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September 16, 2019

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I have never been great at remembering jokes, or for that matter, telling them. Mid-joke, I usually think of the punchline, and start giggling way before I get there. My husband, Dan, often tells me that it is nice to see that I crack myself up. He says at least one person appreciates my sense of humor, even if it is just me.

The only joke I seem to recall easily is this one: There is this farmer, and he is working out in his fields, and a big storm rolls over and lightning strikes his house, then his barn, then his silo, and everything he owns is on fire. He looks up at the sky and yells, "God, why is this happening to me?" and a deep voice booms down, "Something about you just ticks me off."

Perhaps I remember this particular one because this is so often how life feels. We never seem to get to handle one challenge at a time. Troubles invariably come in clusters. This is when I recall that joke, and do my best to laugh, and mumble, "All is right with the world," and just keep going.

But when we are in the middle of what feel like back-to-back catastrophes, I find myself tempted to indulge in wee pity parties. I get tired, and sore, and feel overwhelmed, imagining there must be some cosmic target painted on the top of my head that makes some trickster angels in the sky giggle and see what else they can toss our way. However, I have learned that if I give in to even a bit of that self-pity, I can rely on being thumped soundly on the head by God and the universe. And rightly so.

For example, we have had a fairly tumultuous summer. At the end of July, I was the driver of the third car in a chain-reaction pile-up on our local highway. The good news is that our adult disabled son, Nick, (31) who was in the front seat with me, and our granddaughter, Mary, (4) who was asleep in her car seat in the back, were just fine. The not-so-good news is that I sustained whiplash and our car was totaled.

For at least a month afterwards, every time I closed my eyes, I would relive the accident: the body-tensing feeling of literally standing on the brakes trying to stop in time, which I didn't; the slow-motion replay of the moments before the impact, wondering what else I should have done to avoid the crash; the heart-dropping, breath-holding, gut-hurting imagining of what might have happened, a slideshow of horrific, gory could-have-beens.

Then at the end of August, the water main on the highway above our home ruptured, sending two muddy rivers around our house, creating lakes in our front and backyards, and flooding into our basement.

As we started gunking out all the water and mud and leaves and gravel from our first floor and yard, I found myself first pouting, but then remembered that joke. As much as I was feeling like that farmer in the punchline, I could not truly feel sorry for myself, especially as compared to the terrible traumas being experienced by so many in our world right now.

My son and granddaughter were fine — sassy as ever, oblivious to what might have happened in our car accident — while so many families have lost children and other beloved ones to gun violence, to war, to hunger, to disease in recent days. We had adequate car insurance to help restore us to normal, whereas there is no filling the holes left in those families' lives, no way to ever be normal again.

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And while our house was deluged for a short while under mud and debris, Hurricane Dorian devastated the Bahamas, leveling structures and forever changing those people's lives. As of this writing, there are at least 43 confirmed dead and hundreds still missing. Those families may eventually clean up and rebuild their homes and businesses, but their lives are forever altered by this tragedy. While our brief flood was an inconvenience, the winds and high waters of Dorian were life-changers. Point forward, those people will recall their histories as split in two: before the hurricane, and after the hurricane.

As I sip my coffee and watch the morning news, I feel both deep compassion for them and huge gratitude for our relative comfort and safety. I still have a sore neck and some PTSD while driving, and there are unfinished repairs around here. But these do not even come close to what people affected by hate-incited gun violence or global-warming-ignited super storms have endured, and have yet to suffer. There is no joke that can offer them a moment of self-deprecating perspective, no quick answer that will be a balm to their pain.

Consider my head thumped, God, and please show me what I can do to help.

[Amy Morris-Young graduated from and taught writing at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.]

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