



SNOWFLAKES: SURVIVING THE WINTER SEASON



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Have you ever stood outside, with your head tilted back and your mouth open wide, trying to catch a snowflake? Snowflakes fall everywhere, on your hair, your chin, your eyelashes, even your nose and some even managed to land on the very tip of your tongue, only to vanish before you could really get a taste.

Each snowflake is a completely different design and pattern. No two are ever created exactly the same. It is a mystery that continues to delight “snow catchers” everywhere. There are very few things that can be so lovely, so delicate, so perfect, so different and disappear so quickly, never to be reproduced in exactly the same pattern again.

Sometimes it seems as though people are like that, too. Those we love are so lovely, so delicate, so perfect, so different and they disappeared too quickly, too.

Each of us is as unique as those childhood snowflakes. We each have a unique look, sound, smell, touch. We are cut from unique patterns, assembled in an endless variety of shapes, styles, combinations. We look, sound, talk, think and act differently than anyone else. There are no identical matches just as there are no perfectly identical snowflakes.

We know this, but when it comes to grieving, we demand that everyone grieve the same way. Some of us will talk our way through the iciness of our grief while

others prefer more solitude. Some want to read everything they can about grief while others wish to submerge themselves in work. Some cry endlessly while others never shed tears. We are as unique as snowflakes drifting from the sky.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve, although there are some ways that are a bit less dramatic. Just as the snowflakes find their way to their destination, so too, will each of us find our own way through grief. Frozen hearts and numb minds, do, eventually thaw. Icy memories that chill to the bone can grow warmer as we begin to move through our grief.

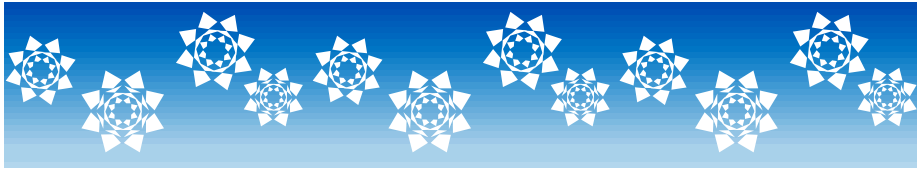
Whatever hurt we are carrying begins to weave itself into our very being and eventually it becomes a part of our history. We begin to become the sum total of all of our experiences. Our unique pattern begins to reflect our unique journey.

We carry souvenirs of our hurts, each stored away until time to add them to the next hurt, thus piling up one hurt after another, all to be carried forever in our being. These hurts leave scars, some big, some small, but all significant in their pain. Each scar must have a place in our being. We become a carefully organized mass of layers, as delicate and intricate and individual as a snowflake.

Sometimes, especially in the early months and even years of grief, all we can remember is the pain and horribleness of our loved one's death. Pain seems to overshadow everything. These shadows seem to make every day harder and in winter, the shadows seem longer, deeper, darker. The snowflakes seem small, less beautiful. The magic of winter's decorations only leaves us cold and barren. If we begin as frozen beings, the journey through grief becomes a process of thawing. And each of us will defrost in a pattern as unique and individual as the snowflakes that drift across the windowpane, leaving little icy streaks of memory on the heart.

So, be patient with yourself this winter season. Recognize your own unique emotions and hurts and learn to identify the tracings of your own snowflakes of grief. You will survive these winter days and this winter season. You will begin to defrost

eventually and it will be far less painful if you will begin to cherish your differences rather than use them as weapons and yardsticks of judgment.



WAYS TO THAW, SURVIVE AND FIND HOPE



BRUSH YOUR TEETH, every morning. No matter what else happens, do that and you are on your way. Just keeping a routine is a way to counteract the craziness. It is a “responsible, adult” thing to do and is a start. Just do it. Your dentist, mother and everyone you encounter will be glad you did.

TAKE OUT THE TRASH. Just get it out of the house. Someday you can try getting it out on the right day.

BE REALISTIC. It will hurt, but don't try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Let those hurting moments come, deal with them and let them go.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF PHYSICALLY. Eat right. Exercise (or at least watch someone else). If nothing else, jog your memory.

LEAVE THE WORD "OUGHT" OUT OF THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

WORK AT LIFT DEPRESSION. Take responsibility for yourself. We cannot wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it to us. We have to do that for ourselves. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat occasionally.

BUY A GIFT. Buy a gift for yourself. Wrap it, but don't hide it! Just when you think you are going “off the deep end”, open it up and enjoy. While you are buying a gift for yourself, buy one for your loved one as well. Wrap it up and give it

away to someone who might not otherwise have a gift. Pass on the love you shared together and it can never die.

BREATHE. In and out. In and out. It's that simple and that hard. Some days just breathing is all you can manage. Other days it's a bit easier so relax and enjoy those moments when you can remember your loved one's life instead of focusing only on the death.

HANG THE STOCKINGS, PLACE A WREATH ON THE GRAVE. Do whatever feels right for you and your family.

MAKE A SNOW ANGEL.

GET OUTSIDE. Catch snowflakes. Build a sand castle. Take a memory walk.

Put something that reminds you of your loved one in your pocket and every time you need a hug, just pat your pocket and recall the loving connection between you. I carry a rock with me always, to remind me of the steadiness, security and sturdiness of his love. I've carved the word HOPE on that rock so I won't forget what hope is all about. Hope isn't a place or a thing. Hope isn't the absence of pain, or sadness or sorrow. Hope is possibility. Hope is the memory of love given and received.

Surviving really isn't too hard. Living can be. No matter how crazy the world or out of "sync" you feel, don't lose the treasure of your loved one's presence in your life. You don't have to say good-bye. You don't stop loving someone just because he died.

Claim your grief and your unique way of surviving. Do whatever it takes to remember the life of your loved one, not just the death.

Each footprint is unique, each hurt is different, each snowflake the only one ever created. Your love is real, just as is your pain. But leave the regrets behind in

the slush. Bring the joy of loving with you into this holiday season. Let its memory light your world. Our loved ones died, but we did not lose them.



Time and space become meaningless for us. The bonds between us are too strong to let death sever the ties. So light a candle and whisper a THANK YOU for the moments you traveled together. Our arms may be empty, but the heart is full. And every time you see a snowflake or just imagine one, remember to cherish its unique design and pattern...and to cherish your unique footprint through grief.

