

WALLOWING

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Though winter seems to have more than its share of less than wondrous days, occasionally even winter has an especially down day. What do the days do when they sense they aren't very good? Do the days feel bad because they are not bringing light and hope to us? Do the days feel any sense of remorse because they continue to march onward, dragging us into morning after morning, night into night? Or do the days care much about us at all? Do they simply skip along, one after another, unaware of the trauma, the turmoil or the treasures that we attach to them?

Some days aren't too bad. They start out kind of slow, like a reluctant first grader, but gather momentum as the hours flow by. Some days get a jump-start on me. The alarm screams AWAKE and I do, instantly annoyed at the interruption of my fantasies. By the time I hit the shower, I'm functioning without feeling, so much like those early foggy days of grief. The lights are on, but no body's home! I'm "in there" all right, but reluctant to claim the start of another day.

Those are the days when hot cocoa and a bowl of steaming oatmeal are the only way to fly. Ah yes, a hot breakfast will make most days seem almost civilized.

Winter days sometimes bring only cold rain or gloom, and for those days, more than chocolate is needed. Even the sound of the radio is too cheerful a

beginning, and shoveling snow or dashing through rain puddles is not the ideal aerobic exercise today. It only serves to remind me of my lost youth. Exercise on those days only deepens the gloom and makes the heart ache.



Even before I open my eyes, I can often sense it just might be one of THOSE DAYS. "Those days" can refer to many things, depending upon your sex, employment status, economic situation and your history. But they can mean only one thing to those of us who are struggling through the snowy landscape of The Valley of Grief.

Those days are for WALLOWING. I do not want to get up and be cheerful (I don't even want to get up . . . who cares about being cheerful!) I do not want to eat right (give me chocolate and FAT and calories on those days!), and I definitely don't want to do anything that might make me feel better! Feeling better is not what I have in mind for the wallowing days of winter.

When a wallowing day hits, I want to do is hide. I want to stay in bed, drawing the covers over my head, snuggling down deep into the quilt and pretend today didn't happen. And I don't want the radio, the television, the calendar or anyone to tell me differently.



I don't want a cheery phone call shaking me from my wallow. I don't want a sympathetic hand on my shoulder or an understanding nod of the head either. I don't want anyone to even acknowledge me. I want to be LEFT ALONE! On the wallowing days, I just want silence and aloneness - the only source of comfort on a wallowing day.

Too many people try to talk us out of our wallowing mood and when I'm in one, that is exactly what I DON'T WANT!!! I want to wallow. I want to grieve. I want to cry and yell and worry and hate. I want to have a temper tantrum and throw things (although I rarely do either). I want to come to a complete stop on my journey and sit down on the curb and cry. Too many people want to love us out of our pain and I don't even want them to touch me!

It is terribly hard to see someone you love in such distress, but sometimes I think we just might need a day or two of wallowing. It's not so bad, this wandering around in the gloom of the past if we can allow ourselves permission to do so. If we could just relax into the despair we might find it not as bad as we feared.



It is the fear that makes those days so much worse than they really are. We add guilt to our gloom and bring along the anger and impatience of grief to create an even worse day for ourselves. We "should" all over ourselves, almost as punishment for not having a good day. "I should be better by now," and "I shouldn't (a double NO NO!) be feeling this way anymore." WHO SAYS SO?

The rest of the world might wish it to be so, but as long as we are breathing, there will be more than a few of those days waiting for us, waiting to catch us "off guard." Guilt, the Number One Disease in America, can cast its shadow over everything we think about as we stagger through The Valley, but it can really wreck a wonderful wallowing day. Just as we are getting settled into a really good wallow, here comes someone to shake us out of our mood. Somebody calls, or we get a note in the mail: "JUST THINKING OF YOU AND WISHING YOU A GOOD DAY" is enough to make us sick! I want to wallow, please. Not often -- but sometimes it is the only thing to do.

We can wallow with the scrapbooks or with the radio playing The Song. We can wallow with cookies or carrots (you've got to be kidding!). We can wallow with our memories or with the VCR. We can wallow alone or as a special treat, with a friend. Wallowing with a friend is truly one of life's little "perks."

Wallowing doesn't mean getting lost in the gloom or sinking into despair. It doesn't mean thinking of driving a little too fast or standing a little too close to the edge. It doesn't mean finding the pills or drowning in the bottle. In fact, all of those

things keep us from wallowing -- just as surely as does the sympathetic but poorly timed pat on the hand.

What we need on wallowing days are understanding, acknowledgment, tolerance, patience and to be left alone. Sometimes the grief -- the pain -- is simply too much to bear in the company of others and I run out of energy to make sure you are okay in the presence of my pain. Sometimes, I just have to run headlong into the hurt, embracing it all, because it is all I think I have left of my love. Sometimes, wallowing can be the door to sanity as I face squarely the intensity of my pain.



Love sometimes hurts, and to deny that is to deny the joy of being loved. You can't have only half a picture. You need all sides, all dimensions, in order to fully understand and embrace the life we are living. Knowing we are alive when our loved one is not is perhaps one of the most difficult steps to be taken in The Valley. To forgive ourselves for living when our loved ones did not live is truly worth a moment or two of wallowing. Since grief is the price we pay for love, and I have been billed for my affections, then please allow me the space to repay the debt.

Wallowing is neither dangerous nor easy, but sometimes it is necessary to get in touch with the pain and the despair so we can breathe through it to find the light. Wallowing does not allow for shields or the wearing of a mask. When one wallows, one goes straight into the hurt, claiming it all. Sometimes I just have to indulge my sadness and embrace my pain so I can learn to live beyond it.

LET THE JOY OF YOUR LOVED ONE'S LIFE BEGIN TO TAKE THE PLACE OF THE HURT AND PAIN OF DEATH.

As long as wallowing doesn't get to be a way of life, we're safe to indulge ourselves once in awhile. As long as I don't find myself contemplating the height of the bridge or the depth of the valley, then I can allow a day or two of wallowing -

especially in the winter when the snow piles deep and the wind brings only a bitter tune.

Wallowing - a moment of reflected pain that speaks so truly of the depth of love. If we had not loved, we would not despair. Sometimes it brings tears, but always it brings memory, and memory isn't such a bad place to dwell in the winter time.

