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This Woman Knows Magazine

Surviving The Holidays

WINTER 2023

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Editor's Letter



We're back! Yes, it's been quite the hiatus! But we're excited to bring you this very special edition of the This Woman Knows magazine.

I know personally that the holidays can be rough for lots of people. If you've experienced loss, estrangement, or financial upheaval then chances are life is not mirroring all the Hallmark Christmas movies on heavy rotation during this time.

And sometimes family dynamics can be stressful. Not everyone embraces healing which can make family get togethers awkward.

Again, I get it.

I know all of these circumstances very well.

I loathed the holidays and wanted nothing more than to be anyplace other than home. But thanks to a lot of healing, the holidays aren't painful anymore.

That's why I wanted to present you with this very special issue. It's for those who don't have the ideal families or find themselves grieving during this time of year or maybe alone for the first time.

The writers share their own stories and how they overcame. We are all here as witnesses that joy is possible and healthy relationships do exist.

Enjoy,

Lisa N. Alexander
Editor-in-Chief

This Woman Knows

Winter 2023

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Editor-In-Chief

Lisa N. Alexander

Graphic Design

PrettyWork Creative

Guest Writers

Susan Ball

Jamesina E. Greene

Angelique Hamilton

Anica Leon-Weil

Holly McNeill

Mary Ingram-Schatz

Tara Storch

Comments? Questions?

Email us at

thiswomanknowsmedia@gmail.com

Send press releases and story ideas to:

thiswomanknowsmedia@gmail.com

For advertising call

(832) 877-1900

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SCAN ME!



Knead Your Faith

Finding commonalities make for new holiday traditions that can be celebrated by all

When I was just starting a teaching career, I worked at a very diverse elementary school in New York City. Children's families came from all over the world and had a wide variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. While some celebrated Christmas, many did not. Having always lived in places where the Christmas holidays brought a bit of joy to school in the cold months, I thought I would miss celebrating those traditions. I didn't.

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It's Boundary Setting Season!

aka The Holidays

How to survive stressful family dynamics with coach **Andrea Rogers** and *This Woman Knows* Podcast host, **Lisa N. Alexander**.

[Click here to LISTEN NOW!](#)

Andrea Rogers

Lisa N. Alexander



Bah. Humbug.

For many people, holidays are a time of joyful exuberance, joint celebrations, and extreme excitement. Individuals travel far and wide to be united with friends and family at designated times of fellowships and gatherings that are anticipated throughout the year.

As the holiday season approaches, the excitement becomes tangible throughout multiple communities. The atmosphere is charged with an air of expectation. People appear to be kinder to their neighbors and generosity reaches a peak. Love and joy seem to be in abundance. Yet, for multitudes of us, this is not the reality.

Across the nations, there are hundreds of thousands of us

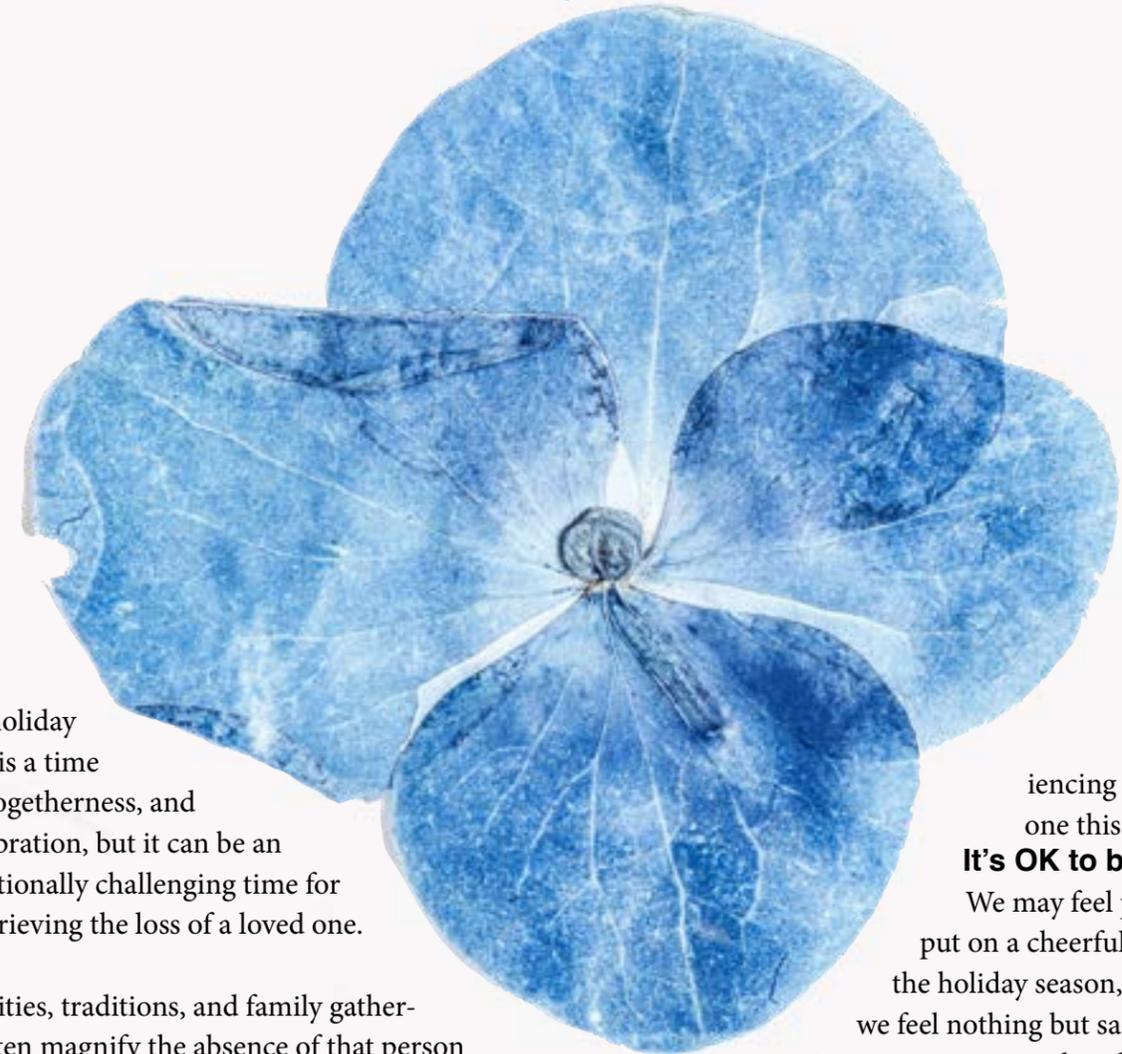
who will not fully experience the excitement and hype of the holiday season. For each of us there is a major void that no music, dancing or sharing of meals can fill. It is the emptiness of the void left by the absence of our incarcerated loved one. It is knowing that my son is being warehoused on a concrete plantation and unless he and fellow incarcerated persons in his direct space make it happen, there will be no acknowledgment of the holiday.

Incarcerated persons are seen as state and federal property. Allowing them to celebrate holidays is irrelevant to the powers that be.

The prison system rarely rehabilitates, but never fails to punish, control, or break the spirit and body of the humans that it

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Grief AND Gratitude



The holiday season is a time of joy, togetherness, and celebration, but it can be an emotionally challenging time for those grieving the loss of a loved one.

Festivities, traditions, and family gatherings often magnify the absence of that person we've lost, making it essential to find ways to cope with grief during what is supposed to be the "most wonderful time of the year."

Thirteen years ago, my family suffered an enormous tragedy with the loss of our oldest daughter, Taylor. Her sudden and unexpected death left a gaping hole in our hearts. I vividly remember that first holiday season without her and how challenging it was emotionally. Reflecting on that difficult time, I hope to offer a few

suggestions for anyone experiencing a loss of a loved one this holiday season.

It's OK to be sad

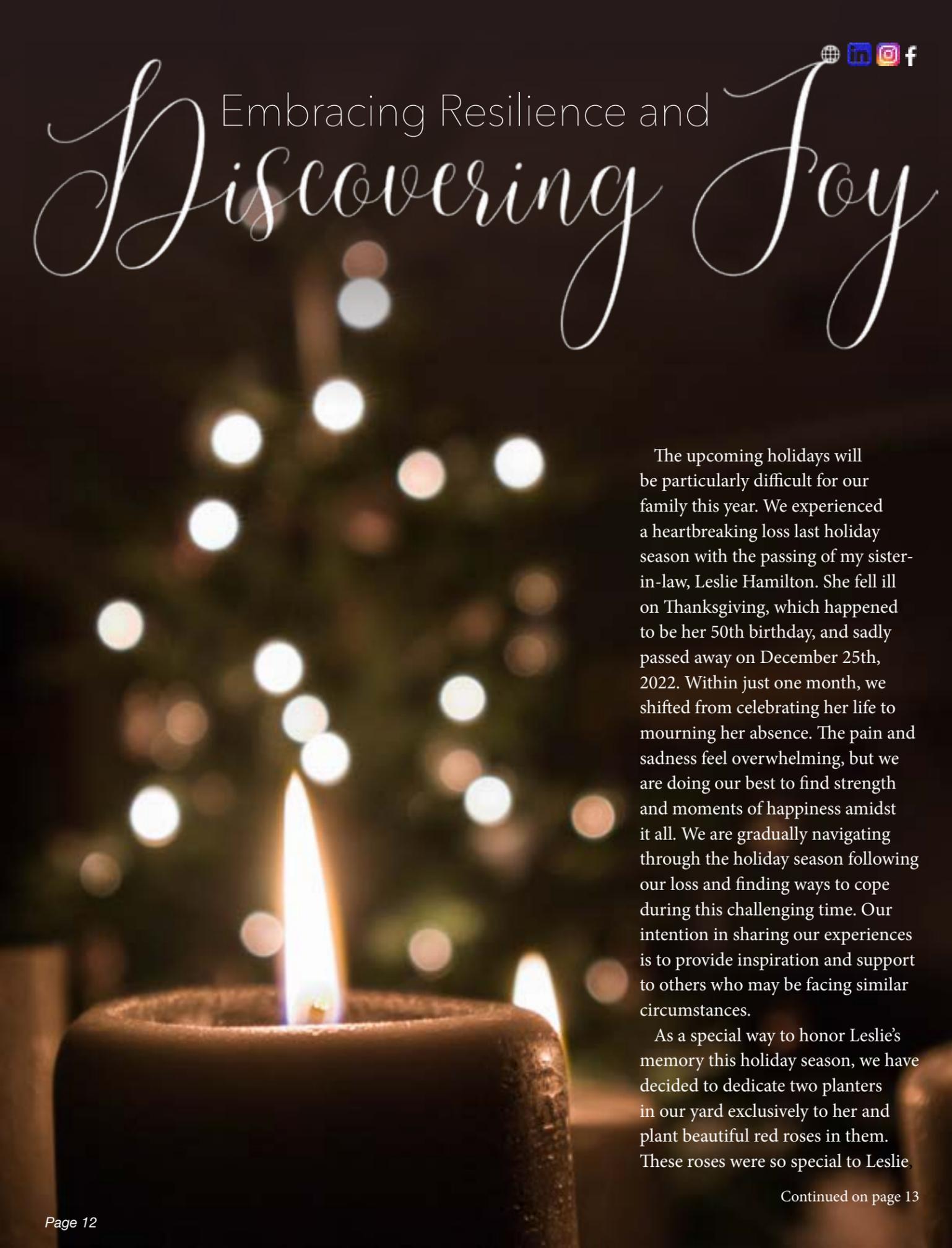
We may feel pressured to put on a cheerful face during the holiday season, even though we feel nothing but sadness. It's important to remember that grief is a personal journey, and there is no right or wrong way to experience it, regardless of how long it's been since you lost your loved one. It's perfectly normal to have deep sorrow or even have moments of joy during the holidays. It can be an emotional roller coaster, so give yourself some grace and be kind to yourself. Your heart is hurting; however you are still putting one foot in front of the other—even if they are baby steps. Deep breath—you can do it.

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Black Maternal Mental Health Advocate

- Nonprofit Leader
- Speaker/Author
- INSPIRE Method Training Creator

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Embracing Resilience and Discovering Joy



The upcoming holidays will be particularly difficult for our family this year. We experienced a heartbreaking loss last holiday season with the passing of my sister-in-law, Leslie Hamilton. She fell ill on Thanksgiving, which happened to be her 50th birthday, and sadly passed away on December 25th, 2022. Within just one month, we shifted from celebrating her life to mourning her absence. The pain and sadness feel overwhelming, but we are doing our best to find strength and moments of happiness amidst it all. We are gradually navigating through the holiday season following our loss and finding ways to cope during this challenging time. Our intention in sharing our experiences is to provide inspiration and support to others who may be facing similar circumstances.

As a special way to honor Leslie's memory this holiday season, we have decided to dedicate two planters in our yard exclusively to her and plant beautiful red roses in them. These roses were so special to Leslie

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and taking care of them gives us a tangible reminder of her presence. It's like she's blooming right in our own backyard. This small act brings us comfort and allows us to channel our grief into something positive.

Dealing with grief has taught us some valuable lessons. One important aspect of coping for us has been focusing on the memories we shared with Leslie. As a family, we gather together and share stories of her infectious laughter, her kind heart, and how she had this incredible ability to light up any room she walked into. It's bittersweet but also incredibly comforting because it keeps her spirit alive in our hearts. Following in Leslie's footsteps, we've decided to volunteer and donate to the causes that were close to her heart. It gives us a sense of peace knowing that we're carrying on her legacy of generosity and kindness.

During these tough times, the support and understanding of our loved ones mean the world to us. We rely on our family and friends to be there for us, to listen to us, and to provide us with comfort. Their compassion and strength are truly invaluable as they help us navigate through this challenging phase of life. We are incredibly grateful for their presence in our lives.

We have also come to realize the importance of being kind to ourselves. Grief is a difficult journey, and it's okay to not be okay and to experience a roller coaster of emotions, especially during this holiday season, which may feel different from what we're accustomed to. It's important to give ourselves permission to grieve and mourn, while also actively seeking moments of joy and happiness. By doing so, we not only honor the memory of our loved one, Leslie, but we also allow ourselves to find happiness and laughter in the company of family. We are incredibly grateful for the support and understanding, and truly treasure the moments of joy and solace they provide us during this challenging phase of life.

Leslie holds a special place in our hearts, and we will always carry her memory with us as we navigate

through grief and discover grace. Although she may not be physically present, her presence is felt in our lives every day. Taking care of the red roses in the planters is a way for us to keep her spirit alive. Love doesn't diminish just because someone is no longer with us; it transcends boundaries and remains with us eternally.

To anyone who may be going through a difficult time during the holidays, we want to offer reassurance that you are not alone. We encourage everyone, even those who are grieving, to find inner strength and seek out moments of joy and happiness. It's possible to experience both healing and grace simultaneously. By approaching this season with courage, compassion, and a renewed appreciation for the beauty of life, we can find solace and hope amidst our challenges. Wishing you a peaceful holiday season. ■



Holly and her sons, Zac and Nate.



My birthday falls on January 1st, which may seem cool, but it sometimes isn't due to New Year's Eve hangovers and its proximity to Christmas. New Year's Day in 2012 should have been filled with family and celebration, but I found myself entirely alone. Nine months earlier, after an eight-year battle for my children, I faced the harsh reality of alienation from them. Ever since my boys announced in March, 'We're going on vacation with Dad, and we're not coming back,' they were gone.

Today, as a mindfulness meditation teacher, I often say that life's events show us what we need to set ourselves free. On that birthday, I was in conflict. I loved my boys, but let me be clear here: without them, I wanted to go! I'd outgrown what Minnesota had to offer me both in my career path and in terms of my spiritual growth. Seeking solace, I spent the day contemplating what Life was trying to tell me that solitary holiday season.

Since their spring exit, gratefully, I did see glimpses of them now and then, but our visits were kept at a superficial level. We didn't discuss the events leading to their departure or our current situation.

Tell me, can you build a life around seeing your children for a couple of hours every month or two, if you were lucky? Zac still had five years of school. Nate had three. I had to stay, right?

Occasionally, I made small moves towards leaving, granting myself the illusion of choice in the matter. Yet, there was one string I couldn't sever – the umbilical cord. I looked inward for guidance, and as always, the Universe responded. Life decided to shake up the one stable element that had given me strength during that time.

Up until that point, my career as an architect had provided a sanctuary amidst the turmoil of divorce and the bizarre eight years on the battlefield. But as it began to falter, as holes appeared in this safety net, I received my answer.

unconventional path



From loss to discovery
One mother's journey



Who leaves their children behind? Only a loser, a bad parent, a worthless bitch, right? The tug-of-war that had defined my relationship with my ex-husband now manifested as an emotional battle within my heart. They were so close yet so far away.

The boys were going through their own struggles and having me near\$\$\$\$\$by surely provided some comfort. I was stuck. If staying was the only solution, then we would all lose. Yet, being a part of their lives was exactly what I'd fought tirelessly for all those years.

That near decade of advocating for my children instilled a profound lesson within me: when you stop surrendering your power and start supporting yourself, you uncover courage and strength. Life sometimes demands a leap of faith, and I'd grown brave enough to make that leap. By relinquishing the traditional expectations of motherhood, I allowed wisdom to guide me as I charted the best course of action.

I realized I wasn't doing my boys any good by staying in a place I'd outgrown while waiting for

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UNCHARTERED WATERS

Navigating the Holidays After The End of an Abusive Relationship

The holiday season is a time traditionally associated with joy, togetherness, and celebration. However, for women who have recently left an abusive relationship, the holiday season can be a challenging and emotionally charged period. Abusers often use this time to manipulate their victims with sentimental reminders, sweet words, and aggressive behaviour.

When my last and near fatal abusive relationship ended, I struggled with the holidays. And even though he had tried to kill me, I found myself wishing and hoping he would call and put our little family back together so we could have a happy Christmas. I know first-hand how difficult the holiday season can

be for survivors of abuse and I want to share what I learned and some of my top tips for moving through and coming out the other side stronger and ready to create a life you truly love.

Celebrate Your Freedom, Strength, and Courage:

Hey You Courageous Woan - You've Got This! Write that everywhere - post-it notes, on your phone, computer, journal, everywhere to remind yourself to celebrate You this holiday season. Celebrate your newfound freedom - no more walking on eggshells! Take pride in your strength and courage for leaving an abusive relationship. Celebrate the fact that you're taking

steps to build a better life for yourself and your loved ones. Celebrate and celebrate some more!

Create New Traditions

Reclaim the holiday season by creating new traditions that represent the new chapter in your life. Ever heard of Cupcake Christmas? That was the new tradition my daughter and I created to take back the holidays and celebrate our way. The act of creating boosts all your positive hormones and that is self-care and self-love.

New traditions can be as simple as baking cookies with your children, volunteering for a charitable cause, or taking a weekend getaway to a place you've always wanted to visit.

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6 Tips for Managing the Holiday Season

Some seasons of life you may find the holidays are not what you'd imagined or hoped for. You may feel pressured to keep up with what you see on social media or in magazines. But remembering to take care of yourself and prioritize your values can make a tremendous difference in being able to enjoy the time you have and by doing so you can model important values for those around you.

Keep it Simple

We cannot do it all. Narrow down your scope as to what is possible and then by choose two or three meaningful activities or events to enjoy.

Focus on What Matters

It can be easy to get caught up in external ideas of what the holidays should look like, but it's helpful to ask...What is important to you? How do you want the holidays to feel?

Make it Even Easier

Ordering a meal when you cannot realistically cook and having gifts delivered saves time and stress.

Be Flexible

Learning to be flexible has makes a tremendous difference in reducing disappointment when things don't work out as planned.

Lean on Community

Don't be ashamed to ask for help or inclusion from the people in your community. If you're feeling overwhelmed, join a friend or other family member's event.

Leave Room for Grief

You may feel pressured to mask your grief this holiday. But leave space to feel sad, angry, lonely, or disappointed. Do something symbolic to honor your loved one.

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Bah Humbug

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warehouses. Mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex system create an environment of helplessness and hopelessness. The poor nutritional provisions and sub par medical care break down bodies and minds. Undiagnosed and diagnosed mental health illnesses are used to further punish and isolate those who should be receiving help! Abuse of authority and excessive force also add to the deterioration of the minds of incarcerated persons.

As a mother, I often think of the first time that I saw my son. I was overwhelmed with awe as I looked at the divine being that had incubated in my womb and was birthed through me! Wow! When I held him, smelled, and inhaled him, pressed his flesh against my flesh, I had a spiritual experience. He became my first experience with my heart outside of my body. He will ALWAYS be my joy!

Today, as I talk with him through sub par prison communication systems, I cherish the moments where we laugh and learn together.

Holidays are challenging because I cannot remember the last time that we celebrated one together.

During the holiday season he lost the grandfather who fathered him into adulthood. I was not even able to hold him through his grief. I walk through this painful terrain by having video chats with him; family zooms with other family members; spending time with my youngest grandson and journaling. Even though there is a huge void, I celebrate his redemptive journey and declare how proud that I am of him.

I have noticed that people tend to avoid talking about my son with me. People who have grown up with him, and even some family members seem hesitant to discuss him unless I bring him up first.

I understand that they may fear making me uncomfortable, but I would prefer that we talk about him. Just because he is an incarcerated person, that does not change who he is to me and my family. He is still loved, special and very important. Let's talk about him. You will be surprised to learn about the awesome man he has become. It is very important to acknowledge him

and share your memories with me during the holiday season. Being reminded of some of the hilarious and amazing things that he has done helps my heart not to ache as badly. I believe that most of us in this situation feel the same way. Don't forget our loved ones, we definitely can't.

If experiencing the absence of a loved one due to incarceration is a part of your life journey as well, let me encourage you. First you must release the guilt and embarrassment that often fills us, whether warranted or not. Focus on the positive elements of this time, such as sharing fun memories. Connect with others who understand your situation and uplift you without judgment. Make some new memories for YOURSELF. Do what you enjoy and feed your soul. Give yourself the grace to have happy holiday seasons, and know that as long as you are alive you owe it to yourself to LIVE.

Please remember that there are families worldwide who would love to feel the touch of their incarcerated loved ones during this season and to have them experience the holiday season free and liberated. Be kind and caring to us! ■

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Unconventional

Continued from page 12

their unlikely return. If I stayed, our disjointed relationship would persist indefinitely. What kind of lessons would that impart to my children? By going, I could follow my heart and hope that, through whatever I learned out there, I could somehow find my way back to them.

'Damn it, I'm leaving!' I decided on that 45th birthday.

The first half of 2012 was spent planning, securing a new job, and renting out my house. After a year and a quarter as a childless mother, I left for the East Coast on July 2, just a few months before my sons' 15th and 17th birthdays. Saying goodbye was more bitter than sweet.

My boys understood what was happening; I'd spoken to them individually when I made my decision. Although Zac couldn't bring himself to delve deeply into life with his dad, he understood

why I needed to leave. 'I don't blame you given the circumstances,' he said. Over the past 15 months, we'd developed a sort of peacetime bond between us.

Initially, telling Nate seemed of little consequence, but that all changed as the time to leave was upon us. Zac had a baseball game that day. I went down to watch. Afterward, in the parking lot, I said my goodbyes.

'Don't worry,' I told Zac, tears streaming down my face as I embraced him. 'I'll be back often. And if you need me, I'll be here as fast as a plane can fly.'

In the background, I heard an engine revving, growing louder and louder. I realized it was coming from my car. Nate had gotten in and started the engine. He was visibly upset. As I approached, I saw anger on his face.

'Parents don't leave their children, Mom.' I tried to console him, but the revving engine drowned out

my words. He repeated his piercing accusation. 'Parents don't leave their children, Mom.' His words cut deep, like a sword through my heart. I stood there, trying to hold back tears, knowing this was the right next step for me.

At that moment, I couldn't convey to Nate the length and depth of contemplation that had gone into my decision. I couldn't make him understand that if I couldn't be there to guide them, I would live by example to the best of my abilities without them.

'I'm so sorry, Nate.'

Perhaps the Universe was encouraging me to be brave on that New Year's Day. Telling me that my life and my relationship with my children might not follow the conventional path, but with belief and compassion for both my boys and me, it could still blossom into something profoundly meaningful. Today, with a heart brimming with gratitude, I can confidently affirm that it most certainly has. ■

Knead Your Faith

Continued from page 7

The brilliant teachers at the school created a truly unique celebration of family, love and giving. We baked bread to share with homeless shelters, sang wonderful songs about friendship, invited families to enjoy treats together and filled November and December with special moments.

When the teachers and administrators looked mindfully at all of the religious traditions from the diverse group of children, they uncovered the heart and soul that connects all of these holidays. Rather than let religious beliefs divide us, we can be united by the universal love of family, gratitude and caring.

This is not to say that we can't all embrace our own religious traditions. If Jesus is the reason for your season, of course that is to be treasured, celebrated and honored! However, at times we find ourselves, celebrating with dear friends with diverse beliefs. Other times, the holidays arrive just as we are facing a crisis of faith, making the holiday bells ring hollow. At these moments, we can all learn some lessons from the elementary school children in New York.

Embrace gratitude

Giving and gratitude are close cousins. In the New York school, each of the classrooms baked two loaves of bread to share with a local homeless shelter at the holidays. Involving the children in such a hands-on way helped them connect to the giving spirit.

Donating to a local organization not only helps the community, but

it can also lift your spirits as well and help you remember your own blessings. The children learned that they although they were very young, they had gifts and the ability to help others.

As adults when we take the time to consider how we can make our community and our world better, we must take stock of our own blessings. What do you have to give? Perhaps your donation be financial, but you can also share the power of your health, energy, creativity or time. Reflecting on these gifts can lift your spirits and help you feel connected to the holidays.

Expand your family

One of the most genuine ways to truly celebrate family at the holidays is to expand the definition. Holidays can be difficult when we are grieving the loss of a family member or find ourselves disconnected from our parents or siblings. But family can be whomever you choose. Who are the people in your life that you treasure? Who would add to your joy in celebration? Are there people in your community who may be feeling alone or disconnected? Could you reach out to them?

Share what you love

Many of our traditional celebrations of Christmas aren't directly connected to religion. Santa Claus, Christmas trees, holiday cookies, grandma's killer holiday punch, mistletoe, the Nutcracker and so many treasured traditions are more culturally Christmas than religious. Yet that doesn't mean that people of all religions will enjoy taking part in those activities. Caring conversations can find compromise

between sharing treasured traditions and overwhelming our loved ones and ourselves with holiday chaos.

Treating all of that hustle and bustle more like a menu and less a to-do list, can also be a form of self-love. Just because you've always done something, doesn't mean you need to do it forever.

Allow yourself a mindful re-evaluation

What made the experience of celebrating all the winter holidays with a diverse group of children sparking, meaningful and inclusive was the time the school leaders took to reflect on the aspects of these celebrations that unite us. Reflecting on which specific holiday activities that inspire joy, connection and meaning, and which ones do not, can transform the holidays. Changing long-held traditions can be daunting because we fear disappointing those around us. However, new holiday traditions inspired by gratitude family and love, can never be wrong! ■



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Uncharted

Continued from page 16

Be honest and write in your journal all the new traditions you will add to your holiday season. Then do as many as you choose to do and keep adding as the season comes around. These new traditions will help you establish a sense of control and positivity in your life. And most importantly, they will highlight how wonderful and peaceful your life is now you are free from abuse and criticism. You are free to decorate in shades of orange and purple, stand back, smile and know it makes you happy and that is all that matters!

Focus on Self-Care and Self-Love

Decide to work on becoming self-full. Nurture and allow yourself to feel your emotions. Self-care is essential for healing after an abusive relationship. Take time for yourself, practice self-compassion, and engage in activities that bring you joy and relaxation. Whether it's reading, meditation, or spa days, self-care will help you build resilience and self-esteem.

Keep a Journal

Journaling can be a therapeutic way to process your feelings and track your progress. Write down your thoughts and experiences and reflect on how far you've come since leaving the abusive relationship. Here are two important journal prompts to get you started: What do I want more of in my life? What do I want less of in my life? Once you know, you will work to bridge the

gap and make the "more of" your reality.

Set Realistic Expectations

This is a big one. The holidays are filled with commercials about love, couples, families, and all of them are happy, laughing and smiling. But these are untruths, ad campaigns, stage sets with fake snow, actors playing a role! Let go of unrealistic holiday expectations. Understand that the perfect holiday season doesn't exist, and that's okay. Focus on making this season as peaceful and enjoyable as possible, even if it's not as extravagant as you might have hoped. Set your own and very real expectations.

Establish Boundaries and Focus on the Truth

One of the most critical steps in reclaiming your life and finding strength during the holiday season is setting clear boundaries based on the truth. It is imperative you speak and keep the truth of who the abuser really was and how you and your children were treated.

Write a list of short truths and read it out loud if you're feeling the pull to go back. Your list will begin with The Abuser: lied to me, hit me, made fun of me, criticize me, stole from me—keep going with your list. Be honest and write as many as you can think of.

Inform your abuser that you are no longer interested in communication or reconciliation. Block their number and limit their access to you. By doing this, you regain control over your life and your emotions. No contact or modified contact if you

have children will help you break the bond and detox from the abuser.

Seek Support

Reach out to friends, family, or a support group for emotional support. Surround yourself with people who care about your well-being. Sharing your feelings and experiences with a trusted support network can provide you with strength and a sense of belonging during this difficult time.

But avoid only talking about the abusive relationship. Start new conversations about other topics. It can be as simple as the weather. This helps your brain redirect and helps you see yourself as an individual with a voice of your own.

Seek Professional Help

If you find that your emotional wounds are still too raw to navigate the holiday season successfully, consider seeking professional help. A therapist or counsellor can provide you with valuable tools and coping strategies to heal and move forward.

Surviving and thriving during your first holiday season after an abusive relationship is a significant achievement. By establishing boundaries, seeking support, creating new traditions, and focusing on self-care, you can build a positive and empowering holiday experience for yourself and your loved ones.

Remember that you are not alone, and there is a network of people and resources ready to support you on your journey towards healing and happiness. The holidays should be a time of joy, and by taking these steps, you can make it a very happy season. ■

Gratitude

Continued from page 11

Doing something different

The holidays may be particularly painful in the first year after a loss. It might be helpful to do something different from your usual traditions. For example, during the first holiday season without Taylor, we traveled to Louisiana to be with extended family instead of staying home in Texas as we had always done. Although I missed her like crazy, the change of environment was good for us. Sometimes, a change may alleviate the pain (even for a little bit), associated with holiday traditions that once included your loved one. After a while, consider integrating some new traditions into your family's holiday celebrations.

Ask for help

I honestly don't know what I would have done without my close circle of friends that first year after we lost Taylor. I learned that it's OK to let them in, but mostly I let myself ask for help, which is not natural for me at all.

I remember how painful it was to pull out Taylor's Christmas stocking or decorate the tree without her as this is something she loved to do with me.

Your friends want to be there for you, but many times don't know how, so let them in your heart and share with them what could help you lessen the heaviness of the holidays.

Maybe it's allowing them to help you decorate your home for the holidays, prepare a meal, or run to the grocery store for you. By letting your friends be a part of

your grief journey, you can be open to letting them hold you up when you need it the most, especially during the holiday season and other emotionally charged times of the year, like your loved one's birthday.

And believe it or not, they really want to do these things for you. Helping you fills their hearts so allow them to step in and carry you for a while. You would do it for them if tables were turned, I'm sure of it.

Honor your loved one by giving to others

Giving to others is one of the most powerful ways to cope with grief during the holiday season and honor your loved one at the same time. Acting out of kindness and generosity not only helps others in need but also can provide you with a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

One year during the holidays we adopted a family in Taylor's name ensuring they had food on the table and gifts under the Christmas tree.

Another year, we hopped in the car and went around doing random acts of kindness all day. We had so much fun doing this together as a family and we all knew we were doing this out of love for Taylor. Incorporating small gestures that can give back to others into your holiday celebrations will remind you that your loved one is still a part of our life because they are always in our hearts.

The busyness of the holiday season

For some, the busyness of the holiday season can act as a helpful distraction from grief. The never-ending-to-do list, shopping, and festivities can keep you engaged

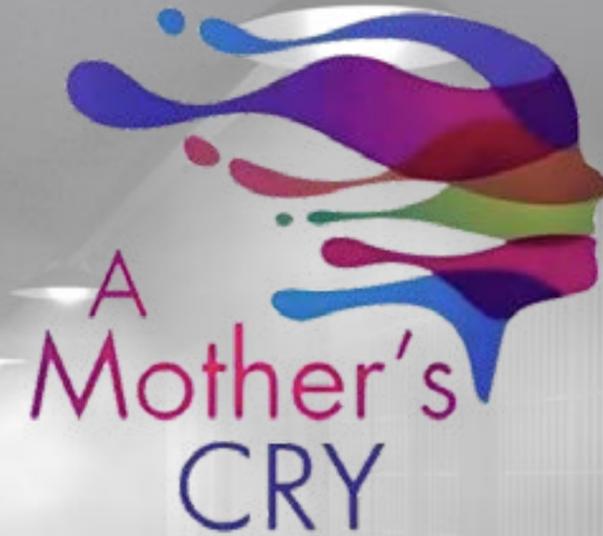
and your mind occupied. When I embraced these distractions, I found they offered respite from the intensity of the holiday season and a short (and welcomed) escape from grief. However, on the other hand, I said no to some of the busyness and get-togethers because I was just feeling blue. And know that it is totally fine to say no to things!

Protect your heart and do what is best for you. And if that means, being around lots of people during the holidays, go for it! Or if it means just keeping things close and quiet, that's perfectly great too.

No "cookie cutter" approach to grieving

Grief during the holiday season is complicated. But it's possible to find comfort and meaning even amid unimaginable sorrow. I've been there. I know. Embrace the support of your friends, allow yourself the permission and time to grieve, and find solace in honoring your loved one's memory.

Remember, there is a no-one-size-fits-all approach to navigating grief. Express your emotions in your own way and in your own time. I assure you that you'll experience moments of hope, healing, and connection, even at the most unexpected times. ■



I am the Mother of two African American males. That fact alone makes my Voice a NECESSITY in this Society.



Through the years, I have experienced both joy and excruciating pain because of this. I have witnessed first-hand, the struggles of being "Mom." From my "Mother's Heart" was birthed "A Mother's Cry", founded with the goal of empowering and uplifting Mothers to become the very best versions of themselves. "A Mother's Cry" is acknowledging, addressing and advocating for individuals impacted sociologically, psychologically and physically by mass incarceration. It is my vision to set up "A.M.C." Chapters nationwide, and to hold a yearly Conference.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Another very special element of **A Mother's Cry** is our community and social involvement and outreach. Here's some of the ways we support:



Events Honoring Breast Cancer Survivors



Supporting Victims of Domestic Violence



Grocery Help for Single Moms



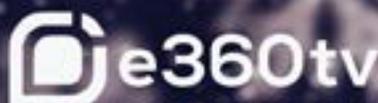
School Supply Donations

Find out how you can get involved today:
AMothersCry.org

✉ amcjami@gmail.com

📘 AMothersCry61

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POWER

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Greetings Heart of Hollywood friends and family!

Well, here we are again amid yet another wonderful holiday season! So many varied emotions rise to the surface within each of us during this beautiful, yet for many, emotion-filled time of year.

My message this issue is based on the true meaning of the word GRATITUDE. Being grateful is easier during holidays such as Birthday's, Anniversary's, and Christmas for many of us, I mean after all; who does not enjoy receiving gifts and well wishes? The struggle for most however, is not the art of being grateful during holidays, but the maintaining of that true sense of gratitude during those days that pass between holidays. I personally deprived myself of countless blessings over the years simply due to my not understanding the power that lives within those gifts that we each have the opportunity of giving ourselves. Simply by reminding ourselves daily of all the wonderful things within our lives that bring us joy, that were not always there, but today through hard work and faith, they exist.... they are our true realities. I encourage each of you to renew that covenant with yourself today, that agreement wherein you agree to give thanks daily for not only the big wins, but the small wins as well. In the coming year, let's each find a way to "count it all joy", for joy and happiness are the keys to every door that purpose stands behind. Be encouraged friends, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year! Until next time...

Share your story @ Lorenmichaelsharris@gmail.com

Loren Michael Harris