

January 1, 2021

(NOTE: This post has nothing to do with disability services. This is about who you are, not what you do.)

A Single Resolution

I found this quote in an email I read the other day:

If 2020 has taught us one thing, it is this: kindness is always within our control. Despite a pandemic, political turmoil, financial hardships, and a million changes to every plan we attempt to make, we as individuals have the power - and the privilege - to choose kindness and caring.

In years past, I have used *The Last Word* post closest to New Year's Day to think about resolutions that might be appropriate for disability service providers to consider as they prepare to begin a new year with (hopefully) renewed energy and purpose. This year, I don't have a list of resolutions for you to consider. I only have one resolution. Actually, it is less of a resolution, more of an invitation!

I receive regular mailings from a group called Operation Gratitude. Headquartered in California, this organization sends care packages and well wishes to active duty military personnel, wounded warriors, first responders, and (this year) health care workers on the front lines in the war against COVID-19. In a recent update from the organization, there was a reminder of how important it is to not let the passage of the holiday season mean that we move past sending our thoughts and well wishes to folks who are separated from friends and family and feeling alone. The holidays may be over, but their isolation continues.

This year, it is not only those folks who are actively serving our country and our communities who are feeling alone. The inability to celebrate the holidays with family and friends, and the quiet passage of what is typically a festive and happy jumble of activity, is likely to exacerbate those feelings of isolation for neighbors, friends, and folks in the community.

If you can't feed 100 people, then feed just one. (Mother Teresa)

I invite you to join me in "feeding just one." In this case, we are going to feed the soul, rather than the body, and "the one" may be one person, one couple, or one family. That decision is up to you. I am inviting you to DO something, actively, to make someone smile, to help them feel less alone, and to know that you are thinking of them.

DIY – A "HOME ALONE, TOO" Box

If you choose to follow up on this idea, there are only two rules:

1) This isn't something that you put together to be given out (generically) to "someone in need." This is something you take time and thought to put together for someone you know. The whole idea is to let that someone know that you thought about them *personally*. You included things that meant something for them, and that carry some shared meaning – some connection – between the two of you.

2) While it should be someone you know personally and have a connection to, it shouldn't be someone whom you regularly give things to, or would be expected to put yourself out for (a son or daughter, a parent, a next door neighbor or best friend that you talk to all the time). This should be someone who you know enough about to personalize the box, but who would never have expected you to care enough to take the time.

Do things for people, not because of who they are or what they do in return, but because of who YOU are.

So how do you begin? I can only share what I put in MY offering. I put together a HOME ALONE, TOO box for my sister-in-law, Debby, who lives five states away, whom I speak to on the phone about once every other month, and whom I haven't seen face-to-face in more than five years.

I put my box together to send at Christmas time, so there were some Christmas-oriented things included:

A Michael Buble' CD of Christmas music

A silly looking ornament for her Christmas tree

A fruitcake [NOTE: Debby is the only person I know who actually LIKES fruitcake!]

The rest of the things included had nothing to do with Christmas. They were intended to do one of two things, or both – to let her know that the box was put together SPECIFICALLY with her in mind (because the item was tied to our relationship in some way), or to give her something to do to pass the time alone.

* A cookie tin and a box of cookie mix. Rather than baking her cookies, I let her bake her own.

* A couple of soduko puzzle magazines from the rack in the grocery store, and an automatic pencil with a BIG eraser (I thought about getting a crossword puzzle or logic puzzle magazine, but I knew she would rather do these.)

* A refrigerator magnet taken off my refrigerator; I picked one that had a story behind it (of when and where it had been purchased) and sent it on, saying that it had been on MY refrigerator for the last 20 years, and now it was her turn.

* One of my favorite books, straight off my bookshelf. I told her I wasn't giving her the book, I was lending it to her. After she has read it, she is to give me a call and we can talk about it.

* A 40"x40" piece of fleece, and a note with a url that explains how to make a "no sew quilt" – there is a new grandchild several states away that she won't get to visit for a while.

* There was a list of url's to go visit that had videos I thought she might like to watch (she has a "thing" about cute animal videos, and she and I travelled to Vietnam together 25 years ago – there were websites with both of those themes)

* A 300 piece jigsaw puzzle – not so large (or with such small pieces) as to be too daunting, but not so simple that it wouldn't keep her busy for a couple of days.

* Finally, there were seven envelopes, number 1-7, that each held a hand written note about some memory that we shared, or some funny incident we were involved in together. Some of those notes were a full page long. Some were only a few sentences. They weren't connected or ordered in any way. What they were was ... personal. No one else shares that particular set of memories the way the two of us do.

I packed everything up in a box, and put a letter inside, on top of the rest. The letter was an inventory of the things she would find as she went through the box, and any instructions that seemed appropriate (like opening only one note a day, or the purpose for the fleece fabric). Then I sent it all off to Connecticut.

Obviously, you can choose to put together something much more modest for someone who you know less intimately (perhaps a puzzle, and a batch of cookies, and a favorite book or interesting website to share with a casual neighbor, or some family-oriented items and one specific thing for each person IN the family, or ???). I don't mean to offer up what I did as a blueprint – just as an example.

I had already decided to write this post – this invitation – to all of you when my sister-in-law called me to say she had just opened the last of the seven "memories." We talked for some time about the memories, about funny things in the box that reminded her of other things, and about how much it meant to her to know that I had thought about HER as I put this all together. She was touched. I have to admit, though, that it probably was as comforting an activity for me, to put the box together, as it was for her to open it and sort through what was there.

So... I invite you to make difference for someone over the weeks to come. It will be all the more appreciated, I am sure, because Christmas is past and it is comes spontaneously because you thought of that someone at this stray time, rather than because you thought of them at the holidays.

I invite you to make a difference for someone.

Happy New Year,
Janie

BE the person that makes others feel included.

If we all do one random act of kindness daily, we might just set the world in the right direction.

In a world where you can be anything, be kind.

