

IS WINTER PARADISE IN DISGUISE?

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There ought to be a law! There ought to be a law against snow and ice and winter. There ought to be a law against snow drifting across the back door and one against ice forming on the sidewalks after I've shoveled. There ought to be a law against 40 below and frozen peas (they have nothing to do with winter, but there should be a law against peas anyway).



There should be laws to protect the average citizen from wind chill and frozen door locks. We should not have to endure the furry of Mother Nature when she loses her temper and tosses snowflakes against the windowpanes. We should not have to cope in winter. Everyone should be able to hibernate from the months of November to April. No one should have to work or think or hurt during those months when everything else is smart enough to stay asleep. Why is Mankind still awake?

There are icicles dangling from every roof corner and the snow has drifted up across the back door.... or at least where we thought we had a back door. We used to live in a two story house, but even that inconvenience has been eliminated this winter....yes, the snow is THAT deep (in the back where the wind sweeps across the open yard from the north). We've lost the shrubs we so carefully planted last fall....at least they

are no longer visible in the sea of white outside. I can see the top of the fence in places, but come on.....how much winter does one have to endure?

We've tried ... we've really tried. We waxed up the cross-country skis and polished the sled runners and bought the ski lift tickets. We stocked up on hot chocolate and threw a set of chains in the back of the truck. We remembered the sunscreen and the mittens. We've learned to dress in layers (I personally like to add a quilt on top of everything else!) and have laid in a food supply that would feed a small army for several years. But, this is ridiculous.

The jello froze on the way to the potluck.

Winter always comes as a surprise to me. I think I should be over winter but it always brings a few tricks to keep me on my toes. I have spent winters in the frozen north (like now), winters basking on beaches in the Caribbean, winters slogging through rain (the swamps of Louisiana) and winters being blown around on the midwest prairies. But, never has my jello frozen!

I've been around a long time and I know the ebb and flow in winter, when the earth sleeps and the waters lie solid beneath the blanket of snow. I've learned to ski, to skate, to sled and to make soup. We've crafted until we ran out of room and friends and then we discovered books and the computer. We've refinished furniture bought in the fall when it seemed like a good idea. We've learned to square dance and to play bridge (I am better at dosey doing than trumping) and we've cleaned house until it should be spring. But nothing prepared me for frozen jello and the bitterness of this winter. Nothing.

Why now? Why now after so many years, did winter send its full blast across my face? Why does it snow more on this side of the street than other there? Why does the snow plow raise its blade at my driveway instead of next door? Why did winter pick on me this year?

Maybe because we're in a new place....or maybe because we've been in the old place far too long. Maybe winter decided to stir things up and cause us to shake out the cobwebs. Maybe we had grown too smug and complacent in our life. Maybe this winter we needed a WAKE UP CALL.

Perhaps we had let winter and its iciness become too familiar and too routine. Perhaps we needed to be reminded of the challenges that snow and grief bring. Maybe we needed to learn to "Chain up" and "Be Prepared" again. We had been drifting for a long time... existing but not really living ... functioning but not really feeling. It had grown familiar, like an old shoe and so, maybe we needed this winter's blast to get us moving again....

Maybe, but there ought to be a law ... is Mother Nature monitoring our grief? Does SHE notice when we fail to grasp the joy in the little moments? Does SHE despair when we let the beauty of her landscaping go unnoticed? Is Mother Nature sad when we hurry everywhere, intent upon solutions but missing the questions completely? Is winter her way of slowing us down and inviting us to walk more carefully through her world?

In winter, creatures turn to each other for warmth and comfort. Is this blizzard a reminder to us to stay inside, to seek out each other for company, entertainment and comfort? Did Mother Nature invent winter just to remind us to cuddle...if not each other, then ourselves? Were we rushing too quickly through Fall to stop and celebrate her turning leaves? Were we

hurrying through our lives, searching for the peace we dream of, but missing the moments along the way?

Is winter the season of despair or the season when we must confront our sadness because we are snowbound and can't escape the icy fingers of grief? Is winter the time when life slows to a mushy pace, when the heart is heavy with memory and the steps no longer seem to carry us any place warm?

Someone should write a book about 101 things to do with snow. Maybe they would tell about making snow cones or building snow castles. Maybe the book would describe the proper technique for making the perfect snowball. It would be filled with recipes, too...for your hot chocolate and my snow angel cookies. Do you remember those times? Or has your memory become frozen, too?

We could each make a dozen snowballs and freeze them. Then we could mail them to our friends who live in the hot places and do not understand or appreciate the silent secrets of the snow. We could hold a snowball for a brief moment, if only to remind us of the magic of that time, now frozen forever in memory.

Winter keeps coming because we simply have not moved to a warmer climate, but we can't until we have endured it all. We cannot move to the warmer places until we have struggled to shovel the walk, start the car and become respectful of the progress of birth, life, death and rebirth again and again. Winter comes until we understand that death only takes the arms we long to hold, the voice we strain to hear, the face we see so clearly. Winter cannot take the love that melts the heart and warms the secret, inside

places. Even though winter comes, love endures long past the icy blasts of death.

Love paints the sky with sunshine and cradles the aching heart and fills the empty arms. We did love and so we shall again... in some other place, some other time. But only if we learn to slip and slide across the icy spots of our grief and practice falling and GETTING UP AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN. There is a purpose to winter.

It is that time when the earth slows and the days grow short so we huddle inside, safe against the icy blasts. Winter is that time when we allow memory to rise to the surface and we must claim and confront our fears, our aches, our hurts, our grief. We've run out of places to hide. Grief finds us no matter where we are in winter. It is time to live through this part of the journey too.

So, bundle up, lay in a good supply of chocolate and tissues and let the memories skate across your mind. Curl up with the scrapbooks, put on the music and let the tears flow. Claim it all, for we have earned it all. We could not understand light if we had not known dark. We would not sing sweet if we had not tasted bitter. We could not laugh if we had not cried.

Winter ... perhaps it is Mother Nature's way to inviting us to live through the pain to get to the other side.....that place where memory doesn't hurt and the magic of love warms us from the inside. Drift away to those moments of paradise, when love was full and the heart knew no past, present or future. It is and was all ours to hold....it will be again, some day ... but only if we let Winter come and learn its lessons of time spent in the

memory place. We cannot hide....it is time to remember and experience again the depth of love given and received.

Is winter paradise in disguise?

Perhaps it is, but no one should have to endure frozen jello ...