

Dancing with Monsters

CHRONIC ILLNESS as CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION

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Embracing the Holidays

"I'm bracing myself to get through the holidays," I told my friend.

"I hope," she replied, "that you can find ways to *embrace* the season instead."

Yes! That is exactly what I want. How do I do that?

The word *brace* comes from brachium, the part of the arm between the shoulder and the elbow. A brace, according to dictionary.com, is "anything that imparts rigidity or steadiness." The "em" part of *embrace* means "to cause to be in..." Embrace means to cause something to be in my arms, "to press to the bosom; hug..."

Behind the bracing, I find grief, fear and anger.

I remember earlier holidays with people I loved who are no longer here. I remember earlier holidays when my body did my bidding. There are sweet memories and sharp losses...So there is grief.

What will my body be able to do this year? Will I be able to rest when I need to rest? I worry about disappointing others. I worry about symptoms flaring. There are unanswered questions and uncontrollable situations...So there is fear.

The holidays have become so much too much. There is so much to do. There are layers of expectations. I want to be able to do so many wonderful things...But in this body, touched by chronic illness, I often can't. There is so much here that annoys me and so much here that I long for but can't have...So there is anger.

Those are big emotions. Frankly, I don't want them near my holidays. I am bracing myself in an attempt not to feel them. It doesn't work. In fact, it makes things worse because once I try to control how I'm feeling I start trying to control *everything*—a sure road to unhappiness.

Instead of protecting myself from my emotions, I have to open to them. As though I am hanging ornaments on a tree, I can hang the grief beside the sweet memory, the fear beside the anticipation, the anger beside the longing. There is room for all and the variety adds richness.

I am thinking of two kinds of embraces. One is the gentle tenderness of a parent comforting a wounded child. The other is the energetic enthusiasm of a young child running to a beloved parent. Breathing in. Breathing out.

Now I am ready to embrace the holidays.