

## 8 April 2015 – Rewind

The call from the Delta TTOC list came in at 7:49pm. I was waiting in the garage for two different craigslist responders to come and buy our miscellany. Of course I accepted the job.

I inwardly laugh to myself when the automatic voice recording gives me the option to refuse the job. Who would refuse to get paid for being a warm body in a room? Who would refuse the easiest job in the world? I am sure some people don't consider it easy. There is no accounting for the differing tastes of human individuals. They come in all colours, shapes, and sizes.

Jane privileges consistency and responsibility over all other things. She is a mother first, a teacher second, and a wife third. Her words. She feels that all three of these can coexist within a certain amount of ebb and flow (also her words) but, I am not sure that "ebb" and "flow" are words I would ever use to describe her. She does not ebb. She does not flow (except when she is teaching). She moves methodically and carefully and this is one thing that I love about her.

It is folly to think that all things between two people will always mesh perfectly. Even making that statement sounds obviously absurd. But somehow, we fool ourselves into believing that it is possible. That the connection we share transcends all others and that this time it is different.

It is not different. It is the same as all the other times. You are who you are and I am who I am and all the things that our friends, families, and former partners have commented on about our personalities are probably more or less still true. This is not a

failure. This is simply how life goes. And for those of us who privilege consistency and responsibility—those of us who are intolerant of stupidity and everything that goes with it—this can even be considered a success.

When I met Jane she made no apologies about who she is. She self-identified as direct and abrasive. Yes, she is these things. She is also soft and fluffy and warm and unendingly generous and compassionate. I think it is this last one which has gotten her into trouble in the past. Hence the tough exterior. She is also a romantic. I wanted to call her unfailingly romantic but that wouldn't be accurate. For if one aspect of her personality trumps her romantic side, it's the practical side. And, yes, I love this about her, too. But find it disappointing at times, as well.

Jane once said to me that she was afraid that she would disappoint me. I would like to think that when she said it, I understood in what context she meant it. But now I am not sure. I assured her then that she would not, could not. This was a blind lie. We have both disappointed one another numerous times. Such is the stuff that intense personal connections between two fully formed human beings are made on. Or is it?

Buddhists believe that all unhappiness (disappointment, in this case) is a result of expectation. And that to love without expectation is the practice. This ideal appeals to the romantic in me. But ideals are not sustainable for real life relationships between flawed and judgmental people.

When I accepted the job in Delta, I was both aware of the fact that I was doing it partly for myself and partly for Jane. She expects me to work. She also expects me to want to work. And while it is true that I

do, I think my knowledge of her expectations makes me feel like there are undue restrictions placed on my autonomy. Which is just a fancy way of saying, "She can't tell me what to do!" And she can't. Except that she can.

Perhaps this fact is a function of taking one's responsibility for one's half of a relationship and I just have to frame it as such to myself. I think the romantic in me wants her not to care what I do. To trust that I will be responsible and not to judge when I make a mistake. To support me no matter what and to know that if *she* wanted to move to the desert and build a yert that we would do the internet research together. Is this an ideal too? Can two people of a certain age and life experience have unconditional love? Or is this beautiful characteristic only reserved for dogs?

Philosophical questions aside, the fact remains that my relationship with Jane expects certain conditions to exist. One of them being that, without money, we will experience a stress that no two teaching professionals should ever have to endure. So money we must have and money we must make. This we both agreed on and Romance does not figure into this equation.

So, I took the job.

It was at an elementary school I had never been to in South Delta. I was a secondary teacher and the image of 30 tiny humans all screaming and not paying attention to me scared the shit out of me. But a day of pay is day of pay. Or so they say. I wasn't sure that I would survive that kind of day.

Google maps said it would take about 57 minutes to get to the school, depending on traffic. The last time I

had been to the same area, it had taken around the same amount of time, so I left at 7am the next morning.

As I drove the familiar stretch of freeway in South Surrey, I looked longingly out the window at the ocean on my left. The foliage had only just begun to bloom on the trees and, through them, it was possible to see that the tide was out.

Jane knows how much I love the ocean. She once booked us a hotel in White Rock back in the olden days when spending the night together was a luxury (it still is). She did it for me. She said, "You get your ocean. And I get you." We never left the room.

I do love the ocean and today I was missing it. I suddenly flashed to an image of Ira running crazily along the slimy sand and wished that he was alive and that I could have spent this day with him. I could smell the rocky intertidal and feel the salty wind on my skin. It was a glorious Spring morning—the kind Ira and I used to spend together in the first year I got him.

In an instant I wished I could have refused this job. That I could have told the smug voice recorder, "Thank you but no thank you!" But that would have been irresponsible. And I am nothing if not responsible. Especially when my relationship harmony depends on it. So, I filed the fantasy of a day-off with my dead dog for a different time and turned my attention away from the ocean and back to the road ahead of me at exactly the moment of impact. I didn't even have time to register fear or understanding of what was happening.

At precisely 7:23am, my car slammed into a stalled dump truck on Highway 99, West of the King George exit and the Serpentine River. The driver of the truck was

unhurt, having just left the cab to call for a tow. I was the only fatality.

Cause of the accident was determined to be due to driver irresponsibility.