

## ***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**It's the holy days! Cut yourself some slack and enjoy.** Are you going to enjoy the holy season that is before us this year? Or are you determined to ruin it with elusive expectations of perfection and with a rat-race schedule that leaves you gasping for air?

Hey, from the outset, accept that *it doesn't have to be perfect*. The holiday greetings, the gifts, the food and pastry preparations; and certainly not all the behaviors. Trust me, there will be some testy moments. There's simply too much going on for it to be any other way.

Some of the people we love most (or think we should love most) will mess up. At some point, they will act carelessly, say something that should have been left unsaid; there will be the usual unpredictable self-centered behavior. It's called *life*.

Listen up, now! That doesn't mean they're a bad person. Maybe they had a bad moment or maybe, God forgive, that's just the way they are. However, you don't have to buy into it. Let it go; or if you can't let it go, give useful feedback, stay big (as in, *have a BIG spirit*) and keep moving.

We can't enjoy these most precious times of the year when our spirit is too loaded down with negative stuff ... like resentment and revenge, or envy and anger. Those feelings may be real and may well deserve some reflective attention. But they don't get us anywhere when they burn on too long in our heart and spirit.

**Go where the light is.** One of the *keys* to our living is to discipline ourselves to go *where the light is*.

There's an old story of a man, on his hands and knees beneath a street light (it's dark out), looking for the key he lost some yards away by the curbside.

*What are you looking for,* a stranger passing by asks him?

*I'm looking for my lost key,* comes the halted reply.

*Where did you lose it?*

*Over by the curb,* the man offers.

*Well then why are you looking for it over here beneath the street light?*

*Because that's where the light is,* comes the sobering response.

Makes sense to me. *Go where the light is.* Clearly, the light is *not* with the negative, critical voices that are always trying to bring us down or diminish us in some way. We've all known *in-laws* or *out-laws* or whomever, who are always stirring up the mix. In many ways, it's a game or a ritual. Therefore, right now, choose *not to play*.

Another *key* to our living is to *go with the special moments*. If we are awake, open-minded and discerning, special moments come into our lives all the time, particularly during the holy days of this special season. Grab the moments when they come your way.

A special look, or word or nod from a loved one (a precious child or grandchild comes to mind). Go with it; and let it take you where it wants to go. Over time, special moments add up to meaningful lives. Savor the moment and taste the joy. *Go where the light is.*

**Cutting ourselves some slack.** For much of this to transpire, we have to lighten up on ourselves. Particularly during the holiday season, many of us are *way* too hard on ourselves. Why is this? Do we suffer from unrealistic expectations or are we simply overloaded with too many lists with too much on them?

Whatever our problems, we need to cut ourselves some slack and enjoy the season. For this to happen, *keep the big picture in mind*.

What's the goal? What's the feeling we want to be left with when the lights are out, family have gone home, and it's *life as usual* once again? Often, in any endeavor in life, it's helpful to ask ourselves, *how do I want to feel when it's all over?*

The answer to this question *is* our agenda for what we do and how we *do* or *say* it. My guess is we all want to feel that these special days hold meaning for our lives. We want to feel and savor the connections to one another. We want to know the sheer joy and warmth that comes from quality time shared with those whom we love most.

Let the season come! And let the feelings of wonder and joy abound!