

WHO AM I NOW?

by Darcie D. Sims

Why am I a thousand-piece puzzle when everyone else is already put together? Why is the rest of the world a size 10? Why do their kites fly so high? Why does the grass grow greener next door? Because I am a thousand-piece puzzle.

Who Am I Now? Who am I, now that my loved one has died? Who am I, now that I have survived the holiday season and find myself deep into the gloom of winter? Why do I feel so scattered? Why am I a thousand-piece puzzle when everyone else is so put together?

Why does January seem so empty? Why do the seasons reflect my moods and why do I take on the cast of the weather outside? Just as the world is stiff and frozen outside my window, I feel dead and cold and scattered inside myself. Who Am I Now?

I managed to make it through the holiday season, though the hows of that feat are truly beyond my recollection. I can't even remember eating the holiday meals.

In those glittering days, I managed to smile and even find a few moments of peace and joy; but here in the gloom of January, all I seem to see are the scattered pieces of my life...cast before me on the card table, waiting for me to pick them up and make the picture.

But what picture do all these pieces form? I used to think I knew. I used to know who I was and where I was going and how I was going to get there. But now, now in the chill of January,

I can't even remember where the puzzle begins and I end.

I think I'm still grieving, and that surprises me. It's been...(too long regardless of the time frame you insert), and I should be getting better. Why do I still ache from a sunburn I got years ago when we were together on the beach? Why is there still sand in my shoes and why does your name still stick in my throat? Who am I now that the memories grow cold in January's chill?

Am I still a mother if there is no child to tuck in at night? Am I still a dad if there is no one to loan the car keys to? Am I still a wife if there is no one to snuggle up to in my bed? Am I still a husband if there is no one waiting at home for me at the end of the day? Am I still a sister or a brother if there is no one to tease? Am I still a child if my parent has died? Am I still a human being, capable of loving and being loved, if the one person I loved more than anything has become frozen in time? Who am I now that my loved one has died?

The gloom has permeated even my toes, and my whole body seems icy. Why can't January be warm and gentle – especially after the struggle of the holidays? I need some sunshine, some warmth, some help in turning over the puzzle pieces and putting them back together. I need some spring.

Continued on next page...

JANUARY

Who Am I Now?

Resolutions

Question & Answer

Transitions



But spring is a way off and I must (somehow) get through these days. If you're feeling like I am, perhaps these few suggestions will help you find the pieces to your new puzzle.

1 Identify specific feelings. Do not generalize. Try to figure out exactly what's bothering you. Look for the tiny grains of sand that are still hiding in the bottom of your shoes. Acknowledge them. Be honest with those feelings, whatever they are. If you're angry, be angry. If you're sad, be sad. Be specific in your sadness!

2 Pick your worries. Focus on only one worry at a time. Give up being worried about being worried. Prioritize your worries. This helps combat feelings of being overwhelmed and you can decide which worries to keep and which to send to your: 1) mother; 2) children; 3) family; 4) neighbor; 5) enemy.

3 Keep a picture or two of the sand castle where you can enjoy it every day. You may decide not to make a shrine out of your memories, but don't lose the joy that you had in making that marvelous moat! Keep the sand you found in the shoe – you just don't have to keep it there! That's what memories are for...a place to stash the important stuff that we need.

4 Become as informed and as knowledgeable as possible about this new world in which you live. We fear what we don't know, what we can't see, what we can't touch. Read, listen, learn all you can about grief. It's not where you

planned on being this winter, but it is where you are. Look around.

5 Listen to everyone. You will receive enough advice about how to do it (grieve) to sink a fleet of battleships. Be grateful...at least someone is talking with you! But, **FOLLOW YOUR OWN MUSIC.**

6 Be kind to yourself. You survived the holiday season, and now it is the beginning of another season, another way of living. Learn to forgive yourself for living.

7 Set small goals first. Accomplish them. Then, set bigger goals. Try starting with getting the garbage out on the **RIGHT** day. Then, open the closet...the drawers...the heart. Try going out. The next time you might be able to get farther than the driveway. **TAKE YOUR TIME.** It's a long way to the beach. You'll get there again...someday.

8 Remember that life requires effort on your part. Make friends with the vacuum, the checkbook and the car. Become determined to learn to remove the box before microwaving the dinner.

9 Don't wait for happiness to find you again. Make it happen. Build another sand castle, maybe on a different beach this time. Don't lose the memories just because they hurt. Look at the pictures, listen to the song, remember the love...you haven't lost that. How could you possibly lose the love you shared?

10 Keep turning the puzzle pieces over. But don't keep trying to put them back into the same picture. That picture is gone. There is a new picture to be made of those

scattered pieces. Search for that scene. Search for the new you...search for the new person you are becoming.

11 Don't forget how to dream, how to laugh, how to dance. The music is different, but so is the season. The room may be empty, but the heart is not. The spirit may be filled with sand, but the shoes remember the steps. One day at a time is OK if you can manage it, but know that some days all you can manage is one minute at a time. But minutes add up to years, eventually, and each grain of sand adds to the strength of the castle. Build the sand castle again...if only in your memory.... Just because it's January, doesn't mean the beach is closed forever. Build your new castle in the middle of the winter. Find the new occupant...the new you.

12 Be gentle this winter season. Turn the pieces over slowly, experiencing each piece as a newly found treasure. We can fill our days with bitterness and anger that the picture will never be the same. Or, we can hope for the spring that will surely come if we let it.

I know there are good things on the horizon. Winter can't last forever. If those things turn out to be less than we hoped, we will simply have to make whatever we get into something livable. Perhaps that is the secret to melting winter into spring: The challenge is to always carve out something beautiful from the icicle. There is joy in living... if we allow time in the winter to reassemble the thousand-piece puzzle.

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RESOLUTIONS



by Shelly Payan

olutions. The word itself is representative of hope, rage and determination. So many times I have heard my great resolve as I've said, "It is January. This is the year I..." But then...something happens. I make excuses. I am neglectful. I forget. And all too often, my resolutions begin to seem like luxuries I can no longer afford.

olutions are the most optimistic way to remind ourselves we could use some positive change in our lives. But one problem with resolutions is that they require a personal commitment. They are successfully fostered only with unwavering dedication and a strong desire to accomplish a long-term, beneficial goal. Too often my own resolutions, however, are all about me—and because I have only myself to rely on, their importance fades away as the year progresses. To disappoint myself, I can live with it.

...Or can I?.....Can you?.....

Some of the most common resolutions involve matters of health, career and finance. This year, I will exercise more. I will find my dream job. I will start saving money.

But then...before we know it...another year is upon us, and we start with a whole new list of resolutions—many of them the same resolutions we've made numerous times before. I will do that someday.

As someday seems to be getting closer—our children are

growing more quickly than we can believe, our parents are aging at a pace we never imagined—I wonder, are we actually afraid to commit ourselves to a healthier, more stable, more financially sound future? Or do we simply not realize that our resolutions have the potential to positively impact the lives of our loved ones, in addition to ourselves?

If you're like me, one obstacle you probably face, daily, is a lack of time. But time, like money, is something we can rearrange to cover the most important facets of our lives. For example, I choose to consult an estate planner about my best investment options rather than spend that money on what I want (versus what I need). Oh, the things I would absolutely love to buy for myself...but knowing my children will have something after I'm gone is an invaluable asset.

I have also made a resolution to leave something else to my children—something they may not appreciate now, but will when the occasion is upon them. I have pre-arranged my own funeral. Why, because I have resolved to spare my children the agony having to make decisions at what will already be one of the most difficult times in their lives. I have made the personal commitment to relieve them of a future financial burden. For them I have accomplished a long-term, beneficial goal.

And for me, well, now I never have to think: I will get to that someday.





Transitions

My mind keeps wandering.
Am I losing my mind?

Not likely. The mind, in such pain and turmoil, is seeking comfort and meaning. In Viktor Frankl's landmark book, "Man's Search for Meaning," he tells us that in the worst circumstances humans face, ones who survive are those who can find meaning in their suffering. The wandering mind is wandering in search of meaning.

Q & A by Deborah Morris Coryell, author of "Good Grief: Healing Through the Shadow of Loss," www.goodgrief.org.