

How **ARE** You?

“How are you,” they say. A casual greeting, tossed off in passing, not really expecting more than a “Fine, thanks, how are you,” or a “good,” or a “great.”

A casual greeting uttered hundreds of times a day—but never casual when asked of a grieving parent.

“How **ARE** you,” they say, stopping, patting your arm, pulling you forward into a sympathetic hug. They squeeze tightly, prolonging the embrace. You gently disengage, appreciating the gesture, the warmth, the validation of your grief, but not sure if you can handle this emotion today.

How am I? Do I really say?

I feel like someone stuck a 10-inch Bowie knife into my chest and ripped away my heart, leaving a hollow, pathetic shell.

How am I?

I feel like I’ve been karate-kicked in the gut with steel-toed cowboy boots.

How am I?

I feel like iron claws are wrapped around my throat, slowly squeezing every breath from my body, until I’m on my knees, gasping, choking, fighting for survival.

“How **ARE** you,” they say. I’m working hard to get through the day without losing my composure so that I can go to work and make a living for what’s left of my family. I’m trying to return some normalcy to my life so I can function like a sane person.

So that I can go to the grocery store and not sob when I walk by my son’s favorite food.

So that I can watch a mother hold her little boy’s hand as they cross the street and not run screaming into the traffic.

So I can laugh when I see a little brother pestering his older sibling.

How am I? You may think I’m avoiding or denying my grief. But grief and I are old acquaintances. We’ve already cried a river together. I’m tired, exhausted and depleted by this relentless emotion. I need to feel normal sometimes...like before...if just for a little while.

“How **ARE** you,” they say. I’m OK. I’m not fine, or good, or great. I’ll probably never be great again. Please don’t ask for more than that if you expect me to function like a human being today.

I’m OK, and that’s enough for now.

Written for Weavings

A support group for mothers