



# THE CARE COURIER

December 2021, Vol 7 Issue 5

## DOESN'T FEEL LIKE CHRISTMAS THIS YEAR

(If you are reading the newsletter, you will find the song at [www.LockeFuneralServices.com](http://www.LockeFuneralServices.com) blog or at this link: <https://www.musicforthesoul.org/resources/it-doesnt-feel-like-christmas/>)

“VickiJolene, you must listen to *“It Doesn’t Feel Like Christmas This Year,”* insisted my dear friend, Shelly Beach. “Stephen Siler from [www.musicforthesoul.org](http://www.musicforthesoul.org) wrote it. He sent it to me. He writes songs to help people experiencing hard circumstances.”

Wendel was in the hospital. Again. It was serious. I’d asked Shelly to help me think through this “Surviving The Holidays” newsletter, since my focus was on my husband. At any minute he might be assigned a bed at the University of Iowa. Surely once his brain tumor was removed, his seizures would end. This is where my thoughts were when Shelly hit the *play* button.

*Outside they’re caroling White Christmas, but in my heart, it’s blue...I wish this holiday would just go away... I wasn’t expecting to hear rich London Philharmonic strings, a raspy jazz voice, or a song that tapped all the sorrow I’d been holding in. With tears streaming down my cheeks, I wondered aloud, “Shelly, do you think you could get Steve to let me share his song in Locke’s newsletter?”*

“I can try.”

We brainstormed as I outlined ideas on sticky notes. I’d brought my laptop to write, but instead quickly packed it away. Something was wrong.

“I need to get back to the hospital. I’ll work on the newsletter while Wendel naps.”

But that’s not how things played out. The rest of the day included serious conversations with doctors, resulting in the jolting sting when hospice was suggested.

**Hospice?** I called my two daughters. Transitions happened quickly. An ambulance took Wendel back to the Pavilion. For two nights my daughters and I sat by his side and prayed as he went from this life into the next—a life I believe will be with our God. A life where there will be no pain, no tears, and total love. That hope alone holds me and carries me through these days.

So my dear ones, this is me being vulnerable. When Jack Locke asked me to write the newsletter/blog he told me he wanted to hear my voice and experience of forty

years speaking into your hearts. Know this: while I write about some of my experiences, **my experiences are not about me; they are about us, for we are in this together.** I now join hands with you in a more personal way as we journey together through grief. We’ll never get “over” grief, but we will move forward a step at a time. Together. My hope is to share whatever I discover that will help us in our journey.

The Holidays—here I was. In Hospice. Lights off at 2 am, holding my phone to my ear. Listening to Stephen Siler’s song, over and over. No Happy Holidays. How will we muddle through the valley of the shadow of death... when holidays, once so “merry and bright,” seem dim?

Shelly Beach did talk to Steve. He agreed to let us buy the right to share the song on our blog. It’s my gift to you, in memory of my husband Wendel E. Reece. You can go to the link above to download the song. Your donations to Music for the Soul are welcome. They also offer other resources for grief.

Please share this newsletter if you find it helpful. The next issue is coming out in 2022: GOT A LOT OF LIVIN’ TO DO. How will we positively move forward in 2022?

The Continuous Care Courier is only about caring. We will never share or sell emails. Our Thursday Grief Group is for the community. Many who come are not connected to Locke. So don’t worry about that. You can unsubscribe at any time. I hope you join me on this journey. If you like this issue, would you share it with others?

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### SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS 2021

#### In This Issue

- Doesn’t Feel Like Christmas This Year
- Comfort & Joy
- Plan Ahead, What To Say
- Surviving Holidays 2021: Strategy, Holidays Are Coming To Town
- Dates of Continuous Care meetings



Please feel free to bring a friend – All groups are free and open to the public!  
WEATHER ALERT: If schools or businesses are closed, the meeting is canceled.  
IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CALL WICKIJOLENE REECE 319-505-3048.

**TIMES:** 5:00 PM-6:30 PM  
**WHERE:** Locke at Tower Park  
4140 Kimball Avenue, Waterloo  
**DATES:** December: 9, 16  
January: 6, 13, 20, 27

\*Grief Support Group ~New Location~



Want to be on our mailing list? Give us a call, and we can add you to our quarterly newsletter list.

Continuous Care  
1519 West Fourth Street  
Waterloo, IA 50702



## PLAN AHEAD - WHAT TO SAY

*You want to be with friends and family. You can be with people, and avoid an ambush. Communicate clearly, to graciously clarify expectations,*

- I plan on being there. But I might need to leave early or even change my mind at the last minute. I don't want to be rude; my emotions take me by surprise. Thank you for your invitation and understanding.
- In the middle of the party, I might be sad, but I really do want to talk about \_\_\_\_\_. Please don't avoid bringing up his/her name. There are so many happy memories to laugh about. And if I cry? It's ok. I just need a hug and understanding.
- Enough about me, how are you doing? What's going on in your life?
- I know it's been over a year, but please don't line me up with anyone.
- I always love your party. But, can I take a raincheck? I can't do crowds, but I'd love to see you. Let's meet for coffee. Wednesday?
- Please excuse me this year, I'm just not ready to be out and about.
- Thank you for your advice. I am working on moving forward with my grief. Oh, there's \_\_\_\_\_ I really need to talk to him/her.
- Surely God doesn't need another angel in heaven. But thank you for your prayers and encouragement.
- Would you excuse me for a few minutes? I need some time alone.
- Thank you for the wine. So thoughtful. I need a clear head so I'm taking a break from alcohol. Join me for a sparkling cider?

### HOMEWORK: PRACTICE THESE.

The more you repeat, the more confidence you will exude. Do not apologize or argue for your healthy boundaries. Know your limits. You can relax knowing that you have a game plan if a situation arises. You got this.



*God, thank you for my loved one and the time we had together. The holidays are here and so many memories make me laugh and cry. My heart is breaking. Please help me in the days ahead. God, I need your love, light, and life to fill and comfort me so I can be a comfort to others. May I see joy through my tears and celebrate the season with hope trusting you offer light in the darkness.*

## COMFORT & JOY

- Ask: "What will it take for me to survive/enjoy this holiday season?"
- Be with positive, understanding people.
- Drive around and look at the lights.
- Wrap up in a cozy blanket and drink cocoa.
- Speak positively to yourself. No self-criticism.
- "Talk" to your loved one. Laugh and cry. Journal.
- Light a candle. Get still, take time, talk with God
- Search YouTube: Wartburg Choir & Children's Pageants.
- Enjoy Comforting Carbs!
- Call a long-lost friend, or two...three?
- Visit or call a shut-in. Ask about their childhood.
- Imbibe, a little.
- What gave you joy as a child? Do that.
- Forgive. Free yourself from a grudge.
- Dance, sing, move like nobody's watching.
- Take a hot shower, get a massage.
- Eat your favorite foods.
- Go to a party, leave when needed.
- Do things that make you laugh.
- Get outside, take a walk, or drive. Enjoy nature.
- Read Luke 1-2, Matthew 1-2.
- In memory of your loved one, give to charity.

## SURVIVING 2021 - STRATEGY HOLIDAYS ARE COMING TO TOWN

"All I want to do is fast forward to January 2nd," sighed Sally.

"I can't do that. My kids. My grandkids. I can't let them down. I've got my list, I'm already...." Sheila's voice trembled at a high pitch. "I can't...."

Marcia placed her hand over Sheila's. "You can't tell them it's too much this year?"

"They miss him. So many tears. I want us to be happy. I must try to make..." Her voice broke.

"Try to make Christmas be like it's always been?"

Sheila crumpled into Marcia's arms, her "yes" barely audible over the muffled sobs.

Gary started singing. "You better not shout, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town. Really? I don't need him looking over my shoulder judging if I'm good or not. I'm tired of being nice!"

"We need to cry. The baby Jesus didn't cry? I doubt that! Have you ever known a baby not to cry?" Nancy nudged Gary.

Margaret, the group leader, watched as some people in the group reached out to Sheila. Others averted their gaze. Each knew from their own experience the same thing: Holidays would never be the same.

But how to help Sheila?

### MAKING A LIST AND CHECKING IT THRICE

"Let's 'flip' 'Santa Claus Is Coming to Town' and instead of letting it manipulate us, let's use it to our advantage," suggested Margaret.

Sheila looked up, curious. "Flip it like an old house? Like DIY shows?"

"Or you can decide to love it, or list it." Margaret chuckled as she handed out some blank pages. "Let's do some brainstorming. List everything you and your loved one usually do to prepare for the holidays. Everything. Baking. Visiting. Travel. Concerts. Church. Decorating. Social events. Shopping. And it's okay to get emotional"

For the next fifteen minutes, the group diligently wrote lists. Sometimes a tear dropped on the paper.

Margaret broke in. "The first thing we all must do is accept that holidays will NEVER be the same when we lose a loved one. We and our family must let go of all expectations of recreating holidays of the past. That's the key to surviving instead of sabotaging.

Check your list and prioritize. 1) What three things must you absolutely experience? Circle only three. 2) Put a line through anything that will stress you out. Just for this year."

"What about the kids?" Martha's voice squeaked.

"We'll get to them later," Margaret soothed softly. "First let's deal with you." She stopped and smiled. "I lied. We're making a list, and checking it *thrice*. 3) Put a star on everything that your loved one did during the holiday. Two stars if this can't be replaced."

"Jerry always brined and fried the turkey. Nobody knows how to use that fryer. And nobody knows the recipe. It died with him," said Nancy.

"There's an empty chair at the head of the table. My husband always said the blessing." Marcia's brow was furrowed. "Who will say it now? Do I keep his chair empty?"

"Jan always had the house smelling so good: pumpkin pie and sugar cookies. We would pull out her great-grandmother's Glogg recipe and make bottles for all our friends," said Tom.

### GONNA FIND OUT WHO'S NAUGHTY AND NICE

"Let's consider boundaries," Margaret continued. "Boundaries protect us by letting us step back and decide where to say 'no' and where to say 'yes.' It's about deciding how we want to be treated.

"The people around us might do or say things that hurt us. Most don't mean to be 'naughty,' they want to focus on 'happy.' Many are uncomfortable with loss. They want us to tuck away all our emotions and be 'nice.' How many of you felt everything was up to you to make the season 'Merry?'" Hands went up. Mostly women.

"This season it's important to be true to yourself and know your limits. You don't have to live up to anyone's expectations." Margaret paused. "Even your own."

"My brother tells me to suck it up," sighed Sam. "What a guy!"

"So, let's make a list of the people around you. Who is naughty? The toxic ones? Avoid engaging with them. Let them go. Don't play their 'reindeer-games.' Who's positive? People you can trust?"

"Like Clarice in Rudolph?" Marcia perked up. "My friend Elaine is like that. Soothing."

### BE GOOD FOR GOODNESS SAKE

"Consider what's good for you this season. Have your kids and grandkids write their list. Talk together. Everyone is hurting. Plan ahead. Think through the day. Be flexible, or compromise. Do you have to fry the turkey? Could the kids learn the ancient family recipe? Try some new traditions? Just order pizza? Heretical? But...relaxing. Order out, split up responsibilities. Don't let your loved one be the elephant in the room. Set a place for your loved one. Share stories. It's okay to cry and laugh. It's healing," Margaret offered with a smile.

### HE SEES YOU WHEN YOU'RE SLEEPING

Margaret lowered her voice, "Whether you believe or not, pour out your heart. I believe God is watching over you. One of my kids once shared, "Christmas is about God putting skin on in the form of baby Jesus, to be with people." Hanukkah is about God providing light when the oil ran out for 8 days! Kwanzaa is about the people, the struggle, sacrifice, and the possibilities ahead. All ancient traditions and holidays are about the light of hope in the midst of darkness. Choose hope. You've still GOT A LOT OF LIVIN' TO DO in 2022."

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