

# A Corner, Turned

by Julia Smillie

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Odds are you won't know, if I ask you exactly where you were a year ago today. I was, at various points, at my sister's house, in a car between Indianapolis and Louisville, and at the hospital in Louisville struggling to acknowledge that the body on the gurney was my mother's.

And so I had planned to write something today that was truly meaningful and significant. I wanted to tell you the meaning of life or, barring that, the meaning of death. I wanted to wrap up a year's worth of pain and package it as Experience and show you the resonance of the human spirit. But I have started and restarted, I have turned to page after blank page and the bottom line is, I can't.

I'm not entirely certain that I've emerged from the muddle of the past months stronger or smarter. I'm quite convinced, in fact, that I know even less than I did 364 days ago. I know that sometimes I'm more afraid than ever, that I have an awesome respect for the unpredictability of life, which sometimes disguises itself as fear.

I can tell you this: life will just happen to you. Bad things will happen and you may never be able to find any reason. Worse yet, it's possible that there may not be any reason at all. Some things simply are and in the wake of them, we have an amazing capacity for survival, an amazing drive to soldier on. But we also have an amazing desire to curl up, to hide inside things, to cover our feelings and to refuse growth outright.

We are confusing and confused beings, our strength and vulnerability battling within us, our ability to feel love directly connected to our ability to feel pain. I can tell you that everything – virtually every single thing – in my life has changed, not even so much because of the absence of my mother but because life has shown me what it can deliver.

This past weekend, my family gathered in Louisville again, for only the third or fourth time since my mother died. We were celebrating my father's birthday (belatedly) and my niece's birthday (early) and were holding each other up without words as we navigated the upcoming Anniversary. I sat on the small hill in my parent's backyard on an indescribably beautiful day and watched my nieces and nephew dash around the grass, tracking a path across the exact spot where I was married a few years before. And for the first time all year, I had the sense, if only slightly, that we were actually going to be alright. That as a family – and as individual people – we were all going to figure out a way to survive this, to keep going, to live our lives and to know joy. I understood that we are all stepping out like newborn fawns on shaky, unsure legs. I understood that the passage of a year doesn't mean the ending of anything, but the beginning of a recovery, an emergence from darkness. A chance. A *chance*.

