



Sounds of the Season

THE SOUNDS OF THE SEASON ARE UPON us – can you hear them? Just listen; they are everywhere. They are the sounds that represent not just the arrival of the season, but also the memories we've made, the choices we have yet to make, and the things we hold dearest.

I love listening to Christmas music. *Feliz Navidad? Mele Kalikimaka? Holly Jolly Christmas?* Not for me. I prefer the traditional songs, like *Oh Holy Night, It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* and *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. To me the sound of these songs is comforting.

When I hear the first few strains of *Silent Night*, I immediately am drawn back to a memory from my childhood years. My family had a large red Christmas ball that hung in the living room, with a braided gold cord hanging from it, which, when pulled, played *Silent Night*. It was my favorite Christmas decoration. I couldn't wait to put it up each year, and I would spend hours listening to the sweet music it played. I can still hear the sound it made.

Going outside on a snowy winter day offers a different kind of sound: the sound of silence. I love the way things sound—or *don't* sound—outside after it has snowed heavily. While I truly prefer to have clear streets and sidewalks, and not have to scrape snow off of my car, if winter is going to do its thing, I do enjoy going outside and hearing the intense quietness after a snowfall. It seems as though the world is blanketed in a peaceful slumber, which makes me feel so comforted and protected.

Breaking that sound of silence is the sound of bells ringing outside of the grocery stores, malls and department stores this time of year. Accompanied by a red kettle and an apron-wearing attendant, those ringing bells are one of the first signs that the Christmas season has arrived. For some, the constant ringing of those bells is akin to

the cacophony of the slot machines in Las Vegas; background noise that, though somewhat charming at first, eventually becomes irritating after several weeks. I've been known to rush past a kettle or two, but am giving myself a challenge this year to drop something in each time I go by. As much as the constant ringing of bells can grate on the nerves, how much more difficult would it be to need to be on the receiving end of those red kettles? I may not have much to give, but offering a few cents or dollars here and there certainly won't hurt my pocketbook, and if we all chip in, perhaps we can give to those in our community who could use some extra love this Christmas. As melodic as the rhythm of the ringing bells is, the sound of coins dropping into the kettle is even more beautiful.

The sound that is the most precious to me though, is to hear the voice of a loved one, whether it is on the phone or, better yet, in person. My dad died a little over a year ago, but his voice is still on the greeting message for my parent's voicemail. I know some people find it unnerving when they call and hear his voice. I don't care. My sisters and I are adamant that my mom keeps it on there. There have been numerous times over the past year that I have picked up the phone and dialed my parents' number, knowing no one was home, but just wanting to hear my dad's voice. My sisters and mom have confessed to doing the same thing. It is comforting to hear that sound in my ears, and it has made crystal clear to me how important it is to hold close and cherish those we love.

Life in general is busy, and that only amplifies at the holidays. There is always the assumption that there will be more time to spend together—as soon as that one project gets taken care of, the schedule clears up or one more accomplishment is made. We are not given any promises like that in life, though, and need to take action now and give the gift of our time to those who want and need it.

In this issue, we bring you our annual Christmas gift guide, full of great gift ideas from local retailers. I, as much as the next person, appreciate the fun of giving and getting gifts. I am confident the most important gift you can give this Christmas will not be found on the pages of this gift guide, though. The greatest gift you can give is to seize the day, throw out the business plan for life, and embrace those you love while you have the chance to do so. Let them see you, let them hear you and let them hold you. Let me say it again: time is the best gift you can give. Sounds pretty good doesn't it?

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