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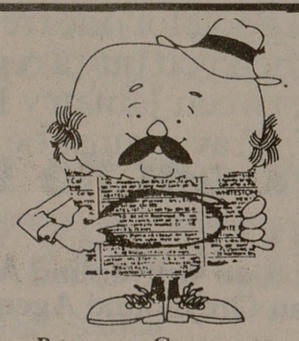

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Depression, good spirits part of Christmas season

Holiday blues common, can be overcome

By Stacy Mark
Reporter

Does the yuletide season leave you feeling ho-hum instead of ho-ho?

Do you feel like serving leftover Spam for Christmas dinner?

If so, then you may be suffering from a condition known as the Christmas blues.

A College Station psychologist, Dr. James Hyden, says that feeling depressed during the holidays is fairly common.

Holiday depression, he says, is situational; it occurs on a regularly scheduled basis.

"It's like feeling sad on the anniversary of your grandmother's death," Hyden says.

Hyden says the Christmas blues affects adults for many reasons.

"As kids, Christmas is a magical time," he says. "And if you were fortunate you got the things you wanted. As adults, the magic might not exist anymore, and you wish it did. It all has to do with expectations."

High expectations of Christmas usually go unfulfilled, Hyden says.

"If you compare the pleasant memories you had (during childhood) with the unhappy ones you might have now, it makes life very depressing," he says.

Holiday depression also occurs when a person wants a family gathering that never materializes, Hyden says. This, he says, grows out of people's need to have a perfect Christmas.

Because Christmas has become materialistic, lack of money is another cause of depression, he says. People who go into debt to buy presents often are left in a depressed state, he says.

"A lot of people channel their financial energy into buying gifts," Hyden says, "and then they can't afford counseling at a time when they need it. It's sort of a double whammy."

> *"Christmas is a magical time. . . . As adults, the magic might not exist anymore, and you wish it did."*
>
> *— Psychologist James Hyden*

Christmas is too built-up by the media, Hyden says, which makes the holiday hard to live up to. He compared this to a movie that receives only rave reviews, but once seen, it never quite matches its lofty praise.

Depression also is linked to fatigue, Hyden says. Meal preparations, decorating and shopping can turn Christmas into a frenzy of chores, making it a "working holiday."

Each individual must deal with the Christmas blues on a separate basis, Hyden says, and although general advice is dangerous, he recommends these guidelines to cope with holiday depression:

- Attempt to slow down during the holidays. Even though the Christmas season is fast-paced, try to stay out of the fast lane.
- Keep in mind what Christmas is all about. It's not the amount of money one spends, it's the thought that counts.
- Don't expect Christmas to be perfect. If one expects everyone to act the way they should, they probably won't.
- People should be nice to themselves. They should feel good about what they can accomplish and not go overboard trying to do something they can't.

However, if the blues do dominate the reds and greens this Christmas, Hyden suggests talking to someone, whether it be a therapist, a friend or a clergyman.

The Christmas blues become a serious problem when the condition is severe enough to merit professional treatment, Hyden says.

Some symptoms of serious depression, he says, are excessive sleep or insomnia, a gorging appetite or loss of appetite, lethargy and continual crying, often for no reason.

Visitors bring Christmas cheer to elderly

By Kelli Jo Day
Reporter

"Snuggs" sits in a large room in the company of a Christmas tree loaded with handmade bits of festivity.

Of the chairs that surround him, most are empty. Those that aren't, are occupied by ladies in various stages of sleep.

But Snuggs is not asleep — his blue eyes are electrically alert. He smiles at the reporter and says all he wants for Christmas is his two front teeth.

R.E. Snuggs isn't a 7-year-old waiting on Santa Claus. He is an 87-year-old waiting for Santa in Room 7 of the Brazos Valley Geriatric Center in College Station.

A big Aggie fan and former chemistry professor at A&M, Snuggs says what he really wants for Christmas is Aggie pocket calendars to give to the other four Aggies at the home.

More than 500 other patients like Snuggs are waiting for Christmas in total-care nursing homes in the Bryan-College Station area.

Local authorities say there's something about the meaning of the season that makes people want to get involved and give something of themselves to those considered less fortunate.

Randy Merrill, activities coordinator for the Leisure Lodge Nursing Center in Bryan, says that around Christmas, people ask, "What can we do?"

Merrill says her yuletide social calendar for the home is overflowing.

"We have a bell choir tomorrow night and this afternoon the kids from Kinder-Care came to help decorate the Christmas tree," she says, reading from a seemingly endless list that includes church, college and youth groups.

Sherrie Shutt, the social and activity director of the Sherwood Health Care Facility in Bryan, says from early December through Dec. 23, the residents see three or four groups a day.

They come in Brownie uniforms, Cub Scout packs and church choir finery, Shutt says, bringing fruit baskets, handmade gifts and baked goods.

The residents love the attention, she says, especially from the young children who perform Christmas carols.

Besides mass visits from "bearers of good cheer," local nursing home staffs coordinate a little festivity for the residents.

At the geriatric center, residents look forward to their annual Christmas party almost as much as they do bingo nights, Bette Jackson, the center's social activity coordinator, says.

The party will be Dec. 23 this year, she says, when the residents will enjoy a Christmas dinner, visits from their families and a visit from Santa Claus.

Jackson says this party will be unique because she plans to play Santa Claus.

"We had a Santa Claus on the staff," she says. "He was our barber, but he no longer works here, so I guess I'll be Santa this year."

At the Sherwood home, the halls already are decked. Shutt says. The home has three Christmas trees, tinsel hanging in each hallway, a festive dining room and outdoor lights, she says, and the atmosphere is light and cheerful.

At Leisure Lodge, Merrill says all of the residents get presents. If gifts aren't received from families and outside friends, church organizations and the home provide small presents, she says.

Although local organizations donate numerous gifts to the Brazos Valley home, the center still has more patients than gifts.

Shutt also says some of the Sherwood residents without families won't get presents. Although local organizations donate gifts, there are too many patients (about 250) to guarantee everyone something.

Lawmaker warns Valley employers not to fire undocumented workers

HARLINGEN (AP) — U.S. Rep. Solomon Ortiz warned Rio Grande Valley employers Monday not to fire undocumented workers, although it is now illegal to knowingly hire illegal aliens.

"If they (employers) are violating the law, we want to give them time to get their house in order," Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi, said.

Ortiz spoke during a seminar with the U.S. Border Patrol and the Immigration and Naturalization Service to explain employer sanctions in the new immigration reform bill.

The session was the first of its kind to be conducted in the South, Ortiz said.

Under legislation signed into law Nov. 6 by President Reagan, employers face civil penalties ranging from $250 to $10,000 for each illegal alien hired.

According to the measure, an education period is in effect for the first six months of the bill's enactment. For 12 months beginning May 1, first-time offenders will be cited but not fined. At the end of the warning period, sanctions will be in full effect.

Employers do not face sanctions for undocumented workers whom they had hired before Nov. 6. However, those workers still could face deportation, David Ayala, attorney for the Harlingen district office of the INS, said.

"One thing we don't want to do is get in a situation where we prevent industry and keep new jobs from coming into the Valley, where God knows unemployment is high," Ortiz told about 60 Rio Grande Valley employers.

Ortiz heard from South Texas shrimpers who warned that their industry could be devastated by the new legislation.

Tony Reisinger, marine extension agent for Cameron County, said much of the shrimping industry in the Brownsville-Port Isabel area could be hurt as it depends heavily on illegal aliens.

Skilled labor would have to be found to replace the 30 percent to 40 percent of the shrimping industry work force that is undocumented, Reisinger said.

Shrimping puts $150 million a year into the Cameron County economy and is the largest segment of the Texas fishing industry, Reisinger said.

Henrie Gutierrez, owner of Capt. Roman Corp., said the illegal aliens often fill positions that citizens don't want.

"We've had incidents when people that are of the American nationality go out one or two times and say, 'Why should I do this?' when they can get food stamps and a welfare check," she said.

Congressman says he may shake hands with man he h

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — U.S. Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez said Monday he would shake hands with a man he punched if the other man admitted to provoking the altercation by calling the veteran congressman a communist.

Gonzalez's friends gathered at the same restaurant where the incident took place earlier this month and paid tribute to the congressman as a "freedom fighter" who stood up for his rights.

Earlier in the day at the same restaurant, Bill Allen told reporters that Gonzalez owed his constituency an apology for hitting him.

"I don't want anything done to him, really," Allen said. "I just think he owes the people who elected him an apology. That's not actions becoming of a grown man who's supposed to represent law and order in this country."

Allen, 40, then went to a police station, talked with detectives and filed a formal assault complaint.

Patrolman Ricard Valdez said, "The statement will be turned over to the municipal court and if determine there is enough evi to go with it, then a warrant w issued for Mr. Gonzalez's arrest.

At the restaurant, Gonzal Allen provoked the fight on D by calling Gonzalez "our No. 1 ing damned communist."

"If Mr. Allen is really a gentl of self-respect and he's willing mit that he provoked it, I'm s to say, 'Of course, I'm willi shake hands with you,'" Gon told about 90 supporters. "I'm interested in pressing cha against him."

Supporters played two songs were written after the incident presented gifts to the 70-ye congressman.

Allen earlier criticized Gon voting record and said the 20- was not funny.

"It kind of surprises me shocks me . . . how they can ca Gonzalez a freedom fighter w takes the freedom to say all th things about my president, Mr gan," Allen said.