

Those Hard Luck Holiday Blues...

By Bill Brubacher

There's a rich and robust tradition about blues music that touches the heart and expresses a deep melancholy – a sadness and longing for better times from toil and hardship, from loss and pain and anger and helplessness over which it seems we have no control. At its best, the blues is a oneness of pain and pleasure, defeat and exaltation, sadness and joy.

And those contrasting feelings can be particularly poignant at this time of the year, especially when Covid-19 has stretched its cold, unfeeling spell on so many people's lives, separating us from loved ones, imprisoning us in restrictive conditions that are new and different, creating an atmosphere of stress and uncertainty.

And if we can't escape it, then I believe the next best thing we can do is to acknowledge it. I think by accepting it and not fighting the dark feelings it brings down on us, we can lighten its burden. It seems counter intuitive – like fighting fire with fire.

I can never get through this season without it taking me back to the trauma of losing most of my life savings.

I was 63 years old at the time, and what started out very bad, only got worse with the losing of my home, my partner of 20 years, the rest of my retirement and my will to live...

It was late October when I first fell into a deep suicidal depression. The 'Winter' in my head and heart had already taken hold of me and the actual 'arctic' winter of 2008 was settling in early that year. It was bitterly cold and stormy, like the winters I remembered as a child.

For a 'romantic' like me, those were the very kinds of winter conditions I enjoyed most when I was young.

They opened my heart and mind to all of the traditional physical, emotional and spiritual comforts and excitements of the festive season: from the radiant warmth of a crackling fireplace (if only in the movies) to the captivating glow of a flickering candle; listening to those perennial musical favourites of the season, to feeling the snuggled joy of sitting in my cozy chair escaping into a good book; from those childhood memories of the unforgettable aromas of turkey slow-cooking in my mother's small kitchen, to

wondering, as only a child can imagine, what was waiting in those brightly wrapped presents huddled under the canopy of sparkling lights and bulbs on the freshly cut Christmas tree?

Instead, that winter I felt lost and alone and deathly cold living somewhere outside my sentient body in some strange and fearful place I didn't recognize.

Returning home from the gym in the early evening felt like I was an intruder in another world, trespassing unseen through fresh snow-carpeted neighbourhoods, catching passing glimpses of happy revelry within decoratively framed living rooms spot-lighting the crimson darkness.

There are none so alone, as those on the 'outside' looking in and I felt like some kind of alien creature of the night.

That was only 12 years ago and a lifetime between then and now, and I re-experience those same feelings each year as though they were yesterday.

Those feelings can't be changed and neither can the season nor the reason for the reality of our lives right now whatever they are and whoever we are. However, we have more important things to focus on – and that's getting through...

It's natural and common to feel like we're the only ones living in this present darkness and/or predicament, and either over-play or under-play our emotions. Neither is realistic or healthy.

Our feelings are ours and they are legitimate and it's good to begin by recognizing them without feeling we're the only ones experiencing them at the moment – or comparing them with others. Simply knowing we're not alone in these difficult times or circumstances we're in, is hopefully helpful in keeping things real and in moving ahead, as best we can at our own pace.

By first accepting and respecting our emotions as felt by others in this very moment, the better we are able to sympathize with them and most importantly then, to give ourselves the strength we need to have to do what we can or cannot do, day by day. We are the only ones that can give ourselves the right to feel our own feelings and maybe to even say a prayer or send out strength to others and in so doing, feel somewhat better within. Try it.

Don't be afraid to feel your feelings and try not falling into the self-defeating trap of feeling sorry for yourself. You have far more strength than you realize. Trust that... believe me.

We may be feeling the life of the 'hard luck' blues right now, and let that spirit flow like music into your aching heart with a new rhythm to uplift and give you hope as it did to the slaves of the south not so many years ago.

We are all part of that ancient tradition of having to live with strife and struggle in life – from the beginning of time. Honour it – make the best of it and let it lift you higher, as only the 'blues' can do and as only you can sing it with all your hope and heart.