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Dear Friends,

This week marks the fifth anniversary of [my heart attack in January 2016](#). So I have been reflecting a lot on life these past few days. And on death. And on how we keep pushing ourselves when the pushing is (literally) killing us.

I wrote a book published in 2014 called [The Geography of Loss: Embrace What Is, Honor What Was, Love What Will Be](#). The day after I submitted the manuscript in 2012, Feliks was diagnosed with autism after 9 years of unimaginable struggle, and a few days later, John was diagnosed with fast-growing kidney cancer.

At the time I wrote the book, I was debilitated by clinical depression after a hard rupture in a business partnership, one riddled with lies and gaslighting -- I felt as if what I had known for seven years was all false. That nothing I saw around me could be trusted, that I was not able to discern truth from lies. I spent two years essentially in my house, in bed, rarely showering or brushing my teeth. A neighbor who met me after those two years asked if I had just moved to the neighborhood, though I had been here all along. I had just never been outside except when I needed to travel for work. [I finally found a therapist to help.](#)

One year after *The Geography of Loss* was published, I had what my friend Laurie Foley called “My Summer of Rage.” That summer, Feliks’ screaming for hours on end and erratic behavior would escalate to the point that I was afraid to leave him awake alone while I slept. So I didn’t sleep. That June, [the Charleston massacre](#) happened, spurring me to create in a week what would become “Hard Conversations: An Intro to Racism and Its Undoing,” a five-week online class now in its 6th year. Over 3,500 people signed up for that first class, and I was both teaching and administering the class alone. I was so sleep-deprived that I began hallucinating. Feliks was still raging for five and six hours a day. I felt at every moment of his screams that if I didn’t stop myself, I might bash my head into the wall to make it stop. We kept the windows closed all summer to try to dampen his screams so the neighbors wouldn’t call the police.

In September of that year, I held my Life is a Verb Camp in California and sobbed every time I took the stage, I was so exhausted and sleep-deprived. I ate Tums by the handful, unaware that what I thought was indigestion was a 97% blocked “widow-maker” artery to my heart, which would cause my heart attack a few months later. But before that heart attack, I would stumble and fall hard onto my forehead on the first day of a writing retreat I was leading, leaving me with a concussion, and later with double vision, then vertigo. I continued the retreat. Because isn’t that what one does?

It was a shitstorm of a few years. And in those years, I somehow wrote and published three books, I gave speeches, I held retreats, online classes, and Camps. After my heart attack, I told someone I felt my body had betrayed me. She kindly asked if, instead, my body was simply providing me with an important message.

We go and we go and we go when we are exhausted, burned out, afraid, disappointed, disillusioned until we get the message that we must slow down. I wonder what would happen if we slowed down before that message came, before the fall, the heart attack, the sudden death?

“We are the competent ones. We are the ones who carry on, who become stoic instead of hysterical, the ones who shoulder a weight like it is nothing, nothing at all. We are the ones who make it right for everyone, who don’t say no if you need help but almost always say no to ourselves.” -Patti Digh

And so, on this fifth anniversary week of my heart attack, I am asking myself two questions:

1. What can I lay down and never pick up again?
2. What would saying “yes” to myself look like in this moment?

What do you need to lay down? Please, lower your bar. Lighten your load.

LINKS YOU MIGHT ENJOY

I found this fascinating. It’s about [“flashbulb memories.”](#) (Thanks for sharing it with me, Julie).

This is [one of my favorite poems](#) by one of my favorite poets.

If you don’t already know about musician [Jacob Collier](#), you simply must.

Cicely Tyson was a Queen whose life meant so much. Her memoir was published two days before her death at 96 yesterday. The cover of her memoir is just stunning. [And she was active to the end.](#)

I LOVE CO-LEARNING - HERE ARE SOME UPCOMING CLASSES

COMING SOON! My son, Feliks, and I are developing a two-week writing class that will begin in March. He's an amazing writer and I am so excited to create this with him. Watch this spot for updates! If you want to be sure to hear about it when registration opens, text me at 828-248-7513 with "WRITING WITH FELIKS" and I'll send info to you before it is announced elsewhere! Registration will be limited.

HARD CONVERSATIONS BOOK CLUB

This ongoing group meets virtually every month to discuss the book for that month. The cost to join is just \$5 *for the year*. We'd love for you to join these monthly conversations that deepen our understanding of racism and other -isms. You can find [more information here](#). Each call is on the third Sunday of the month from 8-9pm ET. If you are unavailable at that time, each call is recorded for later listening.

FREE THINGS!

FREE WRITING PROMPTS FOR 2021

Do you want to get back to a consistent writing routine in the New Year? I am offering free writing prompts **every Monday-Friday** in 2021. If you'd like to receive them, you can do so in either of the following ways:

By text: Text "writing prompts" to me at 828-248-7513 to sign up for free. Your first prompt will arrive via text the day after you sign up (Monday - Friday).

By email: [Go here](#) to sign up for free. Your first prompt will arrive the day after you sign up (Monday - Friday). We added this method because some of you couldn't participate by text. I hope it is helpful!

Stay safe. Double mask.

And I'll see you next Friday from my Orange Desk!

Patti

Sent to: _t.e.s.t_@example.com

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