

IM NOT READY, YET . . .

by Darcie D. Sims

We should know better by now. It shouldn't keep surprising us, but it does. No matter how hard we try, no matter what we do to prepare ourselves, it still happens. Year after year, generation after generation, it arrives without delay. It stays too long but never lasts long enough. It is filled with both anticipation and dread, and though we never learn enough, we know far too much. It is greeted with great joy and heavy despair. And it is always announced by the universal cry of "I'M NOT READY YET!"

It's The Holidays that are coming, and I haven't even cleaned up the fireworks from the Fourth of July. I'm still unpacking boxes (we've moved again!) and now the calendar says it's time for the Annual Migration of Memories and The Great, Stuff-The-Turkey contest. Last year, at our gathering, the turkey won.)

Because we're in another new place, we will again have the dilemma of where to put the tree and how to explain to the company about that one empty stocking?

Nothing fits this year! I can't find the ornaments. The kitchen is too small and the pink plastic flamingos we brought with us from the Louisiana Swamp are going to freeze in the 20 degree below zero temperatures. I haven't memorized my address yet and the grocery store is in the wrong place.

We'll have to figure out where to hang a wreath and whether we should go electric in the yard this year. I'm busy practicing with the snow shovel and knitting little sweaters for the flamingos.

I keep forgetting where I've hidden the gifts I bought during the summer and nothing seems to fit in this place like it did in the last one! We were comfortable in the last place . . . but then I forget that's what we said when we first moved there, too. We always seem to be more comfortable in the last place at least we knew where the memories were and where to put them and how to handle them. Here, in this New Place, no one knows our story, our history. It is as if we have no past. It's easy to blend in, but not so easy to settle in. And THE HOLIDAYS ARE COMING and I'M NOT READY YET!

"I'm not ready yet" is the universal cry of all beings. I'm not ready yet for first grade, for crossing the street by myself, for sleep-away camp, for junior high, for getting married, for getting a job, for having children, for burying someone I love.

I'm NOT READY YET . . . for grieving, for handling the holidays, for stuffing a turkey, for finding a place for everything, for living where no one knows my story. I'M NOT READY YET for Thanksgiving, for Hanukkah, for Christmas, for New Year's, for Three King's Day or even for blizzards or frozen pink flamingos.

I'M NOT READY for the annual flood of memories that always spill out as we unpack the stockings from their tissue-wrapped nest. I'M NOT READY yet for the clutch of pain that still wraps my heart in grief as we place the ornaments on the tree. I'M NOT READY YET for opening the door to greet strangers who are fast becoming friends but who may never know the effort it has taken for me to be who I am now.

I'M NOT READY YET to be normal and take my place among the normal people of the world. I look normal, and for the most part I act normal. (We do, however, have sweater-clad pink flamingos in the yard holding our SEASON'S GREETINGS sign.)

Except for our story and for the tears in our family fabric, we are normal. But no one here knows about those tears, and I don't think I'm ready not to have a past just yet. I don't think I'm ready for no one to remember our hurt, let alone the joy our loved ones gave us.

I unpacked the silver today, intending to polish it and place it in the dining room so it would add its shimmer to the festive decorations. I wasn't ready for the flood of memories that came back as I traced my fingers over the delicately carved designs in the coffee pot, remembering how my mother patiently taught me how to polish good silver. I wasn't ready for

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the loneliness that swept over me as I placed the tea pot on the tray and suddenly wanted to call Mom and tell her I was, at last and again, home. She had taught me that silver always spoke of a comforting home, and now that I had found it and set it out, I wanted someone to remember with me all those talks my mom and I had shared.

I'M NOT READY YET to live only on the surface of life. I want to share my history with my new friends, yet it seems unfair of me to spoil their holiday season. It's not the same for me. There is still a lot of empty in my heart. Not as much as before, but now the emptiness comes from being too new somewhere to really belong.

So I'll just have to figure out how to handle the holidays I'm never going to be ready for in places I may never be settled in. As long as the stockings are up and the silver is polished and ready, then let the holidays come! Somehow we'll figure out how to tell enough of our history so we won't be lonely and people will understand about the tiny empty chair, the flamingos, and the joy that lights up our lives when we clasp hands together in the family circle.

We'll decorate our new house (our new life?) with the treasures that speak of our history, finding joy in the memories they spark. We'll bring with us some of the old, add a few pieces of new, and practice the art of blending yesterday with today in hopes of creating another memory for tomorrow.

I guess it doesn't matter whether you have moved or whether you've been in the same place for generations. It is still an unsettled feeling when, for the first time, no one remembers the journey you've been on. The first time no one mentions The Name there is a hollowness in our being that leaves us empty and feeling alone. It is as if the world has made its move again, and everything that once was so awkward and out of place has now assumed a normal atmosphere, forgetting the price we paid for our new normal. I'll hang the special ornaments, enjoy the silver tea pot, and cherish the warmth of the love these gifts of remembrance bring. No one else has to know the story for me to acknowledge it and remember it. No one else has to know the pain for me to share the joy of having these things be a part of my now.

We'll gather together and count our blessings, not only naming the ones around the table, but including those whose lives have touched ours in countless ways. One does not have to be present to be alive in the hearts of those who shared a few moments of the journey together. The heart never forgets, even when the world does.

No, nothing fits this year, just like nothing fit last year or the year before. But it's getting better, improving either with age or experience, or patience. Or maybe it's because it is simply becoming a thread in the continuing fabric of our lives. We will probably always be a bit unsettled, unnerved when the roll call finds a name missing or a chair empty. But then, why shouldn't we be a little sad when a light goes out in our world?

So this holiday season, gather in your blessings and count them ALL, knowing that no one else has to know about them for them to be real for you. Just because no one else knows The Story doesn't mean it is any less real. Count the blessings of the people in your story and find the peace that comes with counting a holiday of joy remembered and love shared. Peace to us all wherever we may be.