

Opening our eyes
Christmas blues to Christmas bright
by Nan Dickie

It's December already, again, so soon. 'Tis the season to be...jolly?

It's no secret that December and "the holidays" are, for many people, the most stressful time of the year. We all know why. There is overt pressure to buy, and then buy more, presents for Christmas. We have been conditioned to show family and friends just how much we care for them by showering them with gifts at this time. Holiday decorations and catchy Christmas tunes confront us everywhere we go—there's no escaping them. We are supposed to love the trappings—the wrappings, the tree, the lights, the music, the hustle and bustle. I'm not meaning to be Ms Humbug here. These are realities that weigh on, and wear down, too many people.

I know that Christmas for lots of people is a time of merriment, of joyous family gatherings, of sharing good wishes with everyone they meet, of loving to give presents to others. This is the case for many folks, but it is not as prevalent as we may think.

For many people, the wide ranging stresses of this season lead to depression, sometimes a most debilitating depression. That is how it was for me for many years. When I was young, I started dreading Christmas in mid-November. I felt extremely lonely, especially in crowds, especially buying presents, especially among people who were being super-cheerful and excited about upcoming festivities. I couldn't wait until Boxing Day, because then, all of a sudden, it was over, finished, all done for another year.

At one point, I decided to just ignore the Christmas season. This was completely impossible, of course, as it would require sticking my head in the sand for a month. Besides, my difficulties with Christmas stemmed more from within me than from all the commotion that was going on out there in the world.

At a recent depression support group meeting, I asked participants how they felt about Christmas approaching. I was expecting many negative responses to my question. However, I was surprised. One person said, "I love going to arts and crafts fairs to see great pottery and photographs." Another said, "I go to choral concerts; the music and voices are wonderful; I just don't associate it at all with Christmas. I enjoy the music for what it is." Another said, "I love the fact that days start getting longer on December 21!"

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What I realized from these, and many more positive responses, is that there are so many different ways to view, approach and experience the Christmas season. We have a choice; in fact, we have many choices. And we have personal control. We can replace an old habit of thinking about the season in a negative way (“I can’t stand it”) with a new attitude (“I’m going to do those things I really enjoy doing this December”).

Wouldn’t this be a wonderful gift to give ourselves?!

[Nan Dickie is the facilitator of a peer-led depression support group in Salmon Arm. Meetings are held the first and third Mondays at Askews Uptown community room at noon. Everyone, including supporters, welcome. Info: ndickie@telus.net; 250 832-3733.]