

HOLIDAY EXPECTATIONS

All of us get caught up in expectations of not only what the holidays are supposed to be, but in the roles we are supposed to play in those holidays. We're supposed to be joyful and happy at Christmas time. We're supposed to shop and decorate and prepare, and we're supposed to say and do the right things so that everyone around us enjoys the day. That's a big responsibility isn't it?

But my question is - who said we have to do all this? Most of us just go through life doing what is expected of us, never questioning WHY we have to, or ask where OUR rights are in these expectations. We never stop and ask who fills our needs. I think it's time we do. We have enough to do at attending to our grief and doing the really necessary things in life without allowing ourselves to take on the responsibility that everyone else puts on us too.

Because we have conformed to everyone's expectations of us for so long, we don't see any other way to do things. What we need to do is stand up and say: "I can't do it this year. I'm sorry if you object, but I have to meet my needs this holiday." and ignore the repercussions that might follow. I am not suggesting that we abandon our families or friends to do only what we want on the special days, but I am suggesting that we do whatever we possibly can to make these days easier for ourselves and not be concerned with what others think about it.

In a booklet called ACCEPTANCE, Vincent P. Collins puts it quite succinctly:

"I caused myself a lot of unnecessary grief by trying to be unselfish, to think of everybody else first, myself last, and to try to please everybody. But you can't please everybody. You can knock yourself out doing this and that and the other thing to please 'your cousins and your sisters and your aunts,' and you find out that they are not really affected one way or the other. 'Please everybody, nobody's pleased; please yourself, at least you're pleased!' Charity begins at home, and enlightened self-interest is a basic endowment of human nature. You can save yourself a lot of grief by admitting the futility of trying to please everybody, or of trying to please somebody who just can't be pleased."

I think this applies to us as bereaved people not only at the holiday season, but all the time. Ask yourself, must you torment and exhaust yourself this year just to please someone else. What about pleasing yourself for a change! After all, when the day is over and Aunt Mary is in a tiff because you were "morbid" and talked about how you miss you child, or hung her Christmas stocking, Aunt Mary (or whomever) will get over it in a week or so, but you will still be grieving.

The fact is that we must take care of ourselves because few of us are fortunate enough to have a supportive group of relatives and friends around us who will encourage the self-preserving stance we must have in order to get through the holidays without terrible memories of "that day." We must protect ourselves with a little assertiveness.