

STONE & IVY

M A G A Z I N E

WELLNESS, REIMAGINED WITH INTENTION AND GRACE.

*mental wellness / lifestyle / mindfulness /
physical health / recovery / stories*





EDITOR'S NOTE

Winter asks less of us than we often believe.

In a world that urges constant motion, reinvention, and urgency—this season arrives with a different invitation. One of quiet. Of listening. Of honoring what already exists rather than rushing to replace it. This Winter Edition of Stone & Ivy was created to sit gently beside you in that space.

Rather than resolutions, we turn toward goals—softly held, thoughtfully shaped, and allowed to evolve. Goals that meet us where we are, rather than demanding who we should become. Here, progress is not loud. It is intentional. It is human.

Winter can be a complicated season. Shorter days, heavier emotions, disrupted routines, and a longing for light—both literal and figurative—often surface together. In this issue, we speak openly about mental health during the winter months, not as something to fix, but as something to tend. With compassion. With honesty. With grace.

We explore the quiet power of routine—not as rigidity, but as ritual. The small, grounding practices that hold us steady when motivation wanes and energy ebbs. We honor reset as a necessary form of care, not a sign of failure. And we return, again and again, to compassion—for ourselves first, and then for the world around us.

This Winter Edition is also enriched by the voices of contributing writers who specialize in the field of mental health. Their expertise, insight, and lived understanding bring depth and credibility to these conversations, serving as an invaluable asset to this feature. We are deeply grateful for their willingness to guide, educate, and remind us that caring for the mind is as essential as caring for the body—and that neither should be done alone.

May these pages meet you exactly where you are—whether you are moving forward, standing still, or quietly beginning again. There is no rush here. Only intention.

With gratitude,

JenTimothy, Editor

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WELCOME, WINTER



Jen Timothy | Writer

Winter arrives as an invitation.

Not one that demands transformation or bold declarations, but a quieter offering—an open door into stillness, reflection, and possibility. It asks us not to hurry forward, but to step gently into the first days of a new year with intention rather than expectation.

There is no spectacle in her entrance. She slips in on shorter days and longer nights, carrying stillness in her pockets and a kind of hush the rest of the year rarely offers. And yet, if we let her, winter gives us something extraordinary.

Winter, especially in its earliest weeks, is often misunderstood. We speak of its darkness as something to endure, something to escape. We rush to label it bleak, unproductive, or heavy. But this season is not empty—it is open. It is spacious. It is a pause between what was and what will be.

In nature, nothing rushes right now. The ground rests. Trees hold their breath. Growth is happening, yes—but quietly, invisibly, beneath the surface. Winter reminds us that not all progress needs to be seen to be real.

This first month of the year is a gift precisely because it asks less of us. It allows us to reset without spectacle, to refocus without pressure, and to consider new directions gently rather than forcefully. There is permission here—to slow down, to reflect, to recalibrate the rhythms of our days.

Embracing winter does not mean pretending the darkness isn't there. It means acknowledging it honestly—and choosing warmth anyway. Warmth in routine. Warmth in creativity. Warmth in connection. It means lighting candles in the early evening, leaning into familiar rituals, and finding beauty in repetition. It means allowing quiet to become restorative rather than lonely.

Welcome the quiet mornings and early nights. Welcome the opportunity to begin again—softly, thoughtfully, without demand. Welcome the chance to rest, reset, and imagine what might grow next.

Nothing is being asked of you right now—except to arrive.

And that, in itself, is enough.



Winter is an invitation to explore new creative outlets, not with urgency, but with curiosity. To read something slowly. To write without expectation. To cook differently. To revisit old interests or gently explore new ones.

Creativity thrives in winter because it has room to breathe—free from constant stimulation and external demand.

It is also a time that welcomes new adventures, even if they are small. A new walking path. A new morning routine. A new way of caring for your mental health. January teaches us that adventure does not have to be loud or far-reaching. Sometimes it is simply choosing presence over distraction, intention over impulse.

There is something deeply luxurious about winter when we stop resisting it. Luxury in time. Luxury in stillness. Luxury in listening inward. This is not a season for reinvention—it is a season for refinement.



WINTER LIGHT

HEALING ADDICTION, GRIEF, AND CYCLES THROUGH COMPASSION

Tasha A. Stanford, RMHC, CAP | Contributing Writer

Winter has a way of slowing us down. The air grows colder, the days shorten, and the quiet settles in. At times, that quiet feels comforting. At other times, it can feel unbearably loud.

For many—especially those navigating addiction, mental health challenges, or recovery—the winter months can intensify emotional strain. The expectation to feel joyful, grateful, and connected often contrasts sharply with lived reality. Loneliness, grief, trauma, and unmet needs tend to surface when the world insists on celebration.

For individuals and families touched by addiction, winter does not always bring peace. More often, it brings memories.

I grew up in a family deeply affected by substance use. I witnessed generations of people I loved caught in pain they never chose. That lived experience quietly shaped the direction of my life, leading me to build a career centered on helping others find support, understanding, and pathways to recovery that my own family never had access to.

Winter and Mental Health

Clinically, winter and the holiday months are associated with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, substance use, and heightened relapse risk. Shorter days, disrupted routines, financial stress, and unresolved grief all place strain on the nervous system. For many, this stress activates the brain's reward pathways, increasing cravings and impulsive behavior.

During this time of year, people often experience:

- Heightened feelings of isolation
- Family and financial pressure
- Increased exposure to alcohol or substances
- Anniversary reactions tied to grief or trauma
- Symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

When clients sit across from me during winter, I am reminded that addiction is never simply about substances. It is about coping. It is about survival. It is about the human need to feel safe, soothed, and seen.

Understanding the Addiction Cycle

Addiction is not a moral failure. It is a chronic condition that alters brain function and affects emotional regulation, memory, and decision-making. Substance use often begins as an adaptive response—an attempt to manage pain, fear, or overwhelm.

When winter intensifies emotional distress, cravings and relapse risk do not appear randomly. They follow predictably. What is often labeled as “poor choices” are, in reality, deeply reinforced attempts to regulate the nervous system—to find relief when other tools feel unavailable.

Understanding this changes the conversation. It replaces judgment with compassion. It allows space for healing rather than shame.

A Different Kind of Seasonal Message

If this winter feels heavy—if the holidays feel complicated by addiction, grief, or trauma—let this be your reminder:

You are not behind.
You are not broken.
You are not alone.

Healing does not follow a calendar.

Winter, particularly within recovery spaces, can be a time to slow down, reflect, and reconnect.

Instead of striving for perfection, we can gently shift toward presence:

- Reaching out instead of isolating
- Naming needs instead of numbing them
- Offering self-compassion instead of self-judgment

These may seem like small acts, but they are clinically significant. Emotional safety and connection are among the strongest predictors of sustained recovery and mental wellness.

Closing Thought

As you move through this season, allow yourself to be human. Winter teaches us that restoration often happens beneath the surface. Trees appear bare, yet life continues quietly within them.

Even during darker seasons, change is occurring. Growth is unfolding. Healing is possible.

Hope is not the absence of pain—but the belief that pain can transform





WHAT PUNXSUTAWNEY PHIL TEACHES US ABOUT HOPE

Jen Timothy | Writer

Every February, a groundhog emerges from the earth, blinks into the cold, and somehow becomes responsible for the emotional trajectory of an entire season. We gather around screens and small-town traditions, waiting to hear whether he sees his shadow, half-laughing, half-hoping. It's charming, it's ridiculous, and somehow, it matters.

Because beneath the whimsy of Groundhog Day is something deeply human: the need for reassurance that what we're living through won't last forever.

Winter can feel heavy. The days are shorter, the air is sharper, and the world seems to move more slowly. For many, it's a time of waiting—waiting for warmth, for light, for change, for relief. Waiting for something to feel easier. And hope, in its truest form, often looks like waiting.

Not passive waiting, but the kind that believes in movement even when nothing seems to be happening. The kind that trusts in unseen shifts. The kind that shows change is not always loud or immediate.

Punxsutawney Phil doesn't promise spring tomorrow. He doesn't tell us exactly when the thaw will come. But his role—symbolic as it is—reminds us that seasons move. That nothing stays the same forever. That light always returns. Hope doesn't require certainty ... it doesn't demand guarantees; it simply asks us to believe in possibility.

And that can be hard, especially when you've been waiting for a long time. Hope doesn't say, *Everything will be perfect*. Hope says, *This is not the end*.

It whispers that change is already happening, even if you can't see it yet. It reminds us that transformation is rarely instant—it is gradual, quiet, and often unnoticed until one day, suddenly, the air feels warmer.

So, if you find yourself in a season of waiting, let this be your reminder: spring does not rush, but it always arrives.

And so will whatever you are hoping for.



WINTER MOVIES

Winter nights in, without regret.

These feel like home:

- **You've Got Mail** – Bookstores, winter coats, quiet romance, New York magic.
- **When Harry Met Sally** – Friendship, seasons changing, sharp dialogue.
- **Groundhog Day** – Snowy, great cast, gentle humor.
- **Little Women** – Hearth fires, sisterhood, longing, beauty.
- **It's Complicated** – Cozy kitchens, warmth, grown-up love.

Comforting without being sleepy:

- **Dead Poets Society** – Winter prep school energy, emotion, inspiration.
- **Good Will Hunting** – Boston winters, quiet brilliance, healing.
- **The Family Stone** – Messy families, winter gatherings, growth.
- **Steel Magnolias** – Warmth, resilience, laughter through tears.
- **A River Runs Through It** – Stillness, reflection, beauty.

These keep you present and invested:

- **The Holiday** – English cottages, fires, reinvention.
- **Sense and Sensibility** – Quiet longing, winter estates, elegance.
- **The Curious Case of Benjamin Button** – Time, memory, love.
- **Brooklyn** – Homesickness, courage, winter transitions.
- **Legends of the Fall** – Snow, firelight, intensity.

Still engaging—just more introspective:

- **Manchester by the Sea** – Winter grief, honesty, stillness.
- **Blue Valentine** – Raw emotion, intimacy.
- **A Single Man** – Aesthetic, loneliness, quiet beauty.
- **Lost in Translation** – Mood, connection, atmosphere.
- **The Notebook** – Romance, intensity, love
- **Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind** – Sci-fi romans, explores the nature of memory & love

A PLACE TO BREATHE

A PRACTICE THAT HOLDS YOU—
THROUGH WINTER AND BEYOND

Jen Timothy | Writer

Winter has a way of tightening everything. The cold draws our shoulders upward, our breath becomes shallow, and the pace of life often feels heavier rather than slower. While the season invites rest, many of us respond by bracing instead—holding tension in our bodies and minds without even realizing it. Yoga offers a different response.

At its core, yoga is not about flexibility or strength, nor is it reserved for a certain body type, age, or experience level. It is a practice of attention—a way of moving, breathing, and being that asks nothing more than presence. Whether practiced for the first time or returned to after years, yoga meets people exactly where they are.

There are many forms of yoga, each offering something different, yet all rooted in the same intention: connection between breath, body, and mind. **Hatha yoga** moves gently and deliberately, making it an ideal place for beginners or anyone seeking grounding. **Vinyasa** links movement with breath in a flowing rhythm, creating warmth and focus. **Yin yoga** invites long, supported holds that reach deep into connective tissue and stillness. **Restorative yoga** uses props to fully support the body, allowing for complete rest. **Power yoga** builds strength and stamina, while slow flow balances effort with ease.

What many discover when they step onto a mat is that yoga is as much a mental practice as it is a physical one. The breath becomes an anchor. The mind, often scattered or overloaded, begins to settle. Thoughts soften and attention turns inward. In this way, yoga becomes a form of moving meditation.



It offers space to notice what the body has been holding—stress, fatigue, emotion—and to release it gently, without force. Winter, with its slower rhythms and inward pull, makes this practice especially nourishing. The quiet of the season mirrors the quiet yoga encourages within.

Yoga classes are, at their best, deeply judgment-free spaces. There is no expectation to perform or perfect. Poses are offered as invitations, not demands. Modifications are encouraged. Rest is honored. The mat becomes a place where comparison dissolves and self-awareness takes its place.

And then there are the instructors.

Anyone who has practiced yoga regularly knows this moment—the one where a teacher offers a simple line of guidance, a quiet observation, or a reflective thought that lands with unexpected precision. It feels as though the message was meant just for you, on that exact day, in that exact moment.



Certified yoga instructors are trained not only in anatomy and alignment, but in presence. Many carry a sensitivity that allows them to read the energy of a room, to sense when stillness is needed, when encouragement is appropriate, when silence says more than words. Their cues often extend beyond the physical, offering insight that lingers long after class ends.

The benefits of yoga extend far beyond the mat. Physically, it improves balance, mobility, circulation, and strength. Mentally, it supports clarity, emotional regulation, and stress reduction. Emotionally, it offers space—space to process, to feel, to breathe through whatever is present.

In winter especially, yoga becomes a companion to the season. It counterbalances heaviness with lightness, tension with ease, isolation with connection. It reminds us to soften when we are tempted to harden. To breathe when we are holding. To listen when we are rushing.

Yoga is not about becoming someone new. It is about remembering who you already are beneath the noise.



WHEN WINTER GETS QUIET

Holding space for men during the longest season



John Poli, LMHC | Contributing Writer

The winter months can have a profound effect on men's mental health. As temperatures drop and the days grow shorter, many men may experience changes in their mood and emotional resilience. These seasonal changes often coincide with the emotional weight of the winter holidays, making this time of year particularly challenging.

One of the most significant factors affecting mental health during winter is the loss of daylight. Darkness arrives much earlier, reducing our exposure to natural sunlight that helps to regulate our mood and circadian rhythm. Circadian rhythm is our body's natural, internal 24-hour cycle that regulates the sleep-wake pattern and other essential functions like hormone release, body temperature, and metabolism, controlled by a master clock in the brain that responds mainly to light and darkness. This disruption to our circadian rhythm can lead to fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and symptoms associated with seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Men may be especially vulnerable because emotional distress often presents as withdrawal, restlessness, or increased stress rather than openly expressed sadness, which, in turn, can delay its recognition and support.

The recently passed winter holidays, including Christmas and New Year's, can intensify these issues. While the holidays are often framed as joyful and connecting, they can also increase feelings of loneliness, financial pressure, or unmet expectations. New Year's often encourages reflection and goal-setting, which can trigger self-criticism or a sense of falling behind personally or professionally. When the celebrations end, many men experience a post-holiday emotional dip as normal routines return and the most challenging stretch of winter sets in.

During this period, male friendships play a critical role in protecting mental health. Strong friendships can provide a sense of belonging and emotional safety which can act as barriers against isolation. For many men, friendships are built around shared activities rather than emotional conversations, but even these connections offer powerful mental health benefits. Spending time together, laughing, or simply showing up consistently can reduce stress and reinforce the idea that no one has to face difficult times alone.

Nurturing male friendships during the winter season requires intention. Shorter days and busy schedules can make it easy to withdraw, so planning regular check-ins, such as a weekly call, gym session, or coffee meet-up can help maintain a sense of connection. Being willing to initiate plans, ask genuine questions, and listen without judgment can reinforce a sense of friendship and trust.

Winter can be a tough season for men's mental health, but it does not have to be experienced in isolation. By understanding the effects of reduced daylight, post-holiday emotional changes, and the importance of friendships, men can take proactive steps toward resilience. Prioritizing connection, especially with trusted and supportive friends, can make the winter months much more manageable.



Winter has a way of asking men to carry more than they often name. The world grows quieter, expectations remain high, and many are taught—explicitly or not—to handle discomfort privately. But silence does not always mean strength. And endurance does not require isolation.

This season is not a test to pass. It is a landscape to move through.

Strength in winter may look like reaching out first. It may look like admitting fatigue. It may look like allowing friendship, routine, or shared laughter to soften the edges of hard days. These are not signs of weakness—they are acts of care.

Winter does not last forever. But how we support one another while we're in it matters deeply.



Stone & Ivy's contributing writer, **John Poli**, has 20+ years of experience working with adults of all ages experiencing minor or major concerns/changes in their lives. John also has extensive experience working with both individuals with a substance use disorder and individuals who have been impacted by a family member or loved one with a substance use disorder. www.helloalma.com/providers/john-poli

HOSTING GAME NIGHT WITH FRIENDS



Jen Timothy | Writer

Winter has a way of pulling us inward. The days grow shorter, the air turns crisp, and suddenly, the idea of staying home feels less like retreat and more like restoration. It becomes the season of candles and soft lighting, of blankets draped over chairs, of music playing low enough to feel like a hum rather than a performance. It is also the perfect season for gathering—intimately, intentionally, and without pressure.

A winter game night doesn't need to be elaborate. In fact, the most memorable evenings are often the simplest ones: a small circle of friends, a handful of familiar games, food that feels comforting rather than impressive, and a room that invites people to exhale the moment they step inside. Think of it less as hosting and more as welcoming.

Set the tone with warmth. Dim the overhead lights and lean into lamps, candles, or soft string lights. Let your space feel like an invitation rather than a production. Place blankets within reach. Light a candle that smells like something familiar—vanilla, pine, cinnamon, sugar cookies. In winter, comfort is its own kind of luxury.

When inviting friends, consider asking each person to bring something small. Not to impress, but to contribute. It creates a sense of shared care and eases the pressure on you.

You might suggest:

- A favorite winter appetizer (baked brie, soup in a thermos, mini grilled cheeses, stuffed mushrooms)
- A nostalgic snack from childhood
- A dessert that feels like a memory (bread pudding, brownies, rice pudding, cookies)
- A bag of clementines or spiced nuts
- A family recipe

You could even ask guests to bring a short story with their dish—where it comes from, who used to make it, why it matters. Food becomes conversation.

Music matters, too. Choose something that hums rather than commands. A playlist filled with soft folk, acoustic covers, gentle classics, and songs that feel like snowfall. The kind of music that wraps around the room without asking for attention. Winter playlists should feel like company, not entertainment (don't forget to check out the *Winter Vibes* playlist in this issue).

When it comes to drinks, please be mindful: not everyone drinks alcohol—and no one should feel like they have to. A truly inviting gathering considers everyone. Offer mocktails alongside any cocktails you serve. Make them just as beautiful, just as intentional. Place them in real glasses, add garnishes, let them feel special.

Some cozy winter mocktail ideas:

- Sparkling cranberry with orange peel and rosemary
- Hot apple cider with cinnamon and clove
- Ginger beer with lime and mint
- Vanilla cream soda with a splash of cherry



Now for the heart of the evening: the games.

Choose games that don't intimidate, don't require long explanations, and don't punish people for not being "good" at them. The goal is laughter, not competition.

Some crowd-pleasing options:

- Taboo – fast, funny, chaotic
- Catch Phrase – perfect for groups
- Heads Up – easy, physical, hilarious
- Monikers – storytelling and inside jokes
- Telestrations – like telephone, but with drawings
- We're Not Really Strangers (Friend Edition) – deeper but gentle
- Would You Rather? – low-pressure, lots of laughs

Most importantly: keep the expectations low.

Not every moment has to be magical. Not every conversation has to be meaningful. Sometimes joy comes from being in the same room, laughing at nothing, passing snacks, losing track of time. Winter teaches us that connection doesn't have to be loud. It can be soft, slow, and simple. And maybe that's the greatest gift of all.



WINTER RECIPE: SWEDISH MEATBALLS

Served during a winter gathering or game night, Swedish meatballs feel generous and comforting, a dish meant to be shared, passed around, and enjoyed without ceremony. Simple, familiar, and deeply satisfying—just right for the season.

Ingredients

Meatballs

- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided in half
- ½ cup yellow onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup panko breadcrumbs
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 large egg, whisked
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon oregano
- ¼ teaspoon ground allspice
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¾ lb. ground beef, 80% lean
- ½ lb. ground pork

Sauce

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 4 tablespoons flour
- 2 cups beef broth
- 1 cube chicken bouillon, see notes
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard, can sub mustard powder
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- ½ cup sour cream, at room temperature

Instructions

1.Heat ½ of the olive oil in a large, high-walled skillet over medium heat. Add the finely diced onions and garlic. Soften for 5 minutes. Set aside and let cool.

2.In a large bowl, combine the breadcrumbs, Parmesan cheese, whisked egg, milk, cooled onions/garlic, salt, oregano, allspice, nutmeg, and pepper. Gently incorporate the meat until evenly combined, but without overworking it (otherwise the meatballs will be tough instead of tender).

3.Roll into 1½-inch meatballs and place on a plate. (A small cookie scoop makes it easier to roll balls of uniform size.) Transfer to the fridge and let them chill for 15 minutes, or up to overnight. Cover if chilling overnight.

4.While the meatballs chill, combine the beef broth, chicken bouillon, Worcestershire sauce, Dijon, and parsley in a large measuring cup with a spout. Set aside.

5.Heat remaining olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat.

6.Brown the meatballs in batches, leave plenty of room around each so that you can easily rotate them with a spoon to brown on all sides. Brown for about 1 minute per side. Remove and set aside. Decrease heat slightly as needed throughout cooking. Drain any excess oil when finished.

7.Melt the butter in the same skillet over medium heat. Use a silicone spatula to “clean” the bottom of the skillet. Stir in the flour and cook for 2 minutes, stirring continuously, until it begins to brown.

8.Add the beef broth mixture in small splashes, stirring continuously. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer.

9.Place the sour cream in a medium bowl. Spoon some of the sauce into the bowl (about ¼ cup), and stir until well-combined. Stir it into the sauce over low heat until incorporated.

10.Add the meatballs back to the skillet along with any juices from the plate. Spoon the sauce on top. Allow them to heat through over low heat for 10-15 minutes (or until cooked through), partially covered. Garnish with fresh parsley and serve over mashed potatoes or egg noodles.

WINTER VIBES

Winter Vibes is a collection of songs meant for slow mornings, long drives, candlelit evenings, and moments when you need something familiar to hold onto. It's a playlist for the in-between—between seasons, between chapters, between what was and what's becoming.

These tracks lean into nostalgia, tenderness, longing, and quiet hope. Some feel like a deep exhale. Some feel like memory. Some feel like the kind of song you play when you don't quite have the words yet—but you still need to feel something.

Press play, slow down, and let the season meet you where you are.



1. Joshua Radin - *Winter*
2. Richy Mitch & The Coal Miners - *Evergreen*
3. Joji - *Glimpses of Us*
4. Radiohead - *No Surprises*
5. Alex Baker, Hanging Valleys - *Anchor*
6. Yaz - *Only You*
7. Nathaniel Rateliff - *And It's Still Alright*
8. Wild Rivers - *Thinking 'Bout Love*
9. Vance Joy - *I'm With You*
10. Lo Moon - *For Me, It's You*
11. Emmitt Fenn - *What Falling in Love is For*
12. Commodores - *Easy*
13. Matt Simons - *Catch & Release*
14. Maggie Rogers - *Dog Years*
15. Hozier - *Like Real People Do*
16. Fleetwood Mac - *Landslide*
17. Rob Thomas - *Ever the Same*
18. Bahamas - *Lost in the Light*
19. Kaleo - *Way Down We Go*
20. Lord Huron - *The Night We Met*
21. Joni Mitchell - *A Case of You*
22. Collective Soul - *Run*
23. Teddy Swims - *Bad Dreams*
24. The Head And The Heart - *Tiebreaker*
25. Crowded House - *Don't Dream It's Over*
26. Florence + The Machine - *Cosmic Love*
27. Sam Cooke - *A Change is Gonna Come*
28. Counting Crows - *Round Here*
29. Sarah McLachlan - *Vox*
30. Aaron Espe - *Making All Things New*
31. Daughtry - *What About Now*
32. Billy Joel - *Vienna*
33. John Mayer - *Love is a Verb*
34. James Bay - *Let it Go*
35. Hollow Coves - *These Memories*
36. When in Rome - *The Promise*
37. Lauren Wood - *Fallen*
38. Angus & Julia Stone - *Nothing Else*
39. Shinedown - *Three Six Five*
40. Mon Rovia - *Crooked the Road*
41. The Secret Sisters - *All the Ways*
42. Van Morrison - *Days Like This*
43. The Head And The Heart - *Another Story*

This mix can be found & saved on Spotify: Winter Vibes by JTimothy



THE GIFT OF WINTER WALKS

On slowing down, breathing deeply, and learning to see again

Jen Timothy | Writer

Winter invites us outside in a different way than any other season. There is no urgency to bloom, no pressure to perform. The air is crisp, the light is softer, the world feels slightly hushed—as though nature itself is speaking in a quieter voice. And in that quiet, there is an invitation: to step out, to move gently, to notice.

Whether you live in a place blanketed by snow or somewhere touched only lightly by the season's chill, winter walking offers a kind of nourishment that is both physical and emotional. Cooler temperatures ease the strain on the body, making movement feel less taxing and more restorative. Breathing becomes deeper, clearer. The air feels cleaner, sharper, more awake. Even the simple act of walking feels different—more intentional, more grounded.

But the true gift of winter walks goes far beyond fitness.

Winter strips the world down to its essentials. Trees stand bare, unadorned. Landscapes soften into muted palettes. There is less distraction, less noise. What remains feels honest, quiet and real. And when we walk through these landscapes, we begin to mirror them—slowing down, shedding excess, returning to something simpler. This is the season to take your time, walk not for distance or steps, but for presence.

Bring a real camera, if you have one—not your phone, not something that buzzes or interrupts. A camera that asks you to look before you capture; to frame, to wait for the light, to choose. Winter offers endless small wonders if you let yourself see them: a bird puffed up against the cold, a branch etched with frost, footprints crossing a snowy path, the way water darkens just before it freezes. The sun rising later, setting earlier, casting longer shadows, painting the world in gold, pink, and blue.

Photography in winter becomes less about spectacle and more about noticing. It teaches patience. It asks you to observe before reacting. It turns a walk into meditation. And in those moments—waiting for the light to shift, listening to the crunch of leaves or snow underfoot—your mind begins to quiet. The noise of the world fades into something manageable.

Walking, especially in winter, has a way of clearing mental clutter. The rhythm of your steps becomes grounding. The cool air refreshes you. And slowly, without force, your thoughts untangle. You might choose to walk alone, letting solitude wrap around you like a blanket. There is something deeply restorative about being by yourself in winter—about listening to your own thoughts, about not needing to fill silence, about simply being. Or you might invite a friend. Winter walks have a way of opening conversations that don't happen elsewhere. The pace is slower. The atmosphere is softer. Words come easier. Silences feel comfortable. You don't need to perform for each other; you just move, side by side, noticing the world.

And then there are the days when you wander without a plan. When you let yourself get lost—just a little. When curiosity becomes your compass. When you follow a sound, a shimmer of light, a path you've never taken. These are the moments winter offers us most generously: moments of wonder.



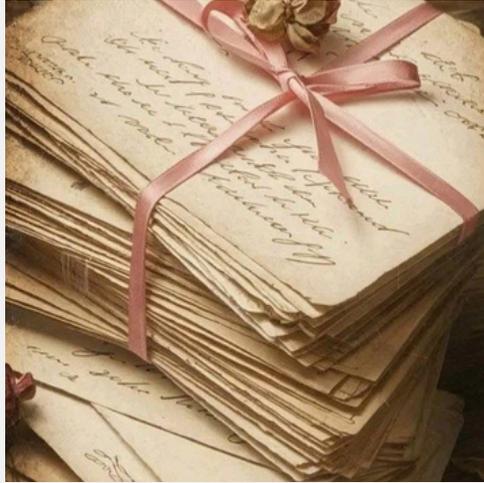
A Winter Walk With Your Camera

Photograph what feels meaningful, not what feels impressive & Capture one of each:

- Something that gifts you a smile
- A quiet moment
- A sign of life
- Something that made you stop
- A trace of warmth
- A winter texture
- A reflection
- Something small
- A wide-open view
- A shadow
- Stillness
- A peaceful landscape
- A memory

LOVE LETTERS, OF EVERY KIND

Notes to friends, parents, past selves, future selves - and the children we are raising



Valentine's Day often arrives wrapped in narrow definitions of love. It speaks in roses and reservations, heart-shaped boxes and carefully curated gestures. It suggests that love is something to be proven, displayed, or possessed. And while those expressions can be beautiful, they are only a small fraction of what love truly is. Love, in its quietest and most enduring form, is expansive.

It lives in friendships that outlast seasons of change. It exists in the steady presence of people who show up when it matters most. It lives in memory, in forgiveness, in the way we learn to hold ourselves more gently over time. Love can be romantic, yes—but it is also patient, constant, forgiving, protective, and deeply human. And sometimes, love takes the form of a letter.

A letter gives love a place to rest. It allows us to speak without interruption, without needing an immediate response. In a world that moves quickly, letters slow us down. They ask us to reflect. They invite us to choose our words with care, to say what we mean, to preserve what matters.

A letter to a friend might carry gratitude for shared laughter, or acknowledgment of a season survived together. A letter to a parent might hold questions, appreciation, or things that once felt too difficult to say out loud. A letter to your past self might be filled with tenderness, recognition, and reassurance. A letter to your future self might hold hope, curiosity, and quiet courage. But some of the most powerful love letters are the ones written to our children.

A letter to a child is not just a message—it is a legacy. It becomes a time capsule of who we were, what we believed, and how deeply we loved. It is a way of saying, I see you, even as you grow. It is proof that they were known, cherished, and held in someone's heart.

Imagine a child opening a letter years from now and reading words written just for them. Words that remind them of who they were when they were small. Words that reassure them when they are unsure. Words that tell them they were loved before they ever knew what love was.

In an age where communication is often fleeting—typed, sent, and forgotten—letter writing becomes an act of intention. It is slow. It is tangible. It can be folded, kept, reread, tucked into drawers, pressed between pages of books.

Encouraging children to write letters is also an invitation to reflection. It teaches them to notice their feelings, to express gratitude, to practice empathy. It shows them that words can be vessels for care. That language can hold meaning. That their voice matters. A letter doesn't have to be perfect. It doesn't need beautiful handwriting or profound insight. It only needs honesty.

This season, instead of focusing on who might give you love, consider how you might express it. Write to the friend who shaped your life.

Write to the version of yourself that survived what you once thought you couldn't.
Write to the child you are raising—or the one you once were.
Write to the person you are becoming.

Love does not have to be loud to be real. It does not need an audience to be meaningful. Sometimes, the most powerful expressions of love are the ones we give quietly—intentionally—on paper.

And perhaps the most radical act of love is this: allowing yourself to feel it, in all its forms.



HOW TO

Romanticize Winter

Winter is an invitation to slow down, soften your routines, and create warmth in small moments. Instead of rushing through the season, choose to savor it intentionally.

EMBRACE COZY OUTDOOR MOMENTS

- Take quiet walks in crisp winter air
- Watch snowfall or winter sunsets
- Visit a local coffee shop on cold mornings
 - Enjoy bundled-up errands with a warm drink

SLOW DOWN & RESET

- Take long, warm showers or baths
- Limit screen time in the evenings
- Journal or plan the year ahead
- Go to bed earlier without guilt

CREATE WARM SPACES

- Add blankets and pillows
 - Use soft lighting or lamps
- Diffuse seasonal scents
- Keep fresh flowers or greenery nearby

SIMPLE WINTER ACTIVITIES

- Drink hot chocolate or herbal tea
 - Bake something comforting
- Read by candlelight
- Create a cozy movie night
- Take winter photos just for fun
- Light candles early in the evening
- Wear soft layers at home



From All of Us at Stone & Ivy

As winter settles in and the season grows quieter, we invite you to move through these months with gentleness and care. Winter asks less of us outwardly and more of us inwardly—more listening, more patience, more grace for what feels unfinished.

May you find comfort in the small, steady things: morning light through a window, a familiar song, a walk taken slowly, a shared meal that lingers. May you allow yourself rest without guilt and reflection without urgency. This is a season not for rushing, but for tending.

If winter feels heavy, know that you are not alone. Growth often happens quietly, beneath the surface, long before it is visible. Trust what is unfolding, even if you cannot yet see it.

As you move through the colder days, may you feel held by connection, steadied by hope, and reminded that light returns—always, and in its own time.

From our hearts to yours, we wish you a winter filled with warmth, presence, and peace.

