The ’Holiday’ Bermuda Triangle

November 29, 2012 By Lora René Tucker

Here we are - Thanksgiving is over, Christmas is coming, and we are in the midst of all the celebration and “hype” seeping through every pore of American culture - from television, to the billboards, to the internet. No, Rod Serling isn’t going to do a prologue, telling us we are now entering “The Twilight Zone,” (though it does feel like it at times,) but we are entering what I (and others) call “The (Holiday) Bermuda Triangle” - the time between the Thanksgiving and Christmas/Chanukah (and Kwanzaa) holidays, usually ending somewhere after the New Year. Not everyone has family, friends, or places to go for the holidays, whether miles, deaths, or emotions separate one from that Norman Rockwell painting. This is the time when people are struggling with their demons - the pains of low self-esteem, the dysfunction and rejection of family, the deep seated issue(s) of the past that rear its ugly head and often drag the person into the vortex of dejection, isolation, and self-medication. It is also the time where recovery and controlled consumption is challenged: You are supposed to drink to celebrate, eat to celebrate, party your #*&%* off eating and drinking...not to mention being with the one you love, surrounding yourself with family and friends...And if you aren’t joyous...Not full of the mirth and glee of the holidays? Grinch, Scrooge, Shlub.

During this time, clinicians of mental illness and addictions, caretakers of the elderly to the homeless, and people interacting with ones who are struggling with depression and trauma, become more vigilant; where emotions related to rejection, loneliness, and feelings of inadequacy become painfully real. When I am working with people who are in recovery (from sugar, alcohol, drugs,) I worry about the holidays. And ordinary people aren’t exempt from the “Bermuda Triangle:” Some people, who have grappled with these feelings of loss, also struggle through these times (and who has not gone through this at least once in their life? I know I have...more than once.) Even folks that present well and have “things going for them;” the white picket fence, the partner or lover, the “two point five” kids, and a dog (or cat,) can succumb to the “Bermuda Triangle.” Anyone can crack under the pressures to perform; to get the perfect gift, survive “home for the holidays,” and be under pressure to have enough: money, food, and presents, this and that. Between the commercials, the family, and the expectations - no wonder “the Triangle” is the time where there are casualties; people “missing in action.”

“The Triangle” is no joke, a real “mutha” for many.

Now you know I am not going to bring up such a topic without opening my toolbox and pulling out some of my “tools...” Wait, not tools, but defensive weapons, because for me the holidays can be an assault on my psyche. I have had my share of melancholy over the holidays; losing close family members, including my father right after the 2005 Christmas holiday, and have dealt with

the “don’t have’s:” No family of my own, no one to bring in the New Year. So when the “Bermuda Triangle” comes rolling in, I have to prepare myself for battle; set up my “Situation Room,” full of plans, strategies, and goals. I have a four point plan I put in place that makes the holidays my own, not a “Happy Holidays, Dammit!,” but a little system that allows me to define my holiday, give thanks, and see in a new year full of faith and hope...no matter what:

1. FIND SOME THINGS YOU MAY LIKE TO DO BY YOURSELF: Don’t depend on another person, depend on you! I look for some free or inexpensive places to go on my own - I want to have control of when I come and go, and I want to observe the activity and decide how much I want to be involved. I may go to the ice skating rink at Bryant Park and watch the skaters (or even skate,) go to the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree, or the store front exhibits that the department stores display. No crowds, no problem, I will go early, or look up the free day at a museum, an art gallery, first showing at a movie (which can be half price.) All you need is a library (free access to the internet or newspapers) and an ounce of curiosity.

This is also the time when 12 step groups have “marathons,” meetings every hour or hour and a half. And you don’t have to be in recovery. Heck, it is a destination, with a positive support system, a cup of tea or coffee, and takes up some time constructively. Go, sit and listen, count your blessings, and get over it!

2. MAKE DATES TO DO THOSE ACTIVITIES: Put them on the calendar. Schedule it. If you know that December 25th is dysfunctional family day, why not schedule that excursion to the rink or walk in the park on the 26th or 27th. Now you have something to look forward to as you deal with Aunt Marjorie asking about T-cells and viral loads for the sixtieth time. Or Cousin Edward staring at you like Typhoid Mary.

3. MAKE A SPECIAL CORNER FOR YOUR HOLIDAY: I take a table, get some pine sprigs, get a “Charlie Brown tree,” decorate it with handmade (and some bought) ornaments, and put my Gumby and Pokey (the alcoholic!) and my mini Etch-it-sketch under my tree. I even mail myself some Christmas cards I may have seen when out and about and put it on the table. (Yes, I mail myself Holiday cards, gotta problem?!) You can update the toys according to your generation; Nientendo, ipod, whatever. Don’t want a tree? No problem, a Christmas Cactus, a Hanukah bush, make up whatever you want. It’s your holiday table. Lighten it up.

4. GIVE YOURSELF A SPIRITUAL BOOST: You can get (back) in touch with your spirituality - Go (back) to a church, a temple (Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, etc.,) or a mosque. Get in touch with your humanity - volunteer and give during the holidays, Commune with the tourist in Times Square, be with friends who have family. Or be peaceful by yourself and for a moment, do nothing...but don’t “hide-in.” Also, you can get in an extra visit or two with your therapist over this time. (You think?) You know there will be times that the grief may surface, or you will wake up with the “bah-hum-bugs,” but they do not have to dominate your head, and you don’t need to be “up in your head with no supervision.” Whether you are indoors or outdoors, plan something for you, because you deserve to “jingle your bells.” Or just jingle a bit.

For some of you, it may not be all that - the “(Holiday) Bermuda Triangle” may be a “whatever” moment in time; so I only ask that you share what makes it easy for you, you may help someone

who may be struggling or even stuck (cause you know you have had those “deer in headlights” moments before.) If you are perfectly happy with the holidays, share those blessings, your happiness is contagious and can rub off on one who needs a smile or a hug. (Yes, a hug - not pats on the back like you’re burping a baby, but a heart-to-heart hug.) So, if you see me about The Big Apple this holiday, help me survive “The Bermuda Triangle” with the fifth (and bonus) point in my plan-

5. GIVE (ME) A HUG FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

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