

Grief and Challenges and Gifts of Winter

By Linda Lehmann, MA, LP

“In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible spring.” Albert Camus

The winter months offer unique challenges to your grief because it can be a time of heightened sadness and despair. Perhaps the holiday season was a distraction from the important work of grief and once it passed your grief was still there waiting for you. Or, perhaps the holidays were something to be endured only to face the lonely days and long nights of January that remind you how unending grief really is. There is awareness that you are beginning a new year without the physical presence of your child in your life. Time may seem altered. You may feel like your child just died yesterday or a long time ago.

Indeed wintertime can challenge you in many ways, but most especially your grief. Winter isolates. Spring is nowhere in sight. People scurry into their houses and into buildings to avoid the cold. There is not the everyday contact that you have with others during the warmer seasons as you stroll through your neighborhood, pick up your mail, and chat with your neighbors.

Winter brings a stretch of time with no holidays that bring families and others together in fellowship. The sun sets early and rises late, which only intensifies the *cabin fever of your grief*. You may seek comfort from the cold with warm blankets, fires, candlelight, and hearty food. But you also need comfort from the iciness of your grief. Others may not recognize how difficult these months can be and thus may not reach out to you in ways that you need. You may feel alone, isolated, forgotten.

But winter can also be a gift. It calls upon you to insulate yourself by traveling inward to explore the depth and breadth of your grief. This work you must do alone. You can ask for help and support but ultimately it requires you to dig down deep inside of yourself to find out what you are made of and to discover that part of you that remains unaltered even though you may feel completely altered.

You can do this in a variety of ways:

- Read books about grief or books that inspire and comfort you
- Write in a journal to record your journey and honor it
- Spend time with your child who died. Talk to him or her. Write to your child. Light a candle and allow yourself to recall him or her in your heart and soul
- Allow yourself to cry if you need to
- Get lots of rest. Grief is a full time job and exhausting
- Spend time in silence
- Go outside and allow the elements of winter remind you that you are still alive, even though you may feel dead inside

And then comfort yourself in these ways:

- Surround yourself with things that stimulate your senses to overcome the harshness of these cold months.

Tantalize your taste buds
Listen to great music
Take a bubble bath or long shower
Find pleasing lotions that moisten your dry skin
Light a candle
Buy fragrant flowers or potpourri to smell
Get a massage

And then:

- Find ways to reach out to others who need what only you can give them
- Learn something new. Find a hobby. Stimulate your mind, expand your horizons
- Order seed catalogs. Plan what you will plant this spring in either your garden or a pot that will help you to reconnect with what life has to offer you
- Look forward to spring and what the next part of your journey will teach you about life and about yourself. You cannot escape your grief, so honor it. Remember the depth of your grief is equal to the depth of your love for your child

Winter can indeed be a challenging time for your grief. But allow winter to gift you as well as you discover what Camus called an “invincible spring.”

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