

## **The Invisible String** by Sue Caruso

I stumbled upon *The Invisible String* book (which was just read) while looking for a book about loneliness, connections, and the message that we are never alone. Isn't it amazing how children's books often remind us of an important lesson that we may have forgotten.

I was inspired by the CrossGen evening activity in March. It was a string event that showed how we are all connected. For those not familiar with CrossGen, it is a ministry that invites all members of any generation to join in fellowship once a month for dinner and activities. This intergenerational activity creates an opportunity for members to get to know one another. In other words, Intentional Fellowship.

During this specific evening, each dinner table was given a skein of yarn. Each person at the table was asked to take the skein, hold on to the string and pass the skein to the person at the table that they had a connection with, the result. Each person, at each table, were connected to each other in one way or the other.

Lesson: We are all connected whether there is an actual string (as in the Cross Gen activity ) or an invisible string (as in the book). What a wonderful gift!

Over the past 10 years, my family has experienced significant losses and mental health challenges. When I spoke on Mental Health Sunday a few years ago, I shared that my family and my husband's family have struggled with diagnosed depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and substance misuse.

In 2011 my husband was diagnosed with Glioblastoma (brain cancer). This came without warning, No family history, no known cause and no known cure. Our world was turned upside down. We were lost lost: full time school, full time work, a new job, scheduling doctor appointments, dealing with insurance issues. We felt like we were in a fog.

My husband passed away in 2012, 18 months after being diagnosed. We (our sons Eddie, Gary, and I) tried to continue, as best we could, with daily life responsibilities. Our friends were there when we needed them. To be truthful we really didn't know what we needed. We each did the best we could to cope. Unfortunately, my sons found substances to deal with their pain and distress. Therapy worked to a minor degree. It wasn't long before I was visiting one son in Rehab and the older son in jail.

My saving grace at that time, and still is, was the blessing of friends from the neighborhood where my sons had grown up. I also grew to know one friend, another blessing from God, who lost her husband 6 months after Ed passed away. Both Ed and her husband died at 56.

Although God had provided these supports, Eddie, Gary and I felt more alone than ever. My family lived in Florida, my mom had died 2 years before Ed's passing, my youngest son lived in Arizona, and my husband's family lived in Ohio. Fortunately, my oldest son (Eddie) lived in White Plains. Unfortunately, my relationship with both sons was strained. I pushed hard for each to deal with their demons.

In time, Gary was making a new life in Arizona, making better decisions. Eddie, on the other hand, was a different story. Eddie was never going to accept the help I thought he needed. It was necessary to accept that reality or alienate him indefinitely. In the end, I felt our relationship was more important.

During this growth and acceptance, I realized I needed to concentrate on my own wellbeing. A balanced life includes concentrating on MIND BODY AND SPIRIT. I started to exercise (body), and see a therapist (mind), I now needed to connect with my spiritual side. Having grown up in the Presbyterian church I knew this was a place to start.

My long-time friend, Nance, was attending First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown and recommended I give it a try. The sermon message that first day I attended was... God is with us. We are never alone. To me, this was an epiphany. On that day, I felt less alone. Shortly thereafter, I became a member of this church and active in a number of ministries. In 2020, I joined a group of members who were called to start a Mental Health and Wellness Team.

And so. Here we are today.

Through these last several years I have been blessed to know many of our congregation members.

On the morning of February 9, 2022, the sun was bright. Friends visiting from New Jersey and Nevada were staying with me. Our plans for sightseeing and visiting friends were well thought out.

Then I received a call from Eddie's boss. Eddie had not been to work in 2 days. I knew something was terribly wrong, he was always a conscientious employee. A wellness check confirmed that he was no longer alive. Gary and my life were turned upside down once again. The feeling of loss was physical and emotional. Shock, pain, disbelief... it is impossible to relate our feelings at that time.

I will never forget those words, Eddie is gone. Each time I remember, the pain from that moment is agonizing.

Is it possible to live with so many holes in our heart? My mother had died 2 years prior to Ed's passing (my husband) and my father and Eddie's passing was within 6 months of each other. My heart and Gary's heart felt like Swiss cheese, full of holes.

So here's the message that you have patiently waiting for.....

One of the crucial reasons I am here today after these terrible losses is the tremendous outpouring of love and support from this congregation. I have felt a strong circle of support from so many caring and sensitive members. This has sustained me, without exception. That invisible string has been wrapped around me by so many here. That same string reaches back from me to you as I deal with my grief. Helping you is helping me.

I remember after my son's funeral and the loneliness really set in, I started to zoom (COVID season) into bible studies and church meetings. It may sound strange. At that time, I couldn't make sense of much, but I knew that listening to you all helped me to feel connected.

Don't discount that invisible string.

Here's a few thoughts to ponder:

- **Sometimes** if you don't feel the string tug on your heart, quiet your mind; do something that comforts you (watch a movie, work on a jigsaw puzzle, listen to a song, be kind to a stranger, give/receive a hug). Connie always says she is a hug person. I am also one who loves to give and receive hugs. For me, the power of this connection reminds me of the love that Jesus has for us all. We are all God's children.
- **Sometimes** you need to mend a string: Apologize and then do the work to avoid making the same mistake.
- **Sometimes** other people don't understand your pain or the way you are dealing with your struggles. You never know where that person is coming from. They may feel you should buck up, Deal with the issue. This type of judgement is painful to bear. As children of God, we are called to walk side by side without judgment.
- **Sometimes** we just have to accept where others are and pull on the strings that are more life-giving
- **Sometimes** we need to remind ourselves of God's love and recognize his presence in our lives.
  - o My necklace has 3 charms: a cross to remind me of God's unconditional love, a heart to remind me of the love Ed and I shared, and a hurricane charm to remind me of Eddie and the hurricane of joy, sadness, and unending love that he brought to family and friends.
- **Sometimes** being connected to someone is challenging and it takes work. Don't give up. You are not alone. Remember that the string of connection is not only for you but for the person on the other end.

Ultimately what gives us courage and strength to persevere is God's grace. With God's help we can not only find ourselves but discover God's presence, walking beside us in every moment.

I'll end with a quote from Helen Keller who is a symbol of courage in the face of overwhelming odds:

**Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.**

**May it be so,**

**Amen**