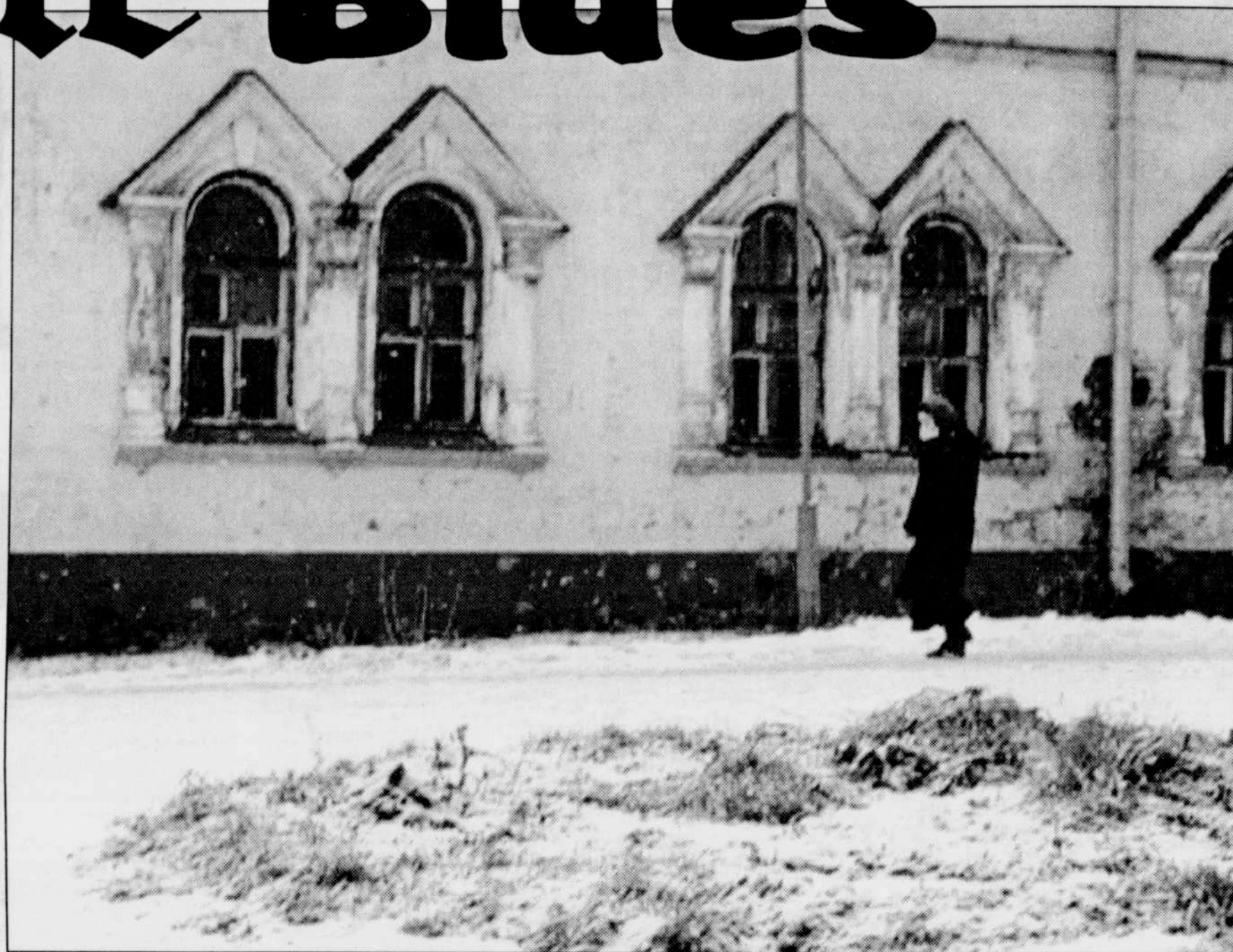


Jingle Blues

Thoughts on overcoming holiday blahs

The lucky ones among us really do get the Hallmark Holiday Experience. But for the rest of us, this time of year can mean dashed hopes, tarnished fantasies and even descent into a winter of depression. So for the glum among us we offer some expert advice on coping with the challenges of the season.



A psychologist talks us down off the emotional roller coaster ride

BY MARILYN J. SORENSEN, PH.D.

The holidays can be an exciting, fun time but stressful just the same. For some, however, these coming weeks present a time of tremendous pressure and conflicting emotions.

For example, consider Marta, who has sad memories of childhood holidays in which her father was usually drunk and abusive. For her, the holidays conjure up negative emotions of disappointment and unpleasant scenes.

Or consider Jeff, whose family never has

accepted his homosexuality. During this time when family traditions are touted, he will not travel to be with his parents and siblings, although his mother will pressure him to do so.

Two major scenarios seem to depict people's attitudes about the holidays:

First are those who have happy memories, self-confidence and a healthy view of themselves as a result of stable and supportive environments. They are able to set appropriate boundaries concerning their time and their finances and fully enjoy the planning, the preparation and the actual holiday events as they unfold.

They feel secure in refusing invitations, sticking to their budgets and deciding exactly what their holidays will entail. For them, these weeks might be stressful, but it is good stress nevertheless, so the positive feelings and results outweigh the negative impact.

Second are the people who are conflicted about their early years, individuals who come from dysfunctional homes and who have devel-

oped an insecurity about themselves and their right to set their own boundaries. They often have low self-esteem.

Of these people, some hate the holidays and perceive them

If you suffer from low self-esteem or feel conflicted about the holidays, you can choose to begin to take control of your life now.

as a time when they must bow to the expectations of others, spending money they don't really have, devoting time to something they don't really want to do, shopping for gifts for people they don't even like and attending functions with people they otherwise would avoid. Because of the anxiety and self-doubt that accompany low self-esteem, they think they have no choices and that they are not in control but that they instead have to please others and have to go along with the plans of those around them.

Still others suffer from feelings of inadequacy and experience a sense of loss from disappointments and lack of nurturing during their early years. In an attempt to recapture



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what they think they have missed, they try frantically to manufacture the magical holiday season that society proclaims to be possible by overdecorating, overspending, planning big parties or meals and totally exhausting themselves in the process.

Frequently, their need to achieve this fantasy also involves others as they commandeer family members to fulfill their projects and pressure friends and family to comply with their

wishes. All too often, these individuals feel a sense of disappointment and resentment afterward, when they realize that they were unable to capture the experience they so desperately desired and that others seemingly failed to acknowledge their elaborate efforts in the way they had hoped.

Low self-esteem forms in childhood, and although many adults are not aware of exactly how it happened or even that they have it, those who do have it experience a sense of inadequacy and powerlessness. They feel too passive, too fearful to go against the tide of expectations.

They feel embarrassed to say they don't really have the money to participate in a gift exchange, they feel too inadequate to make decisions others might not like. They are reluctant to speak up and say what they really feel, what they really want to do or not do, what

