

## Different Lanes, Same Pool

The other day I took advantage of the free access to recreation centers here in Edmonton and went for a swim. It was wonderful to be in the buoyancy of the water and feel my body move through the



water, swimming back and forth. Almost effortless. It surprised me. It was a heavy day, for me. My body weighed down with grief, my limbs felt a thousand times their weight. I moved slowly, lifting my arm up and over, one kick then the other. Repeat, repeat and repeat. The movement of heavy limbs propelling the body through the water, rhythmically, methodical, almost meditatively. It was purposefully slow. In the weight of sorrow, it was the only speed my body could embrace. The gentle parting of water in that slow motion of

moving limbs seemed to invite me to move at the pace that was mine. My daughter was there that day, too. She was swimming intent on her speed and distance, passing me multiple times. On that day, it did not matter. We were both embraced by the movement we needed; hers fast, mine slow. Both meaningful and purposeful. She in her lane and me in mine. Together, yet separate. One pool, two lanes.

On August 16<sup>th</sup>, folks began to return to Jasper. Until that point, we had all been in the same experience. We were all evacuees. On August 16<sup>th</sup> we began swimming in different lanes. It was bound to happen, not by exclusion, but by the nature of this disaster. Some homes are standing, some are not. Re-entry brought with it an intensity of emotions. I can only write from my perspective as one who lost her home, but I sense for those returning it too was a day fraught with much emotion. As we move into the phases of re-entry/recovery I sense more powerfully this separation of experience, this notion that we are swimming in different lanes now. It is hard. I suspect it is hard for all of us, in different ways and similar ways because, even though we are swimming in different lanes, we are still all in the same pool. We are still the community of Jasper and all of us have been impacted by this wildfire that has caused this separation of community.

I read the stories people have so bravely shared on Facebook, anger, fear, joy, hope. It's all there. I see folks working as hard as possible to get us all back and still it doesn't feel like enough, for any of us. Apart from Jasper, I know my feelings of isolation, of feeling left behind. The sadness that will not be satisfied. I know the longing of those returning to do all they can to have us all return.

On days when the weight of my separation slows me down; when the unbearable weight of the reality of my homelessness wants to crush me, I need to remember that day in the pool. How my daughter and I swam together, side by side, each in our lanes, each in our rhythms yet held together in that one same pool. How the waves of her movements joined the waves of mine.

When I feel separated by our different experiences, I need to remember we are because we are the community. That the waves of my movement join the waves of your movement, and yours join mine. There are days I wake up and wish that all of this could be gone, that in some mystical fairy tale kind of way, I could go back to July 22<sup>nd</sup> and we could have a redo. I wish by some miracle that all of us could be back in Jasper at this very moment, that there were homes enough for all. I hope for that day.

So, for now, when my own emotions are too raw to even touch, I try to remember that the waves of my movement join the waves of your movement, and yours join mine because one day my hope will come true and, on that day, I will want to know that we have all remembered we are still swimming in the same pool. We are a community, together. We are Jasper together. May peace be us.

Rev. Linda McLaren