

BROKEN SEASHELLS – BROKEN HEARTS *by Pamela Leonhardt*

Recently while on a trip visiting my sister in Oregon I came across a lovely and heartfelt book entitled *My Beautiful Broken Shell* written by Carol Hamblet Adams and illustrated by one of my favorite seascape artists, D. Morgan. The words of the tender reflections in this book resonated with my heart as I walked along the sandy shores of the Oregon coast collecting seashells.

Adams shares the brokenness of her heart and spirit as she struggled through a difficult time. In her book she describes her experience walking along the sandy seashore searching for perfect seashells to add to her collection. As she gazes at the sea of broken shells, she comes to realize that the broken ones reflect her own broken heart. In each shell, Adams sees those who are hurting and who have lost loved ones; those who are frightened or alone; and those who are living with unfulfilled dreams. Like all of us, each shell in the vast sea is tremendously resilient after fighting so hard to keep from being totally crushed by the pounding surf. We, too, come to realize that it takes courage to remain on the shore after being “tossed by the storms of life and worn down by the sands of time” despite the unrelenting pain and suffering in our hearts. Like each of us, broken seashells represent our tears, deepest sorrows and pain from the loss of our precious child. The turbulent crashing waves of the sea followed by the calm waves teaches us about the true meaning of strength, courage and faith. The brokenness of each shell comes to remind us that when our hearts are shattered beyond belief, we can survive even the most horrific storm in our own lives. As each beautiful broken shell doesn't pretend to be perfect or whole, it allows for its brokenness to be seen, knowing that within the center of the shell lays immense beauty.

Broken seashells don't exist alone but are surrounded by a vast number of seashells, each broken in their own unique way. Like all of humanity, when you truly look around, you see that we are all wounded in one way or another. As rare as it is to find a perfect shell in the midst of hundreds of shells lying on the beach, it's equally rare to find any one of us who has not experienced deep pain and sorrow. As the broken shells lie close to one another, we are reminded that we, too, live in a community with each other and when we draw upon the strength and courage of others it helps us through the most difficult times.

After reading this tender and heartfelt book, I walked the sandy Oregon shore, no longer in search for the perfect seashell for my collection but rather recognizing the strength, courage and beauty of all the broken shells that lay scattered along the shore. With each broken seashell I picked up and placed in my hand, I admired its own uniqueness and strength. It was through gazing at them, I was reminded of my own brokenness and the tremendous courage it has taken me to survive the most turbulent storm in my life. Through my brokenness I have emerged stronger, more compassionate and loving and able to recognize and embrace my own internal beauty from that struggle.

Like many others, I find my deepest peace and serenity by the seashore, mesmerized by the crashing waves followed by the slow, gentle retreat of the water back into the sea. As one of my favorite quotes so profoundly states, “nowhere on earth are heartaches better tended”, I feel the sadness in my heart soothed and my soul restored and nourished as I experience all the beauty that the sea offers. As I prepare to leave next week for another retreat to the sea, I will notice and cherish each broken shell knowing the strength and courage it took for each of them to survive the turbulent storms of the sea and be reminded of my own healing journey. Next time you find yourself walking along the shore's edge, pick up a broken seashell that speaks to you and see yourself reflected in the broken edges. Recognize the strength of the shell to survive being tossed through the crashing waves just as your heart has survived and grown stronger after the most horrific and tumultuous storm.

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HOW TO HELP ME GRIEVE *by Vivian Sagert*

“Be There for Me” – I feel alone, in pain. I need a friend.

“Share My Sorrow” – Speak from your heart. I have to talk about my feelings.

“Touch Me” - I need a hug, your hand, your love.

“Let Me Grieve” – Listen to me, I need to cry. We all grieve in our own way and in a different time frame.

“Keep Their Memory Alive” – It's always on my mind. I have so many memories.

“I Need Your Help” – Help me, phone me, pray for me. Do whatever you can.

“Don't Desert Me” – Don't desert me after the 1st or 2nd week. I need you especially on holidays.

“Take Care of Yourself” – I need to depend on you.

“Help Me Heal” – Involve me, listen to me months later. I need your interest and invitations.

“Be My Friend” – Don't be afraid of me or my grief. It's OK to cry.

Lastly please don't criticize me till you walked in my shoes, instead, “Pray For Me.”

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