

Winter ahead

This is a story about my mother.

My mom loved autumn. She loved the changing of the leaves -- the red of the maples, the gold of the aspen. She loved the sound and the scent of walking through the leaves that fell from the trees in our front yard. She loved the smell of burning leaves (yes, we used to burn leaves when I was a child), and she loved the many sights and sounds and scents of the autumn season.

There was just one problem -- fall, as you know, is followed by winter.

As the days grew shorter, and the afternoon quickly turned to dusk, my mom would sit in her home, watch out the window, and look at the darkening sky. "I love fall," she would say, "but I hate the winter that follows."

My mom spent the first few years of her life on the plains of southern Alberta, Canada. There the summers were short, but the sun would stick around hours longer than it did where I grew up. In June, she and her friends would still be playing in the late afternoon's sun at 10 p.m. in the evening.

Winter, though, was the exact opposite. The sun sets early in the northern latitudes as winter draws nigh. Winters in Alberta were long and deathly cold.

Over the years, she would talk about her life growing up in Canada, and she would tell stories about the summers -- but avoid stories about the winter.

My mom was like that -- she hated the winters, but loved the other seasons. Since she didn't have anything good to say about winter, I guess she didn't say anything at all.

I've inherited my mother's feelings about winter, if such is possible. For part of the week, I live in Las Vegas, Nevada, where the winters are nicer than they are in snow country. In Las Vegas, roses grow all winter long; some trees still lose their leaves -- certainly palm trees don't -- but winter seems to stay for all of about a month. In Las Vegas, we pay for the hot summers the rest of the year round, with nice weather -- the kind of weather where I can easily barbecue on a January afternoon.

For the remainder of the week, I'm in a neighboring state. Here the winters are longer, darker, and colder than in Las Vegas. Here is where I remember my mother's words.

Now, you may be asking yourself why I'm writing about this topic -- it's certainly a bit different than I usually write.

This is why:

We all have winters in our lives. We have bad times, down times, troubled times, lonely times. We have times where we can start to believe that life will never get better. Many of us have a lot of those "Canadian Winters" in our lives.

Like the middle of January, those times seem to go on forever -- with no hope of spring in sight.

But there's the catch, the key, the clue: January **always** gives way to February, and February is always followed by March (at least on our particular calendar). With March comes Spring, and it's followed by April, then May, and pretty soon, you're back to Summer again. (Those of you reading this in the Southern Hemisphere will please adjust the month names accordingly to match Winter in your neck of the woods).

In the same way, the winters in our lives -- the problems, troubles, trials, and downturns, give way to warmer times -- the successes, the learning, the benefits, and the love.

Too often in the middle of the winters in their lives, people give up -- making it always winter, all of the time.

I was reading a newspaper story the other day, where a landscape crew was talking about preparing for spring. The crew plants spring bulbs in the autumn, knowing that only by planting then will the beautiful blooms come up in the spring. Those bulbs stay dormant all winter long, but burst forth into color as the spring sun beckons them.

In our lives, when we run into downturns, let's remember that winter is always followed by spring and summer (and, of course fall and winter). Our lives have upturns and downturns, trials and triumphs.

My mother died in the autumn, some years ago. Each spring, I put flowers on her grave, so she knows that spring has come again. Her birthday is in August, and I try and bring flowers on that day, as well, so she can tell it's summer. I bring leaves some years to her grave, as summer turns to fall, but I never bring anything in winter -- although maybe I will this year.

We all have winter in our lives. Let's remember that the dark days always turn to lighter ones, and the lighter ones get lighter still.

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