

Letting Go

Michelle sat there staring out the window at the distant harbor lights, for a moment she could smell the cool air that came from the sea. The shadows on the water seemed to create images that beckoned to her. They demanded her full attention. How she longed to reach out and touch those lights, to feel the sand and water beneath her feet. She wanted to feel the breeze blowing through her hair, she could almost taste the salt water on her lips. At that moment she knew she would miss him far more than she ever thought possible.

The heavy drip, drip, drip of the rain drops falling in chorus on the window pane suddenly had demands on her attention. She realized she was alone, she felt the emptiness invade her. The loneliness had crept back to haunt her yet again. The ringing of the phone startled her as she reached for it in the dark. Even before she answered it, she had a feeling deep inside of her that brought a panic that began to rise up inside of her. It was Nicole, her husband had died the same year as Michelle's. Nicole had suffered a great deal, George had suffered for years with cancer. Michelle camped out at Nicole's side many times throughout George's illness. Michelle's own grief of losing Warren took back burner during those times. Warren had died while on a hunting expedition in the snow covered mountains of Canada.

Hello Nicole, yes I will be at the meeting tonight. How she wished she could tell her friend no, but she had promised that she would attend the support group that was meeting at her friend's house tonight. The group met twice a month. They offered friendship and comfort to each other. Each person in the group had lost a spouse either to illness or injury. Michelle breathed a heavy sigh and wondered if she could bare her soul to this group. She said bye to Nicole and hung up the phone.

The drive out to Nicole's house took her around the scenic route that wound its way around the cape. The air was cool as the last days of summer were becoming shorter and shorter. Summer at the cape brought hundreds of tourists and the beach was alive with the sounds of the surfers as they bravely faced each new wave. But now the beach was quiet and the only sound was the splashing waves against the rocks.

The room was already filling up as Michelle made her way to a seat. The conversation was as usual; the endless talk of lost love ones. She introduced herself as each one went around the room making introduction. Her eyes immediately made contact with Clint. Clint was the counselor. His blue eyes could have melted the biggest ice burg in Alaska. Michelle felt her face grow red. How could she even have such thoughts. Even with the warm smile that Clint offered, she had no desire to talk to strangers about how she missed Warren. How she missed him holding her, how she missed the long hours on the beach wrapped in blankets. She could almost feel his touch as the memories flooded her soul and brought tears to her eyes.

The meeting was moving forward as she was lost in her thoughts. Clint talked about letting go. What did he know about letting go she thought to herself. How could he possibly know how it felt to lose someone you had spent most of your life with. Just as she was about to get out of her chair and walk out, something caught her by surprise. Clint had lost his wife three years prior. He knew the emptiness that we felt, he knew how lonely nights could be and how my heart

ached for the life I had before Warren died. As Clint continued to share his story and the process that has to take place in order for healing to come. How Michelle longed for that healing, for that peace that Clint talked about. She wanted to let go but how and when.

Michelle was glad she had not let her friend down. She promised to keep in touch as she and Nicole said good night. On the drive home, she pondered the healing process that Clint had spoken about and she was overwhelmed with urge to reach out, but reach out to who she asked herself out loud.

The alarm clock seemed to be a figment of her dream as she reached out to silence it. The rain continued it's harmony of drip, drip, drip against the window pane. There had been entirely too much rain this season. The winter months were inching closer and this meant more rain, snow and a dark and lonely time with the holidays approaching along with the winter months. The thought of facing yet another lonely winter and holiday was almost more than she could bare. Why did Warren have to go on that stupid hunting trip, she had begged him not to go. Now she is alone. It's not fair, it's just not fair she screamed in the silence of her room.

Michelle busied herself during the following months preparing for the holidays. Her family would all be there, everyone except Julie. After her father died, Julie had not been home. She stayed in contact by phone but it was always a brief conversation filled with politeness. Things were just not the same between them. Julie was all grown up and her life at the time did not include her mother. The phone rang and by the caller ID, Michelle knew it was her Mom. Hello dear came the familiar voice of her mother. Your father and I will not be able to make there for Thanksgiving. The storms has all the main highways closed and they are calling for another six inches of snow by morning. Michelle hung the receiver up and felt a twinge of loneliness creeping up and expressing itself by tears forming in her eyes. She looked over at Logan, an over sized Saint Bernard. Well oh boy, it looks like it is just you and me this year. Logan lumbered over to her as if he knew exactly how Michelle was feeling. He had been just a ball of fur when Warren had brought him in as a gift to her for Christmas that previous year. He will be your companion while I am away. I'd rather have you she remembered saying.

The turkey was dry, the potatoes lumpy but Logan didn't seem to mind as he licked up the last morsel from the bowl. Enough of this self pity she told herself. She phoned Nicole and if the offer still stood for the loan of her cabin in the mountains, she would love to take her up on it. Sure you are welcome to use it came the reply. Michelle wasted no time getting packed. She loaded the s.u.v. and she and Logan began their adventure up the mountain.

The route to the cabin was breath taking. The beauty and the majesty of the mountains was a welcome scene. The cabin was small and the room was dark and dreary. This was a mistake she thought to herself as Logan terrorized what looked to be a drowned rat. Michelle picked up the wet ball of fur and laughed out loud at the sight of the frightened kitten. After a towel drying and a warm bowl of milk, Lucky was fast asleep. Michelle thought Lucky was a fitting name since the kitten was lucky that they arrived when they did. Logan was not happy in the least bit about having this creature invade his space. After receiving confirmation that he was still the king of the cabin, Logan too settled in for a nap in front of the warm fire. Michelle left them dozing while heading into town for supplies before the next winter storm moved in. The town

was small and the people were friendly. Mr. Davis the butcher welcomed her to Springdale, not an appropriate name for a mountain town that hardly had Spring time. Mr. Smith was the owner of the general store filled her list while she admired the quilts that Mrs. Smith had made and displayed proudly in the store. There seemed to be a warm feeling, a feeling of belonging, a feeling she had not had in a very long time, not since Warren had died.

The final winter blast arrived and it hit hard with all its fury. The snow fell hard and fast, within hours, the ground was covered along with the roads. Michelle was glad she brought in enough wood for the fire place before the storm hit. She wrapped up in the warm quilt that she had bought at the general store and sat in front of the fireplace. Her mind soon drifted to the days of when she and Warren had first met. She was a receptionist at the Agency where he worked. He was a bright talented young attorney. Warren was so handsome and smart. She wondered how it would be to have the outcome of someone's fate in your hands as he did so many times with the people he represented. They trusted him and believed in him. She wondered how it felt to have someone put all of their trust and belief in one person. Their love was as powerful as his closing arguments in the court room. Within three months they were married. Warren was her everything, she always felt safe and secure in his arms.

Logan's barking intruded her memories. What is it boy? What do you hear out there? The wind was howling through the trees and the snow was coming down fast. But in the distance she could hear the cry for help. Grabbing the flash light and her coat, Michelle made her way through the blizzard toward the direction she heard the faint voice. The storm had blown down a small tree that now lay across the road, under the limbs she could see a hand sticking out. As Michelle neared the fallen tree, she heard a faint voice calling for help. My legs are hung and I can't move my arm. He was glad to hear a friendly voice and a smiling face. Can you find something to get the limb moved? Michelle told him to hang on and she ran back to the cabin in search of something, anything that could be used to remove the fallen limb. With Logan chasing close behind her, she made her way back to the scene with an axe.

What is your name Michelle asked? Ben, Ben Wilson. Well Ben Wilson my name is Michelle and this here is Logan. Can you cut the limb away? If I could just move my arm some, I could crawl out. Be still, save your energy and I will try to cut away some of these branches. Michelle worked furiously cutting and moving branches away from Ben. Logan helped by licking Ben's face and dug around the snow with his paws. By the time Michelle had cut the last branch, she was cold and tired but managed to move them enough for Ben to climb out from under the fallen tree before collapsing in the snow.

The sun was bright as it pierced her eyes. She tried to raise up, but soon gave up on that notion and laid back down. I see you are awake, Michelle turned and saw Ben standing there with a bowl of soup. Here, I warmed you some soup, you need to eat something. How long have I been asleep? Oh, about 2 days came the surprising answer. As Ben helped her raise up to eat, she looked down at his legs. How is your arm and legs? I should be up waiting on you and here you are bringing me soup. You gave me and Logan quite a scare. Glad to see you awake. And by the way, the arm and legs are fine, no broken bones just some cuts and bruises. I will be sore for awhile but nothing major. You and Logan saved my life. If you had not been here at the cabin, I hate to think how long I would have lay there. It looks as the snow may be slacking up

some. The roads should be clear in a few days. I hope I am not an inconvenience until then. Michelle looked up and their eyes locked for the first time. She turned away quickly and mumbled something to the effect of no, no inconvenience.

The days soon turned into weeks while waiting on the roads to clear. As soon as it looked as though the weather would clear, another round of storms moved in. Michelle sure was glad she had gone into town when she did and stocked up on supplies and on firewood.

Over a cup of coffee, Ben began to tell Michelle how he had been hiking the mountains to commune with nature, he laughed out loud at the sound of that. He had miscalculated the storm system and waited too long to head down the mountain. He had spotted the smoke from the chimney of the cabin and was trying to make it here when he was pinned by the falling tree. Yep, I would be in a heap of trouble if you had not heard my screams. Michelle gave all the credit to Logan, after all, it was he who first heard something and alerted Michelle. As they waited for the storms to end and the roads to clear, Logan had accepted Lucky and they snuggled together in front of the fireplace; not a care in the world. Logan had also made a new friend in Ben and for me, I had new hope. But could I even allow myself to have hope for new beginnings and the feelings that were starting to form for Ben scared her but she enjoyed the feeling.

The roads finally cleared and after making sure the cabin was secure, Michelle drove Ben to town so he could retrieve his jeep that had been left there when he hiked up the mountain. They waved their goodbyes and Logan gave Ben one last lick and offered up a paw.

The trip back home was serene. Michelle thought of Ben and how he had nurtured her back to health after that first couple of nights of scaring him and Logan. She also thought of Warren, it was as if she was cheating on him in her mind by having the thoughts she had. Her mind drifted back to the cabin and how she had thought of Ben's arms around her, holding her and stirring feeling that seem to arise from the depths of her soul. How she wondered what it would be like to be loved by someone, someone other than Warren. She brushed the thoughts from her mind and settled to the fact that Ben was still in the mountains and she, Logan and Lucky were finally pulling into the driveway of home sweet home. Lucky seemed to like his new home and Logan let him know when he overstepped his boundaries. I spent the next weeks getting caught up with daily routines and catching up with Nicole. Nicole of course wanted to hear every detail of my adventure of rescuing a gorgeous mountain man. I had to smile. I busied myself trying to get the house ready for sale. I thought of the winter spent in the cabin and the small town with the general store and how that quilt that I had bought from Mrs. Smith. I did miss the snow and the peace that came with it. The crackling of the fire in the fireplace seem to usher in a calmness that I had needed for so long. So it was decided, she would buy the cabin from Nicole and she, Logan and Lucky would start over once again.

Michelle knew she had to finally say goodbye to Warren. She knew she had to let go and open up her heart to love again. Warren would not have wanted her to be alone. Michelle took one last stroll on the beach where she and Warren had spent so much time together. She knelt and touched the sand and let it slip through her fingers, like time slipping away she thought. She

took a deep breath of the cool air and touched her finger to the water and lifted it to her mouth to taste the salt. She would miss this place and she would miss Warren, but as she let the water rush over her feet, she said goodbye to both.

She placed the last box into the moving van and loaded Lucky and Logan into the car. This time the trip to the mountains would be a happy one. The cabin was as cold and dark as the first trip there, but somehow it had a welcome back feeling as she opened the door. The memories of the time spent with Ben came flooding back, but she soon dismissed them and started unpacking.

Mrs. Smith was happy to see her. She had made a new quilt and it was perfect for Michelle. She took it home and folded it in front of the fire place and Logan and Lucky soon claimed it for their own. She had to laugh out loud at the sight of such a big macho Logan asleep with such a little fur ball curled up next to him. She too was soon fast asleep, tire from the drive and tired from the emotions inside her heart and head. The phone startled her with the incisive ringing. Hello. Julie was at the other end. Hi Mom. No, nothing is wrong. I just missed you and Logan and wanted to plan a trip to come out there to see you. I thought a family Thanksgiving would be great spent at the cabin this year. Michelle brushed back a tear as she and Julie made plans for the upcoming holidays. It would be nice to have her home again, if only for a short time.

Julie arrived in Springdale on time and Michelle was there to greet her. She was as lovely as she had always been, a little thinner, but beautiful. Julie started right in telling Michelle about her trip. Michelle told her all about the cabin, about the winter that was spent there last year and about Ben. She caught herself smiling as she remembered the time spent there with Ben. She wondered how he was and what he was doing. She quickly put her attention back on Julie. How long will you be able to stay? Until after Christmas Julie said. Good said Michelle. This will be a great holiday season with you being here. Julie seemed to be preoccupied as they entered the cabin. She missed her father she finally said and she missed family time. Julie had not talked about her father or his death since she had left home. It is okay to remember and to miss said Michelle. I miss him as well, but I was finally able to say goodbye and let go. I will always love your father and I will miss what we had, but he would not want us to just stop living. Julie let out years of bottled up emotions and she and Michelle had a good cry and Julie was finally able to open up and share her memories of her Dad with her Mom. They remembered the days spent at the cape, how they laughed and played in the sand and the water. Julie had grown up and she had to let go her own way. She walked alone toward the base of the mountain and as she stood looking as far as the eye could see, she dropped to her knees and let go of the past, the past hurts, the past anger she had so long held inside. As the tears flowed, she felt release and said her goodbye. As the wind whistled through the trees, it was as though her father was there saying goodbye as well. Julie embraced the cool air and will always remember the smell of the crisp clean air that engulfed her that day.

Thanksgiving that year was just that, thanksgiving. They were thankful for the memories, for the time they had and they were thankful for the ability to say goodbye. As Thanksgiving turned into Christmas, the winter storms were starting to come in stronger and harder than ever before. Michelle got Julie to the bus station just in time before they closed the mountain roads due to heavy snow. Michelle waved bye as the bus pulled out of site. The loneliness was trying to

invade her thoughts, but she pushed them aside and smiled as Julie waved back.

Michelle, Michelle. She heard someone calling her name. She turned to see Ben waving from across the road. I heard you had come back he shouted over the noise from the bus and the wind. He crossed to where Michelle was standing, still in shock to see Ben after all this time. It is good to see you he said as he reached for her hand. She remembered the warm feeling and blushed for having them. How are you? How is Logan and Lucky? They are fine she finally mumbled, still embarrassed for her little girl blushing.

As Michelle drove back to the cabin with Ben in his jeep behind her. She wondered, how will I handle this, what if my feelings can not be contained. The fire had died down as she opened the door to the cabin. The dim light cast shadows on the walls, their shadows. His hand reached for her and she slowly turned to him. The familiar warmth flooded her once again as she gave into his touch. She wanted this moment to last forever. She was scared and excited at the same time. She longed for his touch, but was so afraid of what may lie ahead. She was afraid of giving her heart to someone again. As Ben slowly pulled her closer, her mind relaxed and she looked into his eyes and she knew, she knew she could entrust her heart to him.

The morning was like a warm blanket, the light danced through the windows and she turned to snuggle next to Ben, his side of the bed was empty. Her mind raced in a thousand different directions. She called his name and no answer. She couldn't stop the fear that gripped her, the same fear she had felt years ago. Logan stirred and offered up a cold nose to greet Michelle. For a moment, she thought she had dreamed the whole thing. But she could still feel his touch, smell his cologne. Her thoughts were interrupted when Ben shouted from the kitchen: Coffee is on, get up sleepy head. Ben came to the door way, the sunlight playing gently on his face. His smile offered a safe haven for her fears and the warm coffee matched the warmth she felt in his arms.

That winter in the little cabin in the mountains brought closure to so many fears. Julie had finally shared her feelings and in the end had learned to let go as well. I often think back to that day that Logan and I rescued Ben and it ended up that Ben is the one who rescued us all. We go back to the beach every now and then just to feel the sand between our toes and to taste the salt that the water offers up. To hear the waves crashing against the rocks. But this time, I am making new memories. I am saying hello instead of goodbye.

Debbie Russell
May, 2011