Enough

I always wanted to have *at least enough* in my life. I remember so many times, especially the years between Mom’s separation from husband number two and into the years of her marriage with husband number three when I was “still under their roof,” when there were more times when life’s inadequacies were greater than its “enoughs.” When Number Two left us and we sometimes ran out of money before the next paycheck, there was frequently not enough coal for our furnace, not enough warmth in our drafty little house, and not enough time for Mom to pay attention to me after dealing with the various drama that he created in our lives. So, I started writing poetry; I was in fourth grade. And through words, I found a way to have enough to help me get through whatever we were facing.

When we moved into a little trailer in the bottom corner of Mamaw and Papaw Little’s farm in fifth grade, we were still on our own and, although our overall situation seemed much improved, there was still empty space at various times – not enough to eat before the next paycheck was issued, not enough light when we first moved in and had no electricity for the first month because we just couldn’t afford to have it yet, and never enough of my mom left over from her full-time job at a department store to do much with me because the struggle of being a single parent took a higher toll on her both physically and emotionally than I could ever imagine at the age of eleven. But I received a small radio and was given permission to play records on the big console stereo in the living room. Music and words were my salvation.

When she married Number Three when I was in sixth grade, he promised her that she didn’t have to work so hard anymore. He promised her that we would be fine financially. He promised to take care of us. That’s when I learned that security sometimes carries a big and long-lasting price tag. Because then there was never enough understanding, enough patience, enough love (not lordship), to carry over to me. I was embarrassed by things like free lunches, his rules and hostility towards my friends, and the way he demeaned both my mother and me. I retreated further and further into a world of writing and pop music, constructing improvised worlds where there was always enough, and often, a luxurious overspill, more than enough of whatever I thought a twelve-year-old could need then and last into adulthood.

Even after my sister was born when I was thirteen, I saw that he made sure there was plenty for her, but I still stood out in the cold – quite literally some nights, because I was tired of bowing to his unrealistic expectations for me to do everything – clean house, take care of the baby, keep my room neat, not talk on the phone so much to my friends, keep up my grades when I wasn’t allowed enough time to finish assignments and had to resort to finishing homework on the school bus and on the front steps before school every day of my high school life. I was never enough to please him, and not usually enough to please Mom, either, and that led to a darkness that is still difficult to describe. I found friends who could give me rides to and from practices, joining choir and being in school plays, anything dealing with words and music – those were my safe spaces where I could be anyone and anything I wanted to be with no demands or expectations from the people who controlled my life during those years.

Many years after leaving home after college, there were times when there was still not enough – mostly not enough money, not enough time to work two or three jobs to make ends meet, and not enough sanity left at the end of the day to feel like I wanted to get up the next morning and do it all again. For the first time in my life, there wasn’t enough of *me*. And although my love affair with music never waned, I quit writing for a very long time. The part of myself that needed to be creative shut down, buried deep under all the things that life demanded me to be.

Fast forward a lot of years and a lot of situations, and I’ve been married to a wonderful man (which I never imagined I would find, much less marry) for twenty-one years. Is it a perfect life? No, it’s not perfect. But through years of building and shifting and learning to keep going no matter what, I’ve reached a point in life where I can finally say, and mean it fully, “I have more than enough.” Even more importantly, though, I have learned to accept and be proud of the fact that what needed to happen all along was self-acceptance: not only do I *have* at least enough, but finally I *am* enough.