8 REASONS WHY WINTER IS THE WORST (FOR GRIEVERS)

What’s cold, icy, really uncomfortable, and sometimes makes you sad? Gosh darn winter, that’s what.

You can spare me your affinity for skiing, fresh fallen snow and curling up by a warm fire because I will swiftly counter with wet socks, slush, and lack of sunlight. Sure winter has its moments, but for some its short days and bone chilling temperatures are enough to push you over the edge.

This may be especially true for many of you who have to suffer the indignities of winter while also trying to cope with your grief. Grief is an emotional tundra and then winter comes along and paints the landscape frigid and grey to match your mood. Winter can exacerbate the troubles grievers are already vulnerable to like isolation, depression and poor self-care.

Perhaps I’m biased because I’ve been stuck inside the house with kids and a naughty puppy for 100 weeks, but I’m going take the next few minutes to espouse all the reasons why winter is the worst, especially for grievers.

1. Lack of Sunlight
A lack of sunlight, or the length of the night in some cases, can cause an increase in melatonin and a drop in the neurotransmitter serotonin and Vitamin D. All of this can throw your mind and body out of whack and leave you feeling tired, irritable and blue.

Tip: Do what you can to get outside, open the blinds, and hold on until daylight savings time.

2. Cabin Fever
I’ve lived through winter in 3 out of 5 of 2015’s snowiest cities. And then I lived through winter in Maryland, where the slightest threat of ice or snow shuts everything down. Winter has debilitated Baltimoreans and we have spent a lot of time cooped up indoors….together…with little to do…indoors…lots of togetherness.

Cabin fever is not a technical diagnosis but it is a well-documented phenomenon (think early US settlers who spent long winters alone in their cabins). Cabin fever describes a state of restlessness, depression and irritability brought on by spending time in a confined space or remote area.

Where grief is concerned, being stuck inside provides you with ample time to spend ruminating, thinking of your loved one, focused on difficult emotions, and replaying unpleasant memories with little distraction.
**Tip:** It's okay to spend time focused on your grief, but also find constructive ways to occupy your mind like puzzles, movies, games, organizing, home repairs, calling a friend, creating art, or writing in your journal.

3. **Social Isolation**
The predisposition for griever's to withdraw combined with cancelations, problems with transportation, and a desire to avoid the cold and snow can amplify your risk of falling into a cycle of emotional and social isolation. Isolation and loneliness can have a negative impact on your physical and emotional health.

**Tip:** Get out and go to a mall, store, support group, or place of worship. When possible, push yourself to keep plans even if it means braving the cold.

4. **Not moving enough**
You already know that **even a small amount of exercise can have a marked impact on your physical and emotional health.** Obviously in winter your options for getting out and moving around are limited. Snowy roads, icy sidewalks, and the cold make it virtually impossible to find much opportunity for exercise.

**Tip:** Even though taking an hour long walk outside might not be possible, look for alternative opportunities to get at least 20 minutes of exercise a day. Try walking outside for shorter intervals, get an exercise DVD, plan an indoor workout routine, or join a gym.

5. **Poor eating and weight gain**
Thank goodness for bulky sweaters, am I right? **Studies show** that caloric intake tends to increase about 200 calories a day beginning in the fall. The rationale behind this increase is debatable as some researchers believe primitive impulses drive humans to stockpile calories in anticipation of short days and cold weather, while others think there’s just more opportunity to indulge in the winter (holidays, time spent inside, and the nostalgic connections associated with food). Regardless of why you eat, bad food and extra pounds can leave you feeling gross on many levels.

**Tip:** Are you giving yourself permission to eat badly because you’re sad? Are you eating out of boredom? Are you eating certain foods because you associate them with the cold weather or holidays? Do you rationalize that you have time to work off the weight before beach season? Be careful and be mindful of what you’re eating and why.

6. **It’s cold**
That’s all. Being cold is torture.

7. **You’re sad**
For some, the holidays present a storm of grief triggers followed by months of feeling blah (see all of the above). It’s possible that the events of November and December have set you adrift on a long grief wave that won’t recede until the spring thaw.

**Tip:** Believe that things will get better and check out our section on coping with grief.

8. **You’re SAD**
Winter onset seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a subtype of major depression that is characterized by symptoms that emerge in fall or early winter and recede during the spring. These symptoms may start out mild and become more severe and include things like irritability, tiredness or low energy, problems getting along with others, hypersensitivity to rejection, heavy feeling in the arms or legs, oversleeping, appetite changes (craving carbs), and weight gain. It goes without saying that SAD can complicate one’s ability to cope with grief and other hardship.

**Tip:** If you think you might suffer from SAD read more about it here and talk to your doctor about your concerns.

www.whatsyourgrief.com
DOCTORS SAY YOUR WORD CHOICE CAN HUGELY CHANGE YOUR BRAIN

By Lim Kairen

Be careful because the next word you say could determine how your day is, or the rest of your life might pan out. Doctors at Thomas Jefferson University explained that the choice of our words could actually have more impact on our lives than we actually think. Think the words of “I can’t”, “I won’t” or “it’s tough”, are harmless? Use them long enough and it will literally change your brain and here’s why.

Positive words strengthens frontal lobe.

Dr. Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldmen, authors of life-changing book, “Words can change your brain”, wrote that “a single word has the power to influence the expression of genes that regulate physical and emotional stress.” By using more positive words in our daily lives, the areas of our frontal lobes are exercised, making it more effective.

By stimulating frontal lobe activity, you are developing an area that is in charge of telling you what is right from wrong and the ability to override and suppress socially unacceptable responses. As a result of frequent use of positive words, it will then give you the motivation to take charge of your life and your choices.

Negative words increase stress hormones.

So what happens when we use too much negative words? The use of negative words activates the fear response in us which raises the levels of our stress hormones which the Amygdala is responsible for. Too much negativity and we become edgy as the stress hormones take over our body.

Although it might be true that a little stress is good for our bodies, but too much of it can cause many problems to our physical and mental health.

Changing the way we view ourselves and others.

The doctors added further that the use of positive language can start to change the functions of the parietal lobe which is in charge of how we view ourselves and others. With a positive view of ourselves through the use of positive and encouraging words, it will make us lean towards seeing the good in others too.

However, a negative self-image brought about by negative use of language can fill us with suspicion and doubt causing us to be more wary of others which changes the way we behave socially.
The experiment.
Studies were conducted to see whether it is true that using uplifting words can help to rewire our brain and thought processes. A group of adults ranging from age 35 to 54 were tasked to write down three things every day for the next 3 months that make them the happiest and why they chose those three.

Three months into the study and it showed that these adults felt more happy and less depressed. The study was also able to tell us that we are all capable of rewiring our brains to become more positive by focusing on the events that make us happy instead of events that don’t.

**Practical methods of using positive language.**
When we’re angry, there are many times when we use words which we regret using once we cool down. Experts say that this is because when angry words are used, they partially shut down the areas of logic and reasoning located in our frontal lobe. The amygdala which is our center for ‘fight or flight’ responses will then take over. This explains why most of us are not able to think before reacting when we are angry. Some experts term it, ‘amygdala hijacking’.

With the habit of using positive language, we can train our frontal lobes to be more effective even when we’re angry so that we become more logical when dealing with heated situations.

If you are currently unaware of whether you are using more positive words than negative words, start to pay attention to your word choice and write them down if you can. Also, to put yourself in a more positive frame of mind, try writing down 3 things that makes you happy every day and start to see that positive change in your life.

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After loss our ability to share how we feel is not as easy as it used to be… Sharing our truth after a loss becomes an internal experience.
You are not aware of this at first, because you do still externalize the loss to those around you as you are in a mourning period. But what is taking place is a new type of withholding. You start to withhold some of your emotions. The separation between your old life, the friends, everything you had begins with this partial withholding of how distraught you feel.

You cry. You share. You tell them how horrible this feels but yet you know they don’t really understand the magnitude of your pain. You start to keep things to yourself more and more after loss.

Ultimately within the first 3 months when people ask you the very important question, “How are you doing?” you respond with “I am doing ok I suppose” or “I am hanging in there.”

And that is when the biggest emotional separation sets in.

When everything is different inside of you but everything looks the same on the outside. You walk around holding onto two worlds, two different emotional states, two different facial expressions.

The months go by and you start to get used to operating with this duality.

You have one person inside of you and another person on the outside. You learn how to process really difficult experiences on your own. You learn to rely on yourself more and more. You learn how not to share and get away with it. You learn the ultimately alone life experience. Where you are surrounded by people who only know the you they see and not the you that was created after loss.

Last weekend I had two of my very good friends fly all the way to San Francisco from Boulder Colorado and New York to surprise me. We had an amazing 24 hours together and for the first time in many years I shared an experience I have held internally within my own emotional processing system. I just blurted it out. You can imagine how surprised I was. I was completely taken aback by this as I am the ultimate dual emotional experiencer.

Over the years I learned how to cope on my own. And I became too good at it.
As I think about the last weekend I realize that maybe after a whole decade of processing on my own maybe finally my two selves that operated throughout all these years are trying to integrate into one.

Maybe I no longer need to process the big scary things on my own. But letting go of all the mechanisms that we created to survive after loss is not as simple as it may sound. All the different pieces of us are trying to come back to life at different times and at a different pace.

Some never make it back. And some make it back many years later in the midst of living life again.

As we go forward slowly and very carefully we need to find a way towards moments of vulnerability where once again we come to a single emotional experience and are able to rely on others when we are going through something difficult.

Even though I am so proud of us for being able to process so much internally and survive the losses we have experienced, I would rather we found our way back to sharing our most difficult and scary moments with a friend.

“A very deep healing can take place when we share with others, the type we cannot give to ourselves.” ~ Christina Rasmussen www.secondfirsts.com

AJT GOES GLOBAL!

I Want to Let You Know

Hello, Respected Mrs. Kathy Corrigan and Members of the Board of Directors of the Bereaved Parents of the USA:

I want to let you know that my name is Hao Wang and I am a bereaved father in Shanghai, China, who lost my beloved only daughter. Like all bereaved parents in the world, I have experienced the extremely difficult emotional journey after losing my beloved daughter.

I want to let you know that in Shanghai there are many families like mine who lost their only child due to various causes. These bereaved parents are in great need of emotional comfort.

I want to let you know that in Shanghai and other regions in China, people from different fields are trying various ways to help these deeply wounded hearts.

I want to let you know that on July 6th of this year, a digital publication called Xingaiyuan was created to serve bereaved parents in Shanghai and other regions in China. “Xing” (star) represents our lost children who are like the twinkling stars in night sky, beautiful and never disappearing; “Ai” (love) means our everlasting love for our children; and “Yuan” (garden) symbolizes the beautiful place that our children are living. I serve as the founder and editor of Xingaiyuan.

I want to let you know that the creation of the digital publication Xingaiyuan was deeply inspired by A Journey Together.

I want to let you know that the founding of Xingaiyuan has received very precious support from Dr. Lihong Shi, the Chinese scholar and assistant professor of Anthropology from Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. She built a bridge between your organization and bereaved parents in Shanghai. Her kindness, compassion, and a sense of social responsibility have been highly regarded by bereaved parents in Shanghai. She is the pride of the Chinese people!

I want to let you know that through the introduction of Dr. Lihong Shi, I have been corresponding with the former editor of A Journey Together Mr. Richard Berman. I have been deeply touched by the understanding, compassion, and care from Mr. Berman to bereaved parents in Shanghai, expressed in his letters; and I have been greatly
benefited from his wise words, profound knowledge, rich experience of writing and editing, and valuable advice. On behalf of Xingaiyuan and its readers, I would like to express my deep respect and heartfelt gratitude to him.

I want to let you know that, on July 26, the board of directors of the BP/USA 100% approved that Xingaiyuan could use some words from the credo of the BPUSA in its online profile and share the essays from *A Journey Together*, which has been very precious support for Xingaiyuan. It will forever be cherished by all bereaved parents in China who are readers of the essays, and your generosity will be forever remembered as friendship and love between the Americans and the Chinese!

I want to let you know that the kind words from Mrs. Kathy Corrigan have been instilled into the hearts of many bereaved parents in Shanghai. We deeply agree with Mrs. Corrigan’s words: The hearts of bereaved parents in the U.S. are bonded with the bereaved parents in China. The bonds of grieving parents transcend miles, language barriers and cultural differences.

I want to let you know that so far, in addition to nine articles from us, Xinghaiyuan has shared the following essays from *A Journey Together*: the credo of the Bereaved Parents of the U.S.A., Practical Advice: Helping Yourself Heal When Your Child Dies (Fall 2014), an introduction on Bereaved Parents of the U.S.A., the first article on the first issue of *A Journey Together* by the then president Joe Rousseau and an essay by the then editor Betty Ewart (Fall 1995), What I Wish More People Understood about Losing a Child (Fall 2015), Hero (Fall 2014), Do You Know They Were Bereaved Parents (Spring 2015), To Vacation or Not to Vacation (Summer 2014), Guilt, If Only...If Only...If Only... (Spring 2008), The Myth of Perfect Parenthood (Fall 2006), and Finding Magic (Winter 2014). We will continue to post every essay from *A Journey Together* with honor and gratitude and share the stories of the authors.

I want to let you know that these essays by bereaved parents expressed thoughts and emotions of the long and difficult grief journey; they expressed the authors’ fear, confusion, anger, guilt, frustration, and even hopelessness; they revealed the authors’ perseverance in pursuit of hope in life; they showed the possibility to move on with life demonstrated by the authors’ actions; and they revealed ways in which the authors honored their children’s lives, shared the joy and success in their children’s lives, and their everlasting love for their children. After reading these essays, the readers from Shanghai and other parts of China shared similar thoughts and emotions. They not only shed tears and felt deeply touched, but they were also able to release their emotions and receive great comfort. On behalf of all the readers of Xingaiyuan, I would like to express my deep gratitude and respect to all the authors. Please allow me to hold the hands of these authors who have great strength through this letter. Let us hold you tight to our hearts! We express to you our heartfelt gratitude!

Please allow me to once again express my deep respect and profound gratitude to Mrs. Kathy Corrigan, members of the board of directors, all contributors of *A Journey Together*, Mr. Richard Berman, and Dr. Lihong Shi! As has been expressed by *A Journey Together*, let us cross the vast Pacific Ocean with our hearts and walk the journey together!

With great love and respect,

Hao Wang
Founder and Editor of Xingaiyuan
2016.11.28

“One of the tasks of true friendship is to listen compassionately and creatively to the hidden silences. Often secrets are not revealed in words, they lie concealed in the silence between the words or in the depth of what is unsayable between two people.”

*John O’Donohue, Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*
THE ONGOING WORK OF COPING WITH LOSS
By Sarah Lyman Kravits, BPUSA Sibling Coordinator

Would that the work of grieving were more like shoveling snow...

This past weekend brought the biggest snowfall of the winter so far, about 4-5 inches, for the area where I live. On Saturday afternoon I spent an hour shoveling snow off our large driveway (large because it used to serve as a parking lot, put in for the medical office of a podiatrist house years ago).

Snow continued to fall while I house damp and trembling a exertion. However, I have to snow shoveling.

And maybe they are right, but it me there is something so about snow shoveling, so the shovel with snow and dump action over and over, and each cleared away. Gradually you driveway. Your steady effort

I wish the work of grieving were more like snow shoveling.

Grieving is painful, relentless, daily work, and as I do this work, the hardest I’ve ever had to do, I look for results. However, this work doesn’t necessarily bring the gratification – whether the immediate or the delayed sort – we may expect. As we do this challenging work, often unable to see how it helps, we may even feel worse at times. Then we wonder what we are doing wrong. We wonder what we are not doing that we should be doing. Life doesn’t feel easier, safer, or better, and we may wonder if the work is worth it.

Perhaps the work of showing up to grief day after day, in whatever form it presents itself, more closely resembles the act of tooth brushing. Although most of us brush our teeth, we generally don’t see mind-blowing results from it on a daily basis, and for that reason we may not realize how important it is. However, the importance becomes startlingly clear if we stop. Over time, dangerous mouth and gum damage can appear, bringing severe pain, unmanageable costs, and even related health crises such as heart disease. Likewise, avoiding or putting off the work of grieving can lead to all kinds of challenges – mental and physical health issues, emotional struggles, relationship difficulties.

When we can’t see or feel the potential future consequences of something done or not done, we tend to lose motivation. The absence of terrible damage is not as compelling as the presence of tremendous success. But I imagine anyone who has had to suffer that terrible damage, the damage that comes from avoidance, would have a message for us. Please, brush your teeth every day, you don’t want to end up in pain as I have. Please, do the work of grieving every day, you don’t want to end up feeling as I do.

I guess grieving resembles snow shoveling in one particular way: There will always be another opportunity to do it. Even as I enjoy the results of this weekend’s shoveling, I know that I’m only finished for a time. As long as I’m alive on this earth, there will always be another snowstorm to shovel out from, and there will always be another day without my brother, a day that brings grief work to do.

So I try to do the work. I try to meet grief every day and ask it, what’s today’s assignment? It’s an open-ended commitment, fueled by a fragile trust that doing the work will help me more than not doing it. Even if I can’t yet see and feel the results I hope for.

“My sister will die over and over again for the rest of my life. Grief is forever. It doesn’t go away; it becomes a part of you, step for step, breath for breath. I will never stop grieving Bailey because I will never stop loving her. That’s just how it is. Grief and love are conjoined, you don’t get one without the other. All I can do is love her, and love the world, emulate her by living with daring and spirit and joy.” – JANDY NELSON, bereaved sibling
BPUSA thanks you for your generous donations!
Together we are making a difference...

Bj Jensen San Diego - We are honored to support the Bereaved Parents of the USA, in memory of our children Jodi and Jay, and our friend Diane Stout Rima.

Carolyln Sorrell Zahnow - NC Chapter supports national! Thanks for the guidance.

Paul Balasic - In Memory of our daughter Bethany Anne. Love you and Miss you baby!

Cindy Evarts - Donation from Angel Trail Soaps in memory of Tristan Evarts.

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Jessica A. McCaa - In memory of my son Cody!

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Gayle Pourinski Brady - In memory of Caitlyn Brady

Gay Shelby - In memory of my precious Angel ~Courtney Sharee' Shelby. An amazing gift from God♡

Meg Reynard – In memory of Miles Wilson

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WE THANK YOU!

We regret if we have inadvertently misspelled a name or omitted a donation. Please email Kathy Corrigan kjcorrigan5@gmail.com and the correction will appear in our Spring Newsletter.