

## THE WAILING TENT

Dear grieving mother,

Welcome to the sisterhood of the wailing tent. With profound condolences, I know you'll soon forget my greeting, for your heart and soul have sustained a terrible blow.

The shock known as "the fog" will accompany you for some time, greatly impacting your memory. So I offer you this written welcome to refer to when your recollection falters.

The wailing tent is an honored place where only mothers with a broken spirit can enter. Admittance is gained not with an ID card bearing your name, but with the fresh sorrow etched on your heart.

Membership is free, for you have already paid the unfathomable price.

Directions to the wailing tent are secret, available only to mothers who speak our language of everlasting grief.

No rules are posted, no hours are noted. There is no hierarchy, no governing body.

Your membership has no expiration date, it is lifelong.

The refuge offered within its walls does not judge members based on age, religious belief, or social status. Hang your mask outside, and if you can't make it past the door, we will surround you with love right where you lay.

The wailing tent is a shelter where mothers shed anguished tears among her newfound sisters. A haven where all forms of wailing are honored, understood, and accepted.

In the beginning, you will be very afraid, and will hate the wailing tent and everything it stands for. You will flail, thrash about, and spew vile words in protest. You will fight to be free of the walls, wishing desperately to offer a plea bargain for a different tent, learn a different language. Those emotions will last for some time.

Your family and friends cannot accompany you here. The needs of the wailing tent are invisible to them. Though they'll try, they simply cannot comprehend the disembodied, guttural howls heard within.

In the beginning, your stays here will seem endless. Over time, the need for your visits will change and eventually you will observe some mothers talking, even smiling, rather than wailing. Those mothers have learned to balance profound anguish with moments of peace, though they still need to seek refuge among us from time to time.

Do not judge those mothers as callused or strong, for they have endured profound heart-ache to attain the peace they have found. Their visits here are greatly valued, for their hard-earned wisdom offers hope that we, too, will learn to balance the sadness in our hearts.

Lastly, you need not flash your ID card or introduce yourself each time you visit, for we know who you are. You are one of us, an honorary lifelong sister of the wailing tent.

Welcome, my wailing sister.

LYNDA CHELDELIN FELL (2014)