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Age Spots - The Blue Side of the Holidays by Jackie Dover

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The Blue Side of the Holidays

I want to offer a warning at the beginning that this is not my normal upbeat article. This is something I wanted to write last year, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. It was too hard and hurt too much.

I love the Holidays. I love the music, the family and friend gatherings, the decorations even the shopping! But last year was different for me. Last year my niece passed away and it was the first holidays without her. There were times then and still are, when I am doing routine daily things and a wave of grief and pain washes over me. It hurts so much and feels like a punch in the gut. I have at times even looked around to see if something this painful had knocked the breath out of those around me. I'm always surprised when they seem unaffected.

Most people want to comfort and offer support, but they don't know how to and dealing with grief during the holidays is extra hard. The holidays are the time we spend with families and friends. When there is an empty seat at the table, we all feel it. It doesn't go away even when we are having fun or doing those traditional things we do each year. That's when we notice the absence the most.

So what do you do if you are grieving during the holidays? It is ok to take a step back from all of the celebrating. Scheduling quiet time if you need it or stepping away if you feel overwhelmed by your surroundings is normal. If you get comfort from doing all the traditional celebrating, then do that. Everyone grieves in their own way and you are completely normal. You get to choose how much or how little you do. My boys all find comfort in talking about and sharing stories about those we have lost. Sharing funny stories and being able to laugh or cry or just remind ourselves that we are all missing her helps them work through some of their hardest times. Do whatever you are comfortable with. Try a new tradition if the old ones bring you more sadness than joy, only you know what you can handle. Listen to yourself.

Loss and grief are not the only things that steal the joy out of the season. Many people suffer from depression during the holidays. Sometimes it is a long term ongoing battle. Sometimes it is triggered by financial strains, loneliness or the cold dark days of winter. Whatever the reason, the holidays can be difficult for many. Just know, you are not alone, many people struggle. There are no magic words that will make things better, but experts do say there are things you can try. Volunteering at a senior center or other location will give you a chance to interact with others and have a purpose. Plan a manageable celebration if you enjoy being the host. If you need help ask for it. Talk to your doctor if this is something you just can't "shake". Trust me nothing you tell them will shock them, they have heard it all before. Put yourself first, plan time to do what you want to do in all the hustle and bustle of the season.

As we approach the holiday season people say it will be easier this year, it isn't the first without her. I'm not sure if I truly believe that, but I do know that last year showed me I can make it through. I can even find some joy in the holidays, and that has to be good enough. So this holiday season, be extra kind. Smile at the cashier and be polite to the other shoppers. Be understanding of the mother or father struggling with the crying child. Take the time to check on a neighbor or friend who has suffered a loss or who may be alone. Kindness and love are welcome at any season.

Happy Holidays to you all.

Contact Jackie Dover at Aging Matters for more information, 1-800-392-8771 or jdover@agingmatters2u.com

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