



By Margaret Evans, Editor

Last issue, I wrote about the [curse of the holiday blues](#) , and soon thereafter I found it starting to lift. You fellow scribblers will recognize this phenomenon. There's something about writing your feelings down – about herding the nebulous and intangible into neat, concrete sentences and paragraphs – that can actually purge those feelings, or at least render them more manageable. Writing as catharsis is nothing new.

But sometimes, it puts a writer in an awkward position. For instance, a few issues ago, I wrote about the insomnia that had been plaguing me for two weeks. Lo and behold, I slept like a baby the night I finished that essay . . . and have been sleeping relatively well ever since. But the paper hit the streets a few days later, and for weeks, I received emails and Facebook messages from readers offering their own tales of sleeplessness, sleep remedies, and other sleep-related communications. It was very touching, and I couldn't bear to break it to those sweet people that I was *so over* the whole insomnia thing. So I played along for a while. (Not exactly honest, but I didn't lose any sleep over it. Heh.)

This time around, I think my mood shift is a direct result not of my own writing, but of similar responses from you readers. Writing about the holiday doldrums was helpful – like a good cry, it made me feel better almost immediately – but it wasn't until I began hearing from others suffering the same affliction that I really started getting my old Christmas mojo back.

Last Friday, I was still feeling pretty bleak-midwintery as I roamed the street at Night on the Town, all by my lonesome. My daughter had traipsed off with friends hours earlier and my husband had headed up to our office to rest his achy feet. So there I was wandering down Bay Street, alone in a crowd – perversely relishing my melancholy, 'cause I'm like that – when I

spied a casual acquaintance sitting on a window ledge outside the Old Bay Marketplace. This man I don't know very well said something like, "Margaret, I loved your recent column. I was just sitting here feeling it." So we chatted about "it" for a few minutes – about the beauty and sadness of life, about children growing up and parents growing old and everything passing away and the holidays highlighting it all – and then I bid him goodbye and headed down the street to hear the Marine Corps Jazz Band finish up the night. Suddenly, I felt 50 pounds lighter. During that short conversation, my melancholy had morphed into a gentle wistfulness that bordered on something like . . . joy. The band was playing *Feliz Navidad* and for the first time all season, that ubiquitous little ditty made me smile.

And it didn't stop that night. I heard from lots of other people, and they all wanted to talk about "it." Y'all, there's an epidemic out there. The holiday blues have infected vast swaths of our local population. Oh, and contemporary Western society, too. I knew this about society, of course – you can't open a newspaper or magazine without running into an article about holiday unhappiness – but somehow, seeing it up close and personal, hearing about it from friends and readers, really drove the point home. And made me feel *so much better*.

□□□□□□□□□□ Misery loves company, after all. And company, in turn, drives out misery.

I started thinking about that word "company" and I thought about it so hard that I finally had to Google it. It's a 12th Century word that comes from the Old French *compagnie*, meaning "society, friendship, intimacy, body of soldiers." Taking it back even further, we have the two Latin parts:

com

meaning "with" and

pan

meaning "bread." The original "companion" was somebody with whom to break bread.

We all need company – especially this time of year, when everywhere we look, people seem to be flaunting theirs. The irony is how easy it is to feel lonely in the midst of all this revelry and festivity and "company" . . . how easy it is to feel alone in a crowd, as I did at Night on the Town. In reality, a crowd is not company. Not the kind we need. Look at those definitions again: *society, friendship, intimacy, body of soldiers*. Until we make that personal connection – establish friendship and intimacy with another soul – a street festival or parade or Christmas party is just another place to feel alone in a crowd.

The last definition of the word *company* – “body of soldiers” – struck me as particularly interesting. At first, it seemed unhelpful, at least for the purposes of this essay. But as I was dressing for my book club meeting last night, still thinking about how to finish this piece, it occurred to me: My book club, a small group of friends who’ve been together for years, is kind of a “body of soldiers.” We’ve been in the trenches together, so to speak – sharing life’s inevitable blows, having each other’s backs, lifting each other when we fall, battling the forces of sorrow and disappointment with the weapons of literature, laughter and love. And – okay – wine.

This. This is real company. The kind that drives out misery. And all the holiday hoopla in the world – the sweet silver bells, the holly and the ivy, the eggnog and the gingerbread and the giant blow-up Santa in the yard – none of it can replace real company. Without real company, it all rings hollow, empty and garish.

And so, dear reader, this is my Christmas wish for you: That sometime – in the midst of this crazy, wonderful, terrible holiday hustle – you find yourself in good company. Whether it be a small gathering of friends, a quiet dinner with your spouse, or just a meaningful conversation on the street with somebody you barely know, I wish you good company. And may that good company drive out misery, fill your heart with joy, and sustain you in the year to come.

Thank you for being such good company in 2014 – for reading *and* for writing. I so love hearing from you.

Merry Christmas.

Margaret Evans is the editor of [Lowcountry Weekly](#). Read more [Rants & Raves here](#) or visit her blog at www.memargaret.com