

## Blue Holidays

I've just finished reading Jennette McCurdy's new book "I'm glad my mom died" which has, maybe not a catchy title exactly, but a memorable one. And I'm not going to talk about the details of her story - if you've read the book, or heard anything about it, you know that McCurdy suffered significant trauma at the hands of her mother. But there is something in her story that I find particularly compelling, something that's rarely talked about, which is how much the story of our lives, and the inner dialogue about our own experiences, are affected by our relationships. The world outside us and the world inside us are deeply linked.

During the holidays, that outer world can be thrown into sharper contrast - changes to our family or friend groups can be felt extra acutely - these are external changes that might leave us feeling sad or nostalgic or hopeless or maybe bitter. *And* there's this shiny social media phenomenon where we feel all this pressure to have holidays as delightful and easy as everyone else's because clearly other people's lives are lived in perfect lighting with total interpersonal harmony.

Change draws our attention - to what is, to what was, to what never was. Hold that attention together with unrealistic expectations of familial and culinary perfection and we can fall victim to the space between what is and what we think should be.

So let's begin by letting ourselves and everyone else be human. Let's acknowledge the narrative we tell ourselves about how the holidays should be - maybe even give that voice a name, so that we can notice when it tries to take over. The ability to foster gentler and more realistic expectations is a gift.

This is particularly important, I think, when our families or communities have gone through significant changes. Maybe someone has died since last Thanksgiving. Maybe a relationship has ended. Maybe someone has gotten married and new family units are shifting the landscape. Maybe someone's sick or you finally set a boundary that's been a long time coming. All of those things can feel acutely poignant this time of year. It's okay if it's hard. There's no shame in being human, no shame in struggling or grieving or feeling entirely un-cheerful.

Honesty can be a powerful antidote to all the posturing this time of year, one that allows for real connection.

One of the most remarkable things to me about Jennette McCurdy's story was the way in which the death of her mother made it possible for her to attune to her own experience and tell the honest truth about her life, first to herself and then to the world.

Letting go of the stories about our families to make room for honesty is not an easy task. McCurdy describes it as feeling like she was losing the entire foundation of her life. And yet, it was also the thing that made it possible for her to be fully alive, fully herself, without the constraints of her mother's abuse and self-importance. That's an extraordinary thing. It's also deeply messy and painful and won't fit on a greeting card.

We are social creatures and changes to our familial groups can have profound implications for not only our relationships, but our understanding of ourselves and our own lives.

Change is messy. And it can create a lot of possibility, but we do ourselves a disservice if we skip the grief or the anger or whatever feeling needs to be processed before we're ready to move forward. It's not worth abandoning ourselves in order to maintain appearances or fulfill other people's expectations. Not even for the sake of the holiday veneer.

So I invite you to make space this season for whatever is true. Give yourself room to reconsider the story you tell about yourself and your life, notice the things that make your heart ache this time of year. Our own care and kindness is a powerful thing.

It's in the honesty, in the truth of our being human, that we might actually be able to see the stars amidst the bittersweet.

May it be so and amen.