimpsed
once too often
in the student lounge
The cops took her out in handcuffs--
that hungry homeless girl
who'd foraged at the liberal college
that taught its students to fight world hunger.*

Kayaked a fresh water lake yesterday and there were at least 10 different kinds of water weed-- big, glorious, robust. Snails an inch long. Minnows and water birds everywhere. Pulled the kayak out and had to laugh even though I was a bit grossed out-- there was a leech on the bottom that was comically confused. It latched on to the hull, stood its little body up and waved its head around looking for the water it had been so rudely separated from. I'd already portaged several hundred feet by then and wasn't feeling kind enough to put him back in the lake, so I picked him off with a leaf and threw him in the woods. If leeches had faces, that one would have looked dismayed... pull back out to foggy sea with a huge smile on my face-- now how cool was he?

My overnight destination is a public dock with an almost full pit toilet and a motley assortment of trailers nearby. A gravel road runs the length of the little bay I'm camping in. It's heavily fished, with nets and lobster pots bobbing about at regular intervals. I'm skeptical about the quality and variety of critter I'll find, and also nervous. I have the clothes on my back and the wetsuit and sleeping bag.

When I went to get the matches and cooking necessities from the larder in the back of my pickup, I discovered that the two day downpour in the Valdez area combined with lack of holes to drain the larder have led to soaked matches. I have no fire starting equipment. If it rains or gets below 50 tonight or I tip over, I will be miserable. Even dead, if I'm not careful. The water is cold, hypothermia or drowning real dangers. So I'm careful.

Even with the tent and supplies stuffed behind me and the sleeping bag jammed into the hull, the kayak is steady. None of this gear is designed to be lightweight, though, so portaging far is out of the question. Loaded as it is, the boat weighs twice as much as I do. I step in, cross my legs Indian style because the sleeping bag rolled into the hull has taken all the legroom, and paddle. It's a slack tide, for which I am grateful. There's no current to fight as I locate an island with solid timber seemingly a good distance from shore and paddle out. It isn't easy to climb up on-- the top of the island drops ten feet sheer to the water all along one side and a sloping beach on the other leads to a ragged-edged dune I scramble up. But the carpet of star moss under cypress is enchantingly thick, and I feel sheltered under the big trees. They are also proof that the island doesn't get submerged at high tide. The tent is set up in a twinkling, the sleeping bag and food and flashlight stashed inside.

I think carefully, then leave the wetsuit there as well. Between it and the sleeping bag, I will be alright even if I make a mistake and the rest of my clothing gets wet. Then I climb back into the boat and cruise around the island. Incoming tide is shrinking the beach, and it pushes against me gently as I island hop. The gulls don't appreciate my curiosity. Clear water beckons, and depths vary from 2 to 30 feet as I cross channels between islands and the sides of the bay. The island I have chosen to camp on has the best cover, and I am contented with the setup. Far down the bay there's a house, and another is perched at the point looking out over the ocean.

Near the bay's mouth the current gets too rough, so I turn around and coast back inward. Below me a vibrant undersea world unfolds. A variety of jellyfish, sea stars, anemones and sea urchins feed in tide pools. I dodge fishing nets and am startled by a loud huffing sound. A head surfaces, eyeing me suspiciously. A large mammal-- seal or sea lion. I hastily back off. But eventually the current floats me back into his territory. Aggravated, he snorts again. I am trying to go around him when he and his mate erupt from the water and leap and torpedo away. Heart in mouth, I watch them go-- round, brown, streamlined, and incredibly graceful. Stellar sea lions are endangered here, and very rare. I doubt my eyes. But those

didn't look like seals. I am sorry to have bothered them, whatever they are. And hope that they resetttle again without having to go far.

The next surprise is a low chitter. An otter surfaces some 20 feet away and looks the boat over carefully. I wait. In Monterey an otter his size was none-too pleased to be sharing his kelp bed with a 16-foot kayak, so he shoved it out of his territory. My little kayak is shorter, lighter, and not equipped to fend off a determined angry sea otter. But this big guy seems more wary than aggressive. He moves further away and goes back to diving for dinner. I laugh in delight as he surfaces with mussels, slams them together with his front paws, sucks the meat from their broken shells, tosses them away, and repeats. Soon there is a chattering query and his mate comes to join him. I'm a delighted guest at an otter dinner party. And further down the bay, bald eagles are hunting.

Slow incoming tide drifts me silently over glassy channels. Kelp a story high brushes the keel and tiny crab stowaways retreats shyly under its fronds. Starfish the size of my torso cling upside down to rocky overhangs. Moon jellies and Andromeda's? sink beneath me, out of reach of the dipping paddle. Fleshy mushroom-shaped anemones tilts their faces upward, filtering food from the crystalline waters around me. Sea stars with over 20 legs in eye popping colors decorate the mussel-covered bottom.

Octopus, fairy shrimp, crabs, starfish, jellyfish

By the time the sun retreats behind the hill that defines my little bay, I am stiff and chilled but so full of wonder it doesn't occur to me to complain. I haul the kayak up onto the island I selected for camping, flip it over near my tent, and tie my food stash as far up a tree as I can reach. It isn't very high. Not enough to keep bears away or frustrate them in the least. I consider climbing the tree. But I'm bushed. I opt to leave it. Inside the tent, light rapidly failing, I cuddle into my dry wetsuit and crawl into my cozy sleeping bag. Sometime in the night I awake to the sound of rustling and quizzical chittering. "I didn't bring that food out here so you could steal it," I call crossly. There's a loud silence, then quiet padding as whatever my visitor is leaves.

I'm in Haines, Alaska, just about to board the ferry for a four day trip down to Bellingham, Washington. I'm opting that rather than driving back through BC because I found BC folk paranoid and lacking in hospitality. BUT I had a lovely time otherwise and am amazed by the awe-inspiring country I have driven through. Kachemak Bay octopus, several species of starfish, jellyfish and shellfish, sea lions, water clarity unbelievable. Caught a water taxi to a public dock there and

kayaked for 4 hours evening, camped overnight on an island beneath ancient spruce on a moss carpet so deep it was like a mattress, then kayaked for 6 hours next day. Unforgettable.

~ Savor the Flavor ~

*There is a world of busy doings
I've stepped outside of for the nonce
to sup the precious flow of river thyme
spiced by scent of today sublime
gently rolling pace and thoughts
green growing and immediate
bark of fox, call of thrush
smell of loam, cold water's rush
pine tang and taste of impending rain
haunting calls of loons floating
aware of time but unappalled
no boiling despair at dust to dust
years rolling on, going well
life sweet, sufficient in itself
fullness of the present moment
Savoring the flavor of each course
Live Now-- No time to be lost.*

~ Lilies ~

*We are not Lilies of the field
To toil and spin is what is real.
Success attained is surely sweet
But there are other goals to meet.*

*If what you have should fall away
Can you stand up, rich, and say
In toiling you did more than duty
In spinning, you created beauty.*

Grieving Jill



Seeing and Dreaming Seasons of Leaves

Seeing is dreaming -dreaming is seeing
Your new life brings sorrow to my being
Dark life leaves scatter scars across the sky
My mortal self ponders the way and why
I look away from God, a second stray
You and the dream sky seem so far away.
I wish you were here, please end this bad dream,
Your dreams and leaves aren't always what they seem.
The piles of leaves resting in fall heaps
Welcome spring through rebirthing winter sleep,
The spring sky with its split second chances
Encourages wild spring leaf dances
Summer leaves burst with the joy of living
Proclaiming the God of love and giving,
I gaze at the sky, see as my heart grieves,
Heaven in seasons shining through the leaves.



Mountain Climbing

Life creates different mountains and mine
Throws rocks of every possible kind
Grief and challenge and changes that plummet,
Cloudy visions of the distant summit.
Some days I'm climbing on broken knees.
Tired spirit droops for vanished shade trees.
Stumbling over rocks- they come by thousands,
Sunlit love keeps me climbing the mountain,
Faith grows soothing leaves and ledges sturdy,
Hope carves toe holds in rock reality.

When rocks bombard you below the tree line
God makes a difference in how you climb!



Missing You

Your chair is the same with its cat nooks behind,
Your smile and your dress are bathed in lamp shine

I touch the things you love, pretend you're still there,
I kept them – your camper and your teddy bear,
Slashing memories supposed to dim with time,
Flare glaringly brighter than a neon sign.
My glass is empty instead of your half full,
Until my fingers trace the imprint of your soul.

Look Up



I think of you throughout the days
That I must live without you here
And I wonder about the whys

Ask where you are and are you near?
I know you don't want me to mourn,
Try grieving in different ways
Look up every once in a time
From my living my own life haze.
Keep trying to better express
The humanity of us all,
To be kinder and more patient,
Catch others gently when they fall.
You don't always have to be brave,
God is by your side when you grieve,
Feel your sorrow, but then look up
Look up through your tears and just breathe.

Jill and the Tree of Life



I see you in spring and summer trees,
I feel you in the gentle breeze
Gentle like you and whispering to me,
“Life is good, and much is yet to be!”
I read your writing on a greeting card,
My heart still shatters, the tears rain hard,
The phone rings and I strain to hear your voice,
It would be you if I only had the choice,
Then I hear you whispering to me,
Life is good, and much is yet to be!”

What Do You Do When the World Tips Over?

You struggle to the surface, breathe,
Some days curse the water, some days tread the water,
Every day swim for meaning.
I tiptoe along the ledges and edges of days
Sometimes precariously juggling normal,
Other days falling into bottomless canyons of sorrow.
My love for her has not touched bottom
My missing her has not surfaced,
Some days the thought of her creates water spouts,
Other days thoughts stall and burrow into the reefs of life without her.
Our views of the world are different,
I know her world didn't stop,
God is showing her different views

Introducing new water wings

My earthbound world is sometimes arthritic and groans with the pain of swimming,

But both of our worlds are kayaking

Into healing sunset, toward the healing sunrise.

