

Healing with Haven

January 2008

Surviving the Winter Gloom

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By Darcie D. Sims, Ph.D., CHT, CT, GMS

Why does January seem so empty? Just as the world is stiff and frozen outside my window, I feel dead and cold and scattered inside myself. I managed to make it through the holiday season, though the hows of that feat are truly beyond my recollection. I can't even remember eating the holiday meals. (I do, however, remember doing the dishes—again and again and again. Next year we are eating out or on paper plates!)

In those glittering days, I managed to smile and even to find a few moments of peace and joy. But here in the gloom of winter, all I seem to see are the scattered pieces of my life, cast before me on the card table, waiting for me to pick them up and make the picture. But what picture do all these pieces form? I used to think I knew. I used to know who I was and where I was going and how I was going to get there. But now, now in the chill of winter, I can't even remember where the puzzle begins and I end.

I think I'm still grieving, and that surprises me! It's been too long (regardless of the time frame you insert) and I should be getting better. Why do I still ache from the sunburn I got years ago when we were together on the beach? Why is there still sand in my shoes and why does your name still stick in my throat? Who am I now that the memories grow cold in the winter's chill?

Am I still a mother if there is not a child to tuck in at night? Am I still a dad if there is no one to loan the car keys to? Am I still a wife if there is no one to snuggle up to in my bed? Am I still a husband if there is no one waiting at home for me at the end of the day? Am I still a sister or a brother if there is no one to tease? Am I still a child if my parent has died? Am

I still a human being, capable of loving and being loved, if the one person I love more than anything became frozen in time? Who am I now that my loved one has died?

The gloom has permeated even my toes, and my whole body seems icy. Why can't January be warm and gentle—especially after the struggle of the holidays? I need some sunshine, some warmth, some help in turning over the puzzle pieces and putting them back together. I need some spring.

But spring is a ways off and I must (somehow) get through these days. If you're feeling like I am, perhaps these few

suggestions will help you find the pieces in your new puzzle.

Identify specific feelings. Do not generalize. Try to figure out exactly what is bothering you. Look for the tiny grains of sand that are still hiding in the bottom of your shoes. Acknowledge them. Be honest with those feelings, whatever they are. If you're angry, be angry. If you're sad, be sad. Be specific in your sadness.

Pick your

worries. Focus on only one worry at a time. Give up being worried about being worried. Prioritize your worries. This helps combat feelings of being overwhelmed and you can decide which worries to keep and which to send to your:

- 1) mother
- 2) children
- 3) family
- 4) neighbor
- 5) enemy

Keep a picture or two of the sand castle where you can enjoy it every day. You may decide not to make a shrine out of your memories, but don't lose the joy that you



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had in making that marvelous moat! Keep the sand you found in the shoe-you just don't have to keep it there! That's what memories are for-a place to stash the important stuff that we need.

Become as informed and as knowledgeable as possible about this new world in which you live. We fear what we don't know, what we can't see, what we can't touch. Read, listen and learn all you can about grief. It's not where you planned on being this winter, but it is where you are. Look around.

Listen to everyone. You will receive enough advice about how to do it (grief) to sink a fleet of battleships. Be grateful. At least someone is talking with you! But, follow your own music.

Be kind to yourself. You survived the holiday season, and now it is the beginning of another season, another way of living. Learn to forgive yourself for living.

Set small goals first; accomplish them. Then, set bigger goals. Try starting with getting the garbage out on the right day. Then, open the closet, the drawers and the heart. Try going out. The next time you might be able to get farther than the drive-way. Take your time. It's a long way to the beach. You'll get there again—someday.

Remember that life requires effort on your part. Make friends with the vacuum, the checkbook and the car. Become determined to learn to remove the box before microwaving the dinner. Don't wait for happiness to find you again. Make it happen. Build another sand castle, maybe on a different beach this time. Don't lose the memories just because they hurt. Look at the pictures, listen to the song

and remember the love— you haven't lost that. How could you possibly lose the love you shared?

Keep turning the puzzle pieces over. But don't keep trying to put them back into the same picture. That picture is gone. There is a new picture to be made of those scattered pieces. Search for that scene. Search for the new you. Search for the new person you are becoming.

Don't forget how to dream, how to laugh, how to dance. The music is different but so is the season. The room may be empty, but the heart is not. The spirit may be filled with sand, but the shoes remember the steps. One day at a time is okay if you can manage it, but know that some days all you can manage is one minute at a time. But minutes add up to years, eventually, and each grain of sand adds to the strength of the castle. Build the sand castle again, if only in your memory. Just because it's January, doesn't mean the beach is closed forever. Build your new castle in the middle of winter. Find the new occupant—the new you.

Be gentle this winter season. Turn the pieces over slowly, experiencing each piece as a newly found treasure. We can fill our days with bitterness and anger and the picture will never be the same. Or, we can hope for the spring that will surely come if we let it.

I know there are good things on the horizon. Winter can't last forever. If those things turn out to be less than we hoped, we will simply have to make whatever we get into something livable. Perhaps that is the secret to melting winter into spring. The challenge is to always carve out something beautiful from the icicle. There is joy in living, if we allow time in the winter to reassemble the thousand-piece puzzle. 🏠

Let Miracles Be

By Harry McDonald, Grand Junction, Colorado

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Two things are striking when hearing the stories of the bereaved: the terrible pain and, quite often, the miracles that follow. Just like heroes that simply state that, they were just doing their job, few people think of themselves as miracle workers. However, they all follow a rule that sets up miracle readiness. You just have to know The Rule. The Rule is: what you give you get.

No one can change The Rule. Everyone uses it whether they want to or not. To make it even easier there are really only two things we can give: one is love and the other is anything that is not love.



In the “not love” camp are such notables as fear, anger, sadness, depression, vengeance, and hatefulness, among others. When we give differently than love, in one way or another we turn into The Destroyer. We have the Midas touch in reverse. Everything we touch turns to ruin. We all have the experience of not reacting ideally when we are under stress, angry or upset.

Nevertheless, what does it mean to “give love”? Love really is unconditional by definition because nothing destroys its positive regard. Conditional love (an oxymoron) is really a bargain offered and struck. It has the, “I'll love you if

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you are beautiful, rich, good, mine, etc.” idea. That actually puts conditional love into the not-love camp. Giving love is actualized by removing judgments. Both conditional and unconditional love can feel good, but only unconditional is lasting. Having no conditions, it has no limits. Being part of the infinite, it is the medium of miracles.

While in the grip of grief, we often feel that to quit grieving will be to forget or to love less, but the death of a loved one can contain the gift of learning to love more completely. That is part of the miracle inspired by offering unconditional love to those we feel have wronged us, or even those we love. True, there are times in our grief that we do not want to hear that, but there are also times when we want to get better and connect more deeply.

If practicing unconditional love sounds a lot like practicing forgiveness that would be right. Beware the impulse to think that forgiveness lets the villain of the hook. Forgiveness is for your sake. Remember that you get what you give.

Observe this paraphrased line from the Lord’s Prayer: Forgive us for what we have thought and done, as we forgive others for what they have thought and done.

In fact, that line from the Lord’s Prayer is actually just

another way of stating The Rule. Since love has no conditions, it is always there, but we have to give it to recognize it. This love is most like a mother’s perfect, unconditional love for her baby. That ideal love totally loses the “I” in favor of the “we”. Taken from us we shrivel and die. Given to us we thrive. Happily, one lesson the miracle teaches is that death is a condition and has no impact on love. Love always transforms us. Therefore, the very first miracle the miracle worker sees is that by giving love, it is remembered and will never be forgotten because we are changed by it. Death loses its sting, as our life becomes a monument to love.

OK, so most of us do not get to that place until we have kicked and screamed for awhile, and then we have to keep working to get back there! It is more of a journey than just a destination. Mostly we move on because we get tired of being The Destroyer. However, since grief is so tiring, it is necessary to know that it is not best to let it be repressed into our unconscious and exhibit as depression or anger. It is best to consciously choose unconditional love, and then keep working at it to deepen it.

We usually need some bridge thoughts to get us from where we are to unconditional love. Bridge thoughts are ideas that helps us shift our thinking into neutral. From neutral, we can then shift to giving love. Some good bridge thoughts to

say or think are:

1. I forgot what to decide about this.
2. I may not have all the fact about how the Eternal views this.
3. Help me to see this differently.
4. This tragedy can be used for good.
5. Say, “Stop!” or “Enough!” to negative thoughts.

Apply any of those bridge ideas to any negative thought. They will make a space, a quiet place in our mind. The miraculous needs our quiet openness. You may not hear a voice or feel the urge to walk on water, but you will be led in applying your willingness! The answer might come in a person, a card, a book, a talk with a friend, a sudden insight, a dream, an unusual occurrence, or any number of ways. They come in a way tailored for us personally that abounds in synchronicity.

If you feel like practicing giving love, I suggest three on-going practices. They are simple, but not easy. The first is to find a way to release all non-love stuff and the judgments that go with them. The bridge thoughts help. Many use prayer and meditation to further the experience. One way that helps me is to use the presence of any strong, negative emotion in me as a red flag or stop sign to change my thinking. We are

always the ultimate victim of our negative thinking. This practice can feel like choosing happiness over being right, but do not be afraid of that. We never really know enough to be truly right. Only the eternal has that distinction.

The second practice is to actively practice thankfulness. Notice all the good around and bless it. Practice gratitude and focus on the good. What you focus on will expand in your consciousness. When reality bites, remember that we get to frame the picture.

The last practice is just to be an active observer of what we are seeing, doing, and feeling.

This is a very powerful skill because it takes us to the place where we actually make decision. You conscious mind can babble about goals all it wants, but if there is not consensus with this deeper self, it will not work. This active observer is very quiet and very powerful. Just tabulating the number of times in a day you have a negative thought will begin to exercise a quiet choice.

The active observer never practices blame. It is just quietly experiencing everything. Granted this takes real practice. Just like we may not believe how a concert pianist can play an advanced concerto as we pluck along with a simple tune, this practice grows. The good news is that even at the most basic levels as we apply The Rule by giving love miracles follow. The payoff is in experiencing, in our own way, that death does not end love, and we are not alone. 🧘



Grief & Loss Seminar Series

The next seminar will be held on February 28th from 3pm-4:30pm @ 2895 Temple Ave, Signal Hill. Light refreshments will be served. For more information please contact Tina Stephenitch at 562-426-7500 ext 406.

Individual/Group Support

As many of you may already know, Haven Hospice offers individual support and group support to all people in the community who are going through the difficult journey of bereavement. For more information on our groups or to make an appointment for individual support please contact Tina Stephenitch, Bereavement Coordinator at (562) 426-7500 ext 406

Make a Difference in Someone's life

Do you have a few hours a week to listen, give support, or assist in the office? Haven Hospice is seeking people who would like to give some of their time visiting patients, helping in the office or doing community outreach. If you are interested in this rewarding opportunity, or know anyone who maybe interested in volunteering their time, please contact Tina Stephenitch, Volunteer Coordinator (562) 426-7500 ext 406 for more information.

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