



Real spirit of the season

When the world feels upside down, remember compassion is what truly matters during the holidays

BY BRIANNA REINHOLD, LPC, LPCC, CFRC, ERPSCC

USUALLY WRITE MY ARTICLES FOR

InMaricopa about a month before they're published.

Normally, I have a clear direction — whether it's tied to a specific awareness month, current events or an upcoming holiday. But this one feels different. I've had so many thoughts swirling around that it's been hard to settle on just one topic. Honestly, what I write about today might feel completely different by the time you're reading this.

For example, as I sit here writing, SNAP benefits are still up in the air. The government shutdown continues. Federal employees are showing up for work without paychecks. Halloween felt smaller this year. Thanksgiving and Christmas don't feel guaranteed for many families. Yet somehow, the newest Starbucks bear sold out in minutes while people are wondering how they'll put dinner on the table.

Times are strange. I can't remember the last time our society felt united, when we truly came together for one another. I see small pockets of kindness and compassion, but I also see judgment everywhere. I hear from single moms working four jobs, doing everything they can just to keep food on the table, not to mention gifts or new clothes for their kids. They rely on benefits to feed their families, and I believe they have every right to buy cake mix or Oreos if that brings them or their children even a moment of joy. Yet they are constantly ridiculed online for asking about additional resources for food or judged for what was in their shopping cart.

Why do we act like people who are struggling should only be allowed to survive; not enjoy life? Most of us buy comfort foods, grab takeout or splurge on small things that make us feel human. Why should that be different for someone using assistance? Sometimes that "unnecessary" treat is the one bright spot on a really dark day. If you don't rely on benefits, be grateful — but don't judge those who do.

It's disheartening how many people in this country tear down those who struggle, while freely handing over their hard-earned money



to billionaires who already have more than they could ever spend; people who could change the course of this country but are too self-serving to look beyond their own wealth.

Over the years, I've debated how much to share my personal views publicly. This isn't about red or blue. It's about people. It's about humanity. It's about the kind of country we're leaving for our kids. The constant "us versus them" energy is destroying us, and it's aimed in the wrong direction. It shouldn't be working-class families versus each other. It should be all of us standing up together against systems that keep people down.

At the local level, I still see hope. Small businesses and community members are the ones showing up for those in need. Neighbors are pooling resources, so others don't go hungry. Strangers are adopting families for the holidays. The real good is happening right here, between everyday people who still care.

The holidays are approaching, and regardless of what the political landscape looks like by the time this prints, I can promise you one thing: It won't be fixed. Families will still be trying to figure out how to make the holidays magical for

their kids, who have done nothing but exist in a complicated world.

So, if you're struggling, please know that there are options. At Northern Lights Therapy, we can connect you with local groups and businesses that want to help, those who are making sure people experience joy and dignity, even in hard times. That's what community looks like. That's what we do.

And please, remember this: You matter. You are doing your best, even when it feels impossible. You are valued, loved and seen, whether you have a tree full of gifts or just a quiet moment of peace.

The holidays are not about what's under the tree. They're about what's in your heart. Don't let hate, greed or fear take that from you. Because when we lose our compassion for each other, that's when they truly win. 

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