

# SUNSET

**Andrea Bright**

---

Death is really quite final. If you have experienced the death of a friend or family member, there is no going back. You know how life is going to look from here onward: that person just isn't ever again going to be in your life in the physical sense. Eventually you cope or get used to it. Eventually you remember you can't pick up the phone and call them. Sometimes you can still talk to them but they just don't respond; you just hope that if they are on the 'other side' they hear your conversation! Losing someone is always hard, but what I think has been equally hard in a different way is when a husband calls and tells you he has just lost his job.

Nothing quite prepares you for that. It seems that within days of people finding out, you begin to notice that your phone never rings. Your friends are unavailable. The office never calls, the emergency situations no longer happen at 4 p.m. on Friday, or dinnertime! Eventually you realize that the only people who are really affected by this horrible situation are the two of you and your children!

Suddenly the stressed executive is at home all day every day, stressing even more but in a different way. He doesn't want to be disturbed but he'd like a cup of coffee. You can't imagine what it's like for him now being home 24/7 but you know for you there is this horrible taste in your mouth and a knot in your stomach that doesn't seem to go away! You've lost five pounds and it's only been a week since he's been home.

What makes it worse is that you did what you thought would be best for his career. You took an ex-pat assignment. The company promised him all sorts of wonderful things; after all, you are their largest investment. Your rent is probably twice his monthly salary and your other ex-pat expenses don't even match his yearly bonus. So you must be of great importance to them. They would never think of letting you go. You are a gold mine to them. They put in the infrastructure and on your return they plan to reap the benefits by picking your brain of what you learned for them! They have kept you out in the field for years for them and them only! So of course they will keep you on. In fact your manager even tells you that they need you to do the job for another year, but headquartered in the US. You believe them. After all, you have been with them for 14 years.

So it's time to come home after seven years on the road and like good little lambs you do so. Everyone is nervous: the dot coms are losing millions a day and they refuse to give you business class tickets home, which would have eased the

trauma of the long flight home with children. So much for treating your top people well! It takes two months to get into your five-year rented out house because your personal belongings are stuck in a wharf strike. But you are glad this has happened because the tenants trashed the house and many repairs need to be made! No sooner do you get back into the house and before you even have a chance to unpack, your husband calls to tell you he's been laid off.

It's not just the layoff that upsets you, it's also how the VP does it. He tells your husband on a Friday that he wants to meet the next Wednesday to follow up on an issue. They meet early Wednesday, the boss says come to his office, and the sacrificial lamb follows. The door opens and he sees Human Resources sitting there – he knows what it is about. Nothing is said, a package is pushed across a table, and the only words spoken are 'your position has been terminated.'

Well it's nearly a year to the date and that sinking feeling in my gut has come back again. Is it fear his new company will let him go or is it just a memory of the past creeping up inadvertently. Does your mind play tricks on you with an internal alarm clock that goes off saying 'anniversary?'

In many ways, a layoff is worse than death. As I said earlier, death is final. But a layoff is not death, as there is no beginning and there is no end. There seems to be no future. It's totally the unknown. Your business friends can't help you. Your old colleagues don't return calls. Your boss denies it was a deliberate act taken because you didn't get on with someone he now had to 'sleep' with in the company! Your family is worried for you. You are depressed; the future looks so black. You are calling people you haven't spoken to in years. You feel like you permanently wear a sign 'unemployed, need work.'

Your wife is offered a job at a store. You suggest she take it even though it is not what you want but you figure every bit will help. You ask the school for assistance and you start making small economies like turning lights off whenever you leave a room. You are now careful with every penny you have after being encouraged by your former employer to live lavishly as a favoured family.

Every day you apply for work at different companies or through different websites. The black hole takes those big files and sends them into 'lala land' never to be seen again and often never to be heard of again. However, you manage to get some interviews and make it past the first few. How interviewing has changed since you have held such a choice position and here you are on a never-ending interview road! Finally the logjam breaks and you are hired.

Unlike most in the valley after a short six months, which seemed like a long six months, you are gainfully employed again. Your bitterness towards your old company has waned but you feel disappointment in how corporate America treats its

successes. After all, at one stage you were responsible for millions of dollars for the great company you once worked for. You have been touted as the ‘China Expert’... the ‘Asia Pacific Guru.’ You opened up the East for their company. You were IT. You ate, breathed and lived for them. Your one child has a hearing loss because of the constant illness related to being in China. Your other has separation issues undoubtedly caused largely by the fact that you were away 80 per cent of the time. Nothing has prepared you for this re-entry into America.

With any upset at your new position, you waver, in case it might happen again. You know you are vulnerable; you fear the worst. You are never ‘settled’ ...you can never truly be settled again. Your wife decides to work full-time just to have benefits should something happen to your job. Health care is your killer with a huge amount going to COBRA, to hedge your bets against another job loss. Will your self-confidence ever fully return?

Will that sinking feeling ever go away? It will always be there, just like when you think of a loved one who has died. You remember just how they were; you remember just how it was not to have that secure job any more...

May the Sun set and the Moonrise, bringing with it a new dawn.



*Copyright © 2003 Andrea Bright, All Rights Reserved*