

# Merry Christmas And (Un?) Happy Holidays

Author Unknown, [www.nami.org/personalstories](http://www.nami.org/personalstories) (*italics and underline added by cbl*)

***What people, events, or things do you most enjoy at Christmastime?***

***Is there anything that is hard for you this Christmas?***

Things to keep in mind during the holiday season:

**Don't get wrapped up in social media or social gatherings:** This is very easy to say, and quite frankly, I enjoy it, so I'm not encouraging people to give up their Facebook or Twitter accounts, *or stop attending parties* completely. But take what you see on the internet and *see and hear at social events* with a grain of salt. Particularly, this time of year, people are frequently posting *or talking* about the joyous things they are doing - whether it be holiday parties, visits with family, friends and significant others, recipes, or simply statuses about their fortunate lives. Seeing *people* and all these cheerful posts and *seeing* all these smiles flooding a person's mini-feed can be a reminder to someone who is struggling that they are *NOT* feeling the same way that the rest of the world *appears* to be feeling. This is not jealousy, but social media and images at parties can present a distorted image of how life really is for everyone else.

A handful of years ago, I ran into an old childhood friend at the supermarket during the holiday season. We started to briefly catch up with one another on what was going on in our lives. I distinctly remember him saying to me that he already "knew" my life had been wonderful since he had last seen me. And this was all according to Facebook. "*I loved seeing you on TV all over the country cheerleading during March Madness. You have stayed in touch with many people and are always out and about doing fun things and you're so lucky you got to go back to graduate school to pursue your passions.*" I felt a little guilty because, little did he know, I had just come straight to the supermarket after an intensive outpatient therapy session where I was going for treatment for depression.

**Talk About It:** My grandfather has always been a source of great comfort – from visiting me in the hospital to simply discussing mental illness in a non-taboo way. I followed in his footsteps by going to Villanova University, having a love for sports, and always saying what is on my mind! While the issues he battled were different than mine, one thing he instilled in me was the importance of open communication. He inspired me to never stop talking (but to always listen to others, too!), because as long as we are open about our issues, the more we can relate to one another and start to heal.

Sometimes, just the thought of disclosing your pain to someone can cause your anxiety to rise. But believe it or not, people want to hear about it more than it may seem. And often times, you'll find that many people can relate on some level. The more we talk, the more we can understand each other and not feel secluded from the rest of the world. I ended up keeping in touch with my old friend from the supermarket, and eventually, disclosed what had *really* been going on that holiday season. To my surprise, he had battled with similar issues. This was a comforting relief for both of us and encouraged me to speak up more about it. Who are "safe" people you can talk to?

**You're not alone:** Whether you're battling with mental illness, a disease, friends/family issues, or anything else - remember that no one is perfect and no one has a perfect life. Everyone is dealing with something this holiday season. So just because everyone else seems upbeat and happy around you, doesn't mean that they are 100% feeling that way on the inside. A photograph captures the quickest moment in time and isn't an accurate tool to measure one's true feelings. So for all the smiles you may see *in public and* on the internet during the holiday season, keep in mind that we are all human and we all struggle at times throughout our lives. Just because the term "Happy Holidays!" or "Merry Christmas!" may not seem to apply to you at every moment throughout the day, that doesn't mean there won't be happy moments to come. The more we discuss with one another our personal battles, the more we are reminded that we are not alone – especially this holiday season.

***This is why we are here at COMI; this is why you bless us all so much. Thank you for being a part of our family in Jesus Christ.***

***Hebrews 4:15-16 We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all – all but the sin. 16 So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help. (from THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language © 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved.)***