

Senior Advice: Holiday happiness is an inside job

by Doug_Mayberry

Q: I do not look forward to holidays because I am widowed, lonelier than ever, and shy. My small family is at a distance, and although we exchange presents and phone calls, it's the worst time of the year for me.

How can I pep myself up?

A: Take the positive high road. Choose to become more involved with other people. Loneliness is not exclusive, and we all share your feelings regardless of whether we are single or married - and even if we have lots of friends.

Relationships require at least two people. By just saying "hello" you can begin a relationship. Perhaps over recent years you have dropped out of any religious participation. December is a great month to reinvent yourself and begin participating again. Volunteer organizations are eager for help to provide food and gifts to those less fortunate. Surprise your neighbors better by delivering baked cookies at their door and saying "I was thinking of you this week and thought you might enjoy a little treat." Hospitals are an excellent place to volunteer. Sharing a little time with ill youngsters is both an eye opener and rewarding when you share their aches and pains. You can make new friends at your library, at the supermarket and the seniors' center.

Don't be hesitant to speak to strangers. A good opening line is, "Where did you grow up?" Strangers are eager to talk about their feelings. If you find a grouch, so be it. As individuals, we are each needy for love, sharing and friendship. Speaking up can be difficult, but your attitude can triumph over reluctance. Women are becoming more comfortable to be the first to speak. Don't be afraid to do so.

Last week I noticed a mother getting out of her car holding her wiggling daughter, while trying to corral an older one getting out the other door and tightly holding her car keys in her mouth. As the keys dropped from her mouth to the ground she looked at me walking by and smiled. I couldn't resist saying, "Looks like you've got your hands full." And she smiled again. The secret is to go where people are. Don't depend on others to invite you. Walking a pet is also a great way to share relationships. Elect to become more involved and have fun.

Q: Our dad lives alone and began driving a tractor on his family's farm in Texas at about age 9. Since Mom died several years ago, my brother and I are concerned about dad's driving habits. While riding with him last week at night, he drove right through a red light. We have talked with him about his driving, but as a wonderful, stubborn father we can't make much progress with him.

How can we convince him of the danger?

A: His reluctance to consider giving up the car keys is normal. Continue to encourage him not to drive at night, the most dangerous time. Ophthalmologists know the longer you stay in the sun the worse your night vision becomes. Make sure he is wearing neutral gray sunglasses and a wide brim hat during the day. Suggest he keep his car windows clean and clear. Make sure he has regular checkups.

Thoughts of handing over our independence by giving up our cars are challenging. However, for safety's sake, there comes a time when it is the best option. Try to convince him his declining ability not only endangers himself, but also others. If he can begin by stopping the night outings, it will be a good start.

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