

## 11-17-17 Fun and Folly

It was the day before the presentation by Julianne McLaughlin on ideas and strategies for maintaining weight and minimizing stress during the holidays. I worried that I had chosen the wrong time of the year. Was it too early? No one would be interested. When I opened my mail, that day, I read the latest AARP newsletter and there was an article by Kimberly Rae Miller titled, *Navigate the Holiday Buffet*. Okay, maybe my timing was spot on.

Perhaps the seemingly never-ending summer had lulled us into denial that Thanksgiving was two weeks away and Christmas would arrive in six weeks. (That jolt of reality reminded me of my mother. When she would call us, we answered with, “Coming”. She responded with, “So isn’t Christmas!”, and she was right!)

Julianne loved the AARP article because it was depicted in the colors of a traffic light. Red for Come to a Complete Stop, i.e. pigs in a blanket. Yellow for Proceed with Caution, i.e. cheese and crackers. Green for Go Right Ahead, i.e. crudités, pork tenderloin or turkey, shrimp cocktail and prosciutto-wrapped asparagus.

How do we manage? Research by medical, psychological, neurobiological and social science indicates a rise mostly in stress relating to family and in-laws, our self-stress expectations and the least by money, shopping and commercialization. We need to remind ourselves to be kind, have realistic expectations, cry when we need to and learn to say No, nicely.

One of my favorites tips from Julianne was to get some fresh air and exercise every day. It reminded me that in addition to everything else going on, some people suffer from Seasonal Affect Disorder (SAD). Vitamin D3, full spectrum lights and exercise and fresh air can help!

Many people need help during the holidays because they carry around childhood wounds and they can easily surface at this time. Simply getting together with family is a reminder. The memories may not be recognized, though, and anger can rise instead of peace and joy. Separating past from the present and ourselves from others is one of the biggest and most important lessons for any of us to learn. Once we begin that lesson and practice it, we can more easily let others be who they are. We don’t have to like or approve the actions or behaviors. They are others. They are not you.

Compensation is another holiday pitfall. Compensating for whatever makes us feel guilty can cause us to go too far with spending and raise the already tall expectations bar pressed upon us by commercialism.

Alongside much-loved traditions, we also can consider an evolving holiday. As children grow older, their needs change. As families grow larger, there are only so many places people can visit on one day! Reconsider what makes sense this year, and find other ways to express our love and appreciation besides gift giving. Maybe you love sending Christmas cards. Or, maybe you are tired of it or can’t afford the postage and you might discover that a phone call was very

much appreciated. If so, that would give you many check marks on your how-am-I-doing mental checklist. You forgave yourself. Check. You made life easier for yourself. Check. You saved money. Check. You saved time. Check. You made someone happy. Check. You experienced quality time with another. Check. That one little change was well worth it!

Simplify, simplify. “Our life is frittered away by detail... simplify, simplify.” So discovered Henry David Thoreau during his quiet time at Walden Pond. This is another life-long lesson for almost everyone. I suspect women have more difficulty with this than men. I believe the holiday season places great expectations upon those who are already detailed-oriented and willing to meet that challenge. Can we forgive ourselves for not meeting that challenge? We might even discover that others are relieved to be free of those expectations; that they also wanted a simpler experience but were afraid to say so or didn’t quite know how to say so.

It is just talking. Give it a try and see how it flies.

Flying by the seat of our pants, or going by our instincts, can be fun. Julianne recommends planning, though, like bringing the list to the supermarket, or, in this case, to Amazon or the department store. While it will help many, these are suggestions; not orders. Some of our best discoveries in life are serendipitous. Julianne shared one. To prevent her children from sneak peeking at the Christmas gifts, she once masking-taped the doorway leading from the bedroom area. Her children are now between 17 and 21 and they still want the masking tape!

Have fun and try to reduce the folly.

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