

February 14, 2021

Hidden Gifts

Dear Friends,

When a day like Valentine's Day comes rolling around, the rest of the world (those who are not grieving) are surrounded by decorations, flowers, chocolates and other gestures of friendship and love, while others just want it to be another Sunday, painfully waiting for the day to end. And even though I am writing this on Valentines' Day, by the time you read this, it will be over and done with. You got through it. Thank goodness. Please try to keep in mind that the way you felt this year will not be the same every year, it will change as we continue to grieve and mourn and work through these very difficult and necessary emotions.

Of course, this year everything is different for everyone because of Covid, - every holiday, every event, every occasion, every day. And now it will be almost a year that we have been isolating, quarantining, masking, testing, distancing, and waiting this damn thing out. I can't help but to notice in our groups how many of us are growing quite weary of it all.

"These conditions, combined with the duration of the pandemic, are causing many people to struggle with the loss of their 'resilience muscle'," says Sherry Cormier, a psychologist and bereavement specialist in "*Sweet Sorrow: Finding Enduring Wholeness after Loss and Grief*." "Back in March, we had a lot of zest. We thought we could get through this and rise to the challenge. But the longer this goes on, the climb gets harder and harder." Cormier says. "We are definitely in a mental health epidemic."

I have found that our initial decision at Stephy's Place to not have an 'end date' for our groups has proven to be most indispensable, particularly during this time; just knowing that we have a group of people to see (virtually) and with whom to communicate and share once a week, has been a lifeline and a life-force for so many. It is no small assistance in these challenging, lonely, difficult, and weary times. It is a blessing.

Cormier goes on to point out that there are possibly some hidden positive elements to this ongoing experience: “Grief brings sorrow, but it also brings gifts.” She says, “We can find out something about our inner sense of strength that we didn’t know we had, or gain resources we didn’t know we had access to before. As we look at what we’ve lost, at the same time we can try to identify: Are there things that we have actually gained? Are there ways in which we’ve actually grown?”

I feel that I have personally grown from this unique time and have become more in touch with myself emotionally and spiritually. Of course, this has not been easy, but I may have never been afforded this ‘opportunity,’ if you will, if my life just kept going in a certain direction. This time of pausing and introspection has truly been a time of growth for me, as Cormier pointed out. I have also noticed, amidst the pain and struggle, that there has been a resilience and growth in so many people in our groups. And let’s not forget that there is indeed light at the end of the tunnel, even if that light looks like a pinpoint right now, as we approach it will become clearer, as light will flood into our darkest crevices.

Just as all the plants and vegetation look like it is lost and gone under the packed snow, and it appears that no growth is taking place, we know that new life will begin to emerge after Spring’s thaw, as light begins to bath the fertile soil. Patience is so very essential right now, as is compassion with ourselves, and gentleness, and kindness, and self-care. Let’s not give into the frustration, the loneliness, the pain, and the struggle. We may feel overwhelmed, and our ‘resilience muscle’ may be quite fatigued, but we will persevere; we will not merely survive this time, we will continue to learn, we will continue to grow, and we will continue to become who we are.

I end today with a most inspiring quote from our Founding Director:

“This is the way I’ve looked at Valentine’s Day since Jimmy died: What is Valentine’s Day, a hokey, commercialized day to celebrate your love for someone? Nope, not for me. Valentine’s Day for me is to remind me that Love exists, that love is the reason I grieve so deeply, and it’s the only reason I will heal so profoundly. Love is the reason for ALL. So, I now look to Valentine’s Day to celebrate my capacity to love and my intention to heal.”

Sheila Martello-DiOrio

Peace and Serenity,

Kevin