

Don't spend Christmas alone

By Ernestine Brown

An elderly friend of mine tells me that December 25th, for her, is the loneliest day of the year. She lives alone and has no immediate family. "Everyone I know is busy with their own children and grandchildren, and even though I have been asked by several families to join them, I don't feel right about it. I know they are trying to be kind, but to me I am imposing by accepting their invitations," she told me the last time we talked about Christmas.

I wondered if there are many people in my friend's situation, and what we could do about it. Well, it seems, there are many, many options available, and I want to share a few of them with you.

First of all if you live in the city, you are blessed. (We'll deal with the rural communities later.)

If you live in a high-rise, or a seniors retirement centre, you are lucky, because most I contacted have a social-events room, and plans are already in place for Christmas festivities. Run, don't walk, to the social room, and read the bulletin board, where I am sure Christmas plans are already posted. If there is a telephone number, or the name of a contact person, get in touch before another minute passes. Offer your help. I guarantee you will be so busy between now and December 25th, you won't have time to be worried about how you are going to spend the day.

Give a thought to hosting your own party. If you are in a large apartment building, there are bound to be other people in your situation. Rap on doors, leave phone messages, and stop people in the halls. Find out if they are alone too, perhaps you could share their day; make it a pot-luck meal, and get to know the people in your building.

People in Ottawa are blessed too, having places like The Good Companions. This wonderful organization has at least two programs bound to get you feeling good about Christmas. One is Smile For Seniors, and the other is Be A Santa. For many years these two programs have put joy in Christmas for countless lonely seniors. To see if you are a candidate to take part, call the Good Companions Senior Centre at 613-236-0428 where they will fill you in on all the details of these two very popular programs for seniors who are alone for Christmas.

There are many, many organizations waiting for your call too. Organizations like the Kiwanis club of Ottawa who offer a Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. And I understand they also have that wonderful talented entertainer, The Singing Policeman, Dominic D'Arcy, standing by as well.

Many of the churches in the city also offer Christmas dinner and companionship to those who face the day alone. Look in the yellow pages under churches and start calling. Remember, you don't have to be destitute to take advantage of these Christmas day outings. You will find people of every social and economic status sharing the table with you.

Now, if you live beyond the city limits, call your municipal office for places offering "Open House." And remember, most Royal Canadian Legions have an open-door policy on Christmas day as well, and there is a branch in just about every small town in the Ottawa and Seaway Valleys.

Now, if you want a real perker-upper, treat yourself before the big day. Get your hair done. Book early so you won't be disappointed. Buy yourself something glittery...it doesn't have to come from a designer shop...you may even pick up something at a consignment store, but do treat yourself to something that makes you feel good about yourself.

With all the options available in your area, be it in the city, or out in the farming community, there is no reason for you to spend Christmas day by yourself. And don't forget, you can also offer your services as a volunteer at one of the many organizations and churches that are always looking for a helping hand.

My wish to all of you is that you will enjoy Christmas and, at the end of the day, may you feel good about how you spent it.

This article originally appeared in the December 2009 issue of Forever Young Newspaper