

TAKING TIME

by Rebecca Escott
Extension Home Economist



Turning Holiday Blues To Joy

I opened my advent calendar window this morning. Just 13 more days until Christmas Day! I am excited, but many people in our communities don't share my excitement. In fact, for some people the approaching holiday may be the loneliest time of year for them.

Any person can be a victim of loneliness regardless of age, marital status, or social-economic level. However, according to Dr. Glen Jenson of Utah State University, women, teens, and divorced people are the most prone to it. And a person may experience a greater sense of loneliness at particular times. Jenson lists winter as the loneliest season, Sunday as the loneliest day of the week, and late night as the loneliest time of the day.

You can have an active part in helping a person turn her holiday blues into joy. One way to combat loneliness is to volunteer within the community. Could you provide transportation or issue the invitation to someone who may be alone during the holidays so that he could volunteer to help at an event? Maybe your neighbor could help you deliver packages to homes. A young single person may be thrilled if you ask her to chaperone a high school dance or band trip.

A person can be also overcome his loneliness by planning something important or interesting for future days. This gives the person a reason to get up in the morning and get dressed — even "dressed up". If you are planning a visit to a neighbor, you can actually heighten the joy by calling a day or two in advance to ask if it would be okay to stop by or to confirm your visit time. To make the visit less hectic for you, you may want to schedule it after December 25. But

drop a card in the mail to your friend now.

Exercise and a balanced diet help fend off the possible loneliness of the winter months. If you suspect that a family member may not be eating well, you could invite that person to join you for a meal. Improper nutrition can actually contribute to a person's feelings of depression, discouragement and loneliness. A mug of hearty soup and a warm conversation may be "just what the doctor ordered." Also encourage the person to exercise with you. Do you take morning or afternoon walks? Who could you invite along for company? Another way to help your friends conquer their sadness is to ask them to share talents. Does your neighbor bake a special holiday recipe? Ask her to bring her recipe and join you in your kitchen for a morning of baking. I always seem to need an extra hand when wrapping gifts. Again, include an isolated person in this activity. Show them that they are needed. Put them to work tearing tape, holding a ribbon in place or cutting paper.

Children and animals have a magical way of helping turn holiday blues into joy, too. Keep that in mind as you reach out to help someone who may be particularly lonely this month. A visit from young carolers or a stroll with your dog can be gifts of joy.

Perhaps one of the best tips for helping someone deal with the losses and changes that often result in loneliness is to be a good listener. Be prepared for laughter and tears. Both are healthy parts of coping. You may have heard of the proverb, "A joy shared is doubled, a sorrow shared is halved." It's true. The first step in being a good listener is to stop talking. Silence, like tears, is also okay. Use the phrases, "I know just how you feel" and "Things



Marilyn, right, said that it was in her marriage contract that her husband would buy her a horse after they married. He did. And, now her daughter Alicia shares her passion for horses.

Togetherness Marks Family

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the children about the use of each item.

Sandra also enjoys visiting senior citizens where she gives them a quiz that compares products and teaches them to read labels.

Sandra continues to milk evenings and weekends at home when she isn't doing promotional work.

"Everyone in the family is willing to work at home so that I can go

to a promotion," she said.

She was thrilled that her sister wanted to take the "Dairy Princess" to school for Show and Tell.

Her peers are also supportive and offer to help with promotional activities.

Sandra said her friends have nicknamed her Cow Queen, Dairy Queen, and Milk Queen.

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With all her responsibilities, Sandra has time for only four to five hours of sleep each night.

"But it's worth going without sleep to see all the satisfied people," she said.

After high school graduation, Sandra plans to attend either Kutztown or Penn State University. She wants to be a child psychologist. Her experience with dairy princess classroom demonstrations confirms how much she loves working with children.

But, she also loves the farm and that promises to play a major role in her future.

"Hopefully, I'll marry a dairy farmer," she said.

will be all right" less often. Instead try, "Tell me about it" or "How did that make you feel?" By all means, it is okay to talk about special people who have died or who are living far away. A gentle touch on the hand, back or shoulder and eye contact can communicate your concern.

As you approach the last few weeks of this holiday season, take a few moments out of your own schedule to reach out to an isolated person and help them turn their holidays to joy.

Rebecca Escott is a Home Economist with Penn State Cooperative Extension in Lehigh County.



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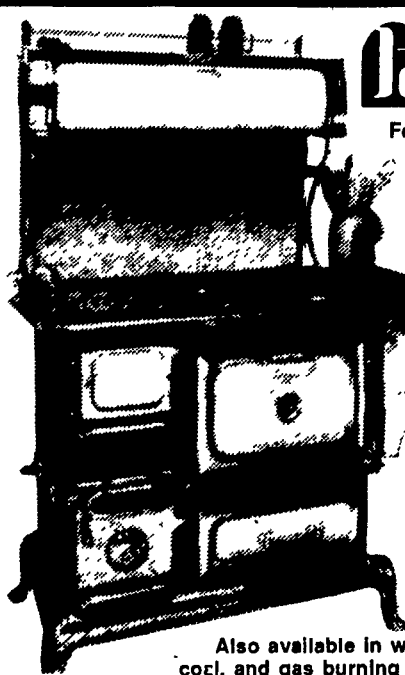
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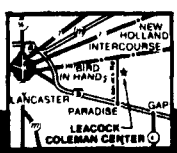
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