

A Cancer Survivor's Christmas

Life with Cancer

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Yes it's that time of year again. It's the holidays and t'is the season to be stressed! Crowded malls, last minute shopping, endless lines, 200 cards to write....what? You mean it's only me who does that? Bummer! No wonder I never get many back.

For the average person, there's enough stress. Add cancer, or illness, into the equation and this season can be the Everest of anxiety.



Have you ever thought what survivors go through on big holidays like this? For one, most of us don't have the energy to do the full Christmas thing. Go out in the freezing cold and put lights on my trees? Are you kidding me? I'd have to take a three hour nap afterwards. Bake cookies for the neighbors? Sorry neighbors but the cookie barrel's empty this year. It takes enough of my strength to drive to the grocery store and find a turkey small enough that we won't be eating it for the next 3 months, let alone decorate. So if you drive past my house and think "boy, those miserable people have no Christmas spirit" it's because my Christmas spirit is being reserved for my family and friends.

Of course, where there's family, there's always stress too, mainly because "they", naming no names, forget the big picture. The holidays should be a time for enjoying our family and our children, celebrating the highs of the year past, and the new beginnings of the year to come. But it's easy to become preoccupied.

Do you freak out if the turkey doesn't pop at the same time the vegetables are done? Are you busily keeping the house tidy, so Aunt Mildred doesn't give you that disgusted "I see dust" look. Do you spend your holiday grumping about all the home improvement jobs that you can see need doing? You'd not be alone.

But time is too precious to waste, especially during the holidays. For some, this may be the last Christmas they get to spend with their loved ones. For others, it may be the last Christmas, for a while, that they feel healthy, or there may be many, many more to come. No one knows for sure. Are you going to gamble on it?

For a cancer survivor, Christmas, like other anniversaries, is a focusing point. It can bring sadness when that question "will I see another one?" pops into your head. Or it

can be an incentive to concentrate on what's important. Either way, it's an added layer of stress. But if those around you are happy and concentrating on the big picture too, then that climb up Everest should be much more like a hike up Parajito Mountain - a lot easier, and still well worth the view.

Kay Kerbyson is a Board Member of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer, and Founder/President of Ovarian Cancer Together Inc., the only non-profit specifically supporting women in New Mexico with ovarian cancer. Resources, support and education materials, for those effected by cancer, can be found at www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org and www.ovariancancertogether.org