

Healthy Happenings

Grief and the Holidays

by Antje Rath, CMHC

Why is this time of year so difficult for me?

Grief is a difficult thing to experience at any time of year. The holidays, however, can compound that grief in profound ways. While there is no cure for grief, there are some things that can be done to help ease your pain, perhaps helping to make this holiday season just a little bit brighter.

During the holidays we are inundated with messages that this time of year is supposed to be filled with joy, spent with friends and family, free of conflict, and filled with laughter. Those expectations are hard to fulfill, even under the best circumstances, harder still, when we are struggling with grief. We just might not look forward to the season, to family gatherings, to office parties, and to everything else that comes with it. Grief can keep us from joy.

For those who have lost a loved one, the holidays, with its focus on togetherness and joy, can cause us to miss our loved one even more than usual. Traditions from past years can suddenly feel meaningless or bring up painful memories and sadness. We don't want to feel like a burden or spoil the season for others, so we might tend to keep our feelings inside. However, if we try to pretend or go through the motions for the sake of others, we often feel worse.

What are some ways we can take care of ourselves and find some peace in this difficult time?

Particularly when we are feeling down and vulnerable,

it is important to “cover the basics.” Drinking enough water, eating a balanced diet, exercising, sleeping enough, and avoiding overindulging in alcohol or drugs are a necessary foundation for well-being. Reaching out for support is difficult for many people yet so valuable. People generally want to be helpful but they don't always know how. Friends and family members might appreciate it if we reach out to them, asking for company while trimming the tree, suggesting to share cooking duties, or just requesting a hug or a listening ear.

If we don't feel like socializing at all, it is okay to spend some time by ourselves, maybe watching a movie, taking a bubble bath, or meditating. If we find comfort in rituals and traditions, there is nothing wrong with keeping them. However, if they are more painful than helpful, it is absolutely okay to change them. The most important part is to listen to ourselves and to communicate with others around us about wishes, emotions, and expectations. Alone or in company, we can find ways to honor our feelings and the memory of our loved one, for example by lighting a candle at the dinner table, sharing memories, creating new traditions, or donating to a non-profit in our loved one's name.

Social media can be helpful as well as hurtful during this time. Sharing, receiving support, and being validated can be immensely comforting. And it might be a lot easier to reach out on Facebook or Instagram than in person. However, being confronted with other people's happy online “reality” or receiving negative responses can be quite distressing. Practicing good self-care and boundaries is as important in this context as everywhere else.

Another way to find some joy in the holidays, although maybe not at first, is to reach out to others in need. After experiencing grief ourselves, it is often easier to comfort someone in a similar situation. We can be the compassionate listener for them just as somebody else

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was for us at first. We can validate their feelings because we have felt them – or are still feeling them - as well. In addition to reaching out to individuals, we might also consider donating our time to churches or non-profits to connect with our community during the holidays. While COVID has made that a little more challenging, there are still many opportunities to contribute in rewarding ways.

For many people, the holiday season is about spoiling their loved ones in the best sense of the word. And of course, that is much easier to do if you feel good yourself. In order to feel good, you need to take care of your health, both physically and emotionally, so you can extend love to others. Being kind to yourself, making yourself a priority, is not selfish. It is necessary to be able to continue taking care of others and finding comfort during this difficult time. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you need support, either to friends and family, or to a professional, like a pastor, a therapist, or anybody else you trust.

Wishing you peaceful holidays.

Antje Rath is a Clinical Mental Health Counselor at Moab Regional Hospital. She leads a Grief Support Group on the first and third Wednesday of each month. To register, call 435-719-5563 or antjer@mrhmoab.org.



From Nurse to Yoga Instructor via Kathmandu

by Jessie Walsh

I have never felt so optimistically naive as I did the day my plane landed in Kathmandu, Nepal. Everything leading up to that moment was effortless. The decision was made, and the details arranged before I had a moment to doubt. A short time before, I had the fleeting recognition



of a long-ago dream. I wanted to study Yoga, and I wanted to do it in the land of Yoga. I had forgotten. But suddenly, as I was contemplating a conference for a profession that had long outlasted its expiration date, I remembered. Should I abandon the idea of traveling to Albuquerque for another nursing conference and head to Nepal to realize

my long-lost dream at the Himalayan Yoga Academy? You can see where I am going here. To Kathmandu Obviously.

I quickly realized that I wasn't mentally prepared for Kathmandu. I had done all the research. I bought a waterproof cellphone case and a LifeStraw water bottle. I was prepared for leeches and mosquitoes; monsoon season was right around the corner. But I wasn't prepared for the onslaught of chaos that assaulted my senses as soon as I stepped off the plane. The noises, the smells, the activity. All at once, completely overwhelming. I wasn't prepared for overpopulation, pollution, insane traffic, or extreme poverty. You can read all you like in anticipation, but nothing can truly prepare you for something so completely outside the realm of your own lived experience. Someone once told me that there are places in this world that my sensitive heart could not handle. I was beginning to

think they were right, and that Kathmandu was one of them.

My optimism diminished briefly as I contemplated the next 6 weeks of my life. Over that time, my shock transformed into curiosity, then to delight and wonder, to finally a deep devotion and love for the culture, the Yoga, the landscape, and its people. In the end, if it wasn't for a wonderful life back home, I might have stayed. Once my brain began to filter out the unnecessary distractions, I could focus on what this magical place on the other side of the Earth had to offer; a deep richness of ritual and tradition, history and food, symbiosis of family and community, simplicity of



life and the ability to take nothing for granted. Far from perfect, but completely different. I came home with immense gratitude for my own life and for the diversity of experiences on this planet. And, of course, a desire to someday return.

Are you curious about yoga? Are you curious about what I learned?

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CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday
5:30-6:45pm All Levels Yoga w/ Trista Winder

Tuesday
10-11:30am Stretch & Restore w/ Star Kolb
5:30-7pm Yoga Basics w/ Star Kolb

Wednesday
12-1:15pm MELT Method w/ Kelly Michaud
5:30-6:45pm All Levels Yoga w/ Angela Houghton

Thursday
10-11:30am Gentle Yoga Basics w/ Star Kolb
5:30-6:30pm Gyrokinesis® Class w/ Anne Howe

Friday
Private Lessons

Saturday
10-11:30am Hatha Yoga w/ Jessie Walsh

Sunday
9-10:15am All Levels Yoga w/ Alternating Teachers
11am-12:30pm Hatha Flow w/ Jessie Walsh

Online Yoga Classes w/ Star Kolb
Monday 10-11:30am Gentle Yoga
Tuesday 4-4:35pm Breathe & Restore
Wednesday 10-11:30am Gentle Yoga
Thursday 8-8:35am Move & Meditate

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Studio, class, prices, teacher info go to:

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