

## . . . and Joy



Comfort is nice; I'm a huge fan—but joy! That's the star on top of the tree.

No wonder we give it pride of place at the holidays. Now is the time of year when all our senses are on high alert. It's cold out there, so we look for warmth. It's dark, so we turn toward the light. We *sing* of joy and find it in every snowflake.

A child laughs and we feel joy. A thousand starlings rise up from a frozen field and there it is again. If someone we love is with us, that's twice the blessing.

But these sensations come and go. The other kind of joy—the kind that lasts, the kind that mystics write about—is much harder to achieve.

After Jeremy died, grief hung around for years. Most of us have known such a loss. Coming home for the holidays and not meeting up. The festive dinners with the empty chair. No note from Jeremy announcing his arrival date. No Jeremy in his muffler, walking backwards on the beach against the winter wind.

Our last walk together was decades ago, and somewhere along the line something shifted in me. Now when I think of Jeremy, or Aaron, also taken by AIDS, or my mother and father and others long departed, I can't really say I'm sad. Right now, as I look out my window at the flakes coming down, piling up like lace against the panes, what I feel, what I can honestly say I feel, is more akin to joy.

Joy at having had such people to love. Joy at still being here to remember them and the holidays we shared. Joy at being warm, snug in the pale light from the window, full of promise as I gear up for the season and for the hope of who knows what ahead.

Some say happiness comes from outside, joy from within. Consider two medieval stonemasons. One mutters that the work is hard. The other looks up from the dust and sees the cathedral—his symbol of eternal life—taking shape in his own hands. He chooses joy, even if he cannot possibly live long enough to lay the crowning stone.

The winter holidays play many roles in our lives. Surely one is to place this singular star at the top of our attention, and to point us toward the “on” switch. Joy is hiding in plain sight all year long, but as we pause from our labors, and come together in celebration, now is when it shines the brightest. Catches our eye. And, perhaps, has the best chance of sticking around.



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