

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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The first holidays without mom. For most of us Americans, it’s Thanksgiving through Christmas/ Hanukkah—the special days, the *holidays*. These are the times we cherish with family and friends. From all over, our family members come ... to be with one another ... to *be* family.

Always, it’s the best of times and the worst of times. The best of times for obvious reasons: family gatherings of all kinds and—with bowed heads and celebratory hearts—the living out of our family traditions. Holiday traditions carry forth some of the peak moments of our lives. Poignant memories overflow, just as new expectations rise once again in our eager spirits.

For the bereaved, however, and those enduring whatever personal loss, it can be a time of deep melancholy and sadness. For me, it’s the first holidays since my beloved mother died in mid January at the advancing age of eighty-nine. She had a good, long life, but still ...

The rhythm of the season won’t have the same beat or feel. Seeing my dear father cope on without his beloved mate of sixty-seven years. No longer able to hear mom’s voice on the other end of the telephone line; no more of the usual cards and gifts exchanged. The family celebrations continue, but it’s different.

Such quivering, life transitions leave an empty chair at the table of family traditions. It’s the way it is. I don’t like; it upsets me, but I have to accept it.

One way or another, these unwanted transitions take us to new places. It’s a time of adjustment.

Take care of yourself. If you’ve lost a loved one in recent times, do your best to not let the holidays beat you up. Take care of yourself! Up to a point, only do things that you want to do. You don’t have to go to the shopping malls; order on line or through catalogues.

And more than anything, don’t get drawn into the guilt game. Got that? Don’t feel guilty over other’s expectations. When the *guilt* card is played, however unknowingly or innocently, take care of yourself. It’s okay to say no and it’s okay to find your own way. You’re the only one that really knows and understands what you need and feel.

Although feeling sad, to some extent, is part of the healing process, still, you don’t have to let the seasonal celebrations and parties get you down. Politely, decline to attend; or only attend for a brief time. Or, perhaps better still, if you are able, go with a *life-giving* attitude focusing on the high values of the season.

As painful as it might be, the sadness and pain of our personal losses can prompt in us unanticipated growth and new awareness. Sometimes the new awareness leads us to new areas of commitment and personal involvement.

Perhaps we're more tuned in to the primacy of our personal relationships or some new perspective or life-understanding is born in our spirit.

In memory of your lost loved one, reach out to others. There is perhaps no better way to deal with the sadness of our personal losses than to reach out to others. We can do this in *loving memory* of our mother (as in my case) or our child or spouse. Certainly, it's painful; but it's also meaningful and healing.

The best of the holidays is about love and our most precious connections through the years. No matter what, the living memory of those connections lives on. It lives on in us and through us.

Doing for one another in a spirit of love, in loving memory of a loved one; over time, it all adds up. What goes around comes around, as the years unfold and as the acts of love pour out.

Already, I'm remembering my mother; her special touches of the season, the uniqueness of her person. I miss her. But her memory ignites a warmth in my heart. She was a beautiful lady.