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{**chapters** *turning the pages through grief*}

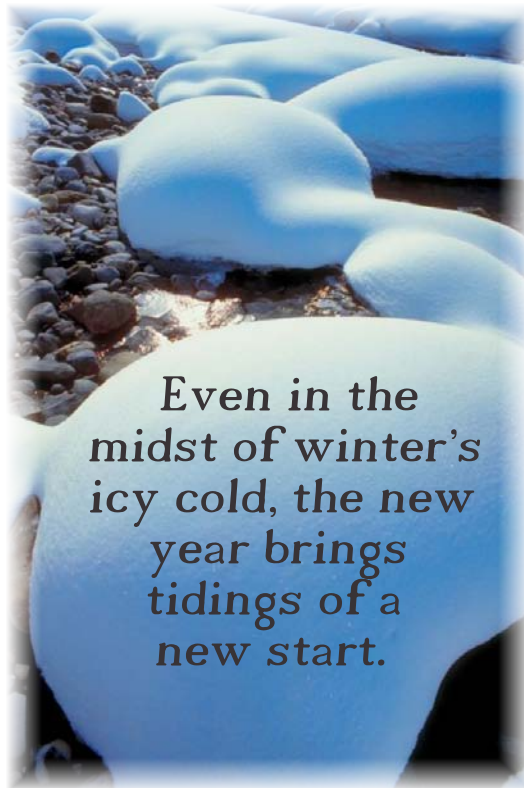
**The Winter of Grief**

The cold days of January can make this an unusually hard time in grief. Short days and long nights make the weeks of grief shuffle by even more slowly than usual. Bad weather tends to keep us indoors more and that can add to the sense of sadness and loneliness this season brings.

But January is also a reminder of new beginnings. Even in the midst of winter's icy cold, the new year brings tidings of a new start. And that is one of the "gifts" of grief—opportunities to ponder where we have been and where we are headed in this new chapter of life. As this year gets underway, here are some important reminders for the winter of grief:

**Write down at least three or four goals you want to accomplish this year.**

Perhaps you'll want to clean a closet, read a book or take a class. Maybe you've considered taking up a new hobby or craft—and 2012 can be the year for beginning! Make sure you take the time over the next few days to write down your ideas and craft them into measurable goals. Instead of saying, "I'm going to read three books this year," write down something specific like, "By March 31, I will read Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities."



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Instead of saying to a friend, "This year I'm going to lose weight," write down a goal such as, "During 2012, I will lose ten pounds to reach a weight of \_\_\_\_." You might also want to think about some specific steps to help you get to your goal. You'll be surprised at how having specific, written plans can change your outlook on life.

**Connect or reconnect with supportive people.**

Whether through a bereavement support group, a faith community or developing a relationship with family members, take time to connect with others. One mistake grieving people sometimes make is to shut ourselves off from other people. Instead, seek to spend some time around the individuals

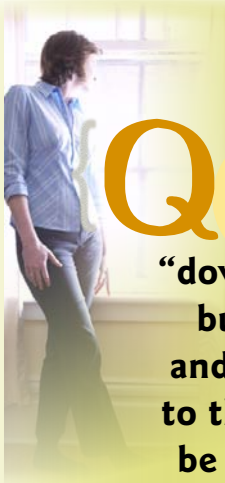
from whom you sense support. Take time to explore your faith and reconnect with your faith community. Be prepared, however, that not everyone in your family or circle of friends is ready to hear all the details of your grief. But

**Continued...**

**January, 2012**

"There are two seasonal diversions that can ease the bite of any winter. One is the January thaw. The other is the seed catalogues."

{Hal Borland}



**Q** The holidays were a real “downer” for me but my friends and family seem to think I should be doing better. Am I okay?

**A** That you are even asking this question indicates you are in a good place coming out of the holidays. If this was your first holiday season in grief—or if your loved one died shortly before the holidays last year—it’s no wonder this season was hard. But also remember that special occasions like holidays and anniversaries can be very hard for many years after a death. These days are filled with sights, sounds, smells, activities, as well as personal and family memories that remind us how much life has changed.

You might want to make a note in your journal or calendar about what you found particularly hard. Think now about the next anniversary or holiday approaching; Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day will be here before you know it! Write down one or two traditional activities you want to continue but also begin thinking of something new. Make a contribution in your loved one’s memory or volunteer to help seniors, children or people living in poverty in your community. Doing something for someone else helps combat the holiday doldrums.

**T**hough certainly not new, Helen Fitzgerald’s three little books are extraordinarily helpful to people in grief. In a little more than 300 pages, *The Mourning Handbook* (Touchstone, 1995) is ideal for people facing any kind of death-related loss and is filled with practical wisdom whether you are grieving the death of your spouse, a sibling, a good friend or a child. Addressing everything from guilt and regrets to anger and family relationships, this book is filled with practical wisdom. Fitzgerald has also written *The Grieving Child: A Parent’s Guide* (Touchstone, 1992) which contains practical ideas for parents and other caregivers as they guide bereaved children through the difficult experience of loss. And her third book, *The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends* (Touchstone, 2000) provides helpful ideas, not only for parents, teachers and coaches but also for teens themselves. All three books provide brief, readable sections of just a few paragraphs each, great for bereaved people who sometimes struggle with long periods of concentration. —B.H.

{bookmarks}

**...continued from front**



we don’t need everyone to listen; we only need someone who will share our stories.

**Take good care of your physical well-being.** Bereavement is highly stressful and can most certainly take an exacting toll on your body. Eating a well-balanced diet filled with fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meat, poultry and fish along with plenty of water is essential to good nutrition. Moreover, make sure you walk, play a sport, or get other regular exercise to strengthen your bones, muscles and cardio-vascular system. If your mobility is limited, a physical therapist can advise you on adaptive exercises that will help increase your physical fitness within your limitations. And by all means, consult your health professional before you make changes to your diet and exercise routines.

While characterized by sadness, winter grief can be filled with opportunities for self-reflection, hope and positive growth. Remember that while none of us chose the grief path we now walk, we do make the choices that can transform our bereavement into opportunities for personal growth leading to a more fulfilled life.

—B.H.

**\*footnotes**

Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop away from you like the leaves of Autumn. —**John Muir**

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