

January: Just Surviving

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January is depressing. It's a month of bitter cold, gloomy days and leftovers. It's a month of used Christmas bows (surely we should save them for next year...) and things that don't fit (either they didn't fit before the holidays, or they don't fit now.). January is also a month with too many days in it.

January is a let down from the hustle and bustle of the Holidays. It is a month to "get through." January is a month to SURVIVE.

I've decided to spend January in my basement. After all, basements are often dark and gloomy (suits my mood), in need of organization (describes my life perfectly) and could use a good cleaning (similar to shaking the cobwebs out of my brain.)

Therefore, I would like to have Hallmark declare January as BASEMENT month and come out with a suitable card to help me celebrate my hibernation. That's where I am going to spend the icy, snowy month of January. I have all sorts of plans. I can tackle the still-packed boxes from our move last summer. I can arrange and re-arrange to my heart's content without annoying the family who dwells upstairs, and who think that "everything looks fine, Mom." (They, however, would think that K-Mart on Exchange Day looks fine, too.)

I can sift through boxes of unknown treasures, sorting and tossing. I can count my blessings in the soft, dim darkness of a basement lit with a single light bulb and no one will see the tears that I hid so well during the Holidays. I can come up one blessing short and gasp in the pain (always there, but not often brought out to light any more), and then let it dissipate in the far reaches of the basement.

I think I will organize the basement according to the seasons: Spring, with the flower pots, fertilizer, garden seeds, and bicycles; Summer, with the lawn mower, garden hoses and rubber rafts; Fall will have the rakes and the Halloween decorations. And Winter ... Winter will have the snow shovels, snow boots, sleds, ice skates, skis (and crutches)--all stored neatly, side by side.

The Holiday decorations will be stored halfway between Fall and Winter because of the GREAT DEBATE in our house about WHEN is the proper time to put up The Decorations. This debate is topped only by the one about WHEN to take them down. So far, the earliest we have discarded The Holidays is Christmas afternoon, and Easter wins as the latest.

I will have to have another category in my basement, however. It will be the Fifth Season ... the season of Miscellaneous. That's where I'll stash everything that doesn't fit anyplace else--somewhat like my grief, which seems to pop up at the most inconvenient times. I wish I could compartmentalize it, organize it, so I wouldn't be caught off guard. I wish I could put it away for a time--storing it in the recesses of my basement--knowing where it is when I need it. But grief doesn't work that way (my basement probably won't work that way either!)

Grief is there, always. You don't "get over it." You can't hide from it. You can't put it aside until it's convenient. In fact, the more you try to avoid it, the more it catches you. It's a bit like that mysterious gift you once got from some distant relative. The more you try to forget it, the more it stays. Grief is in all the seasons of your life.



But grief doesn't have to be a burden all the time. Like the things you have stored in the basement, it can be sifted through, re-organized and dealt with. It doesn't have to be just stashed in the darkest corner of your heart. Part of grief is learning to live without the person who made your life so incredibly

wonderful. But the other side of grief is remembering how wonderful life can be and getting busy with not just surviving, but **LIVING!**

The snowflakes are still just as lovely and mysterious. the spring flowers will bloom again, with their sweet message of Life. Summer will bring more warm evenings and fireflies to chase and Fall will turn its leaves one more time. Winter will come again and another January will be celebrated in the basement ... not because it is the only place we can find solace and comfort, but because the sifting and sorting and reorganizing are an important part of our process. Your life with your loved one was filled with moments of laughter. Remember those moments, enjoy them again and again. Don't store them in the basement of your heart.

So, won't you join me this month as I make good my one New Year's resolution? I resolve to keep my basement clean, organized and usable. It will **NOT** become a repository for cast offs and the no-longer-useful in my life. It will be what it really is: a part of my house, my home, my life.

I will be in the basement this month, not escaping the snow (**I LOVE that!**), but getting ready to heal.

LET THE JOY YOUR LOVED ONE'S LIFE BROUGHT TO YOU BEGIN TO TAKE THE PLACE OF THE HURT AND PAIN OF DEATH. The memories will always hurt, but there also will always be **LOVE**, and you cannot discard, bury or lose the love you shared.

January, the **BASEMENT MONTH.**