

# A Life of Joy and Happiness

## Preserve Their Dignity

By Rick R.

Understanding is the key to right principles and attitudes, and right action is the key to good living; therefore, the joy of good living is the theme of AA's Twelfth Step. (12 & 12 pg. 125) How appropriate it seems that there are twelve months in a year, and we have twelve steps in the program. The joy of good living is the theme, and it blends right in with Thanksgiving in November, and all the religious holidays in December, and is topped off with the New Years Eve celebration. This time of year, does bring a lot of joy to most of us but it also brings distress to some of the less fortunate ones who haven't yet been blessed with the gift of sobriety and peace of mind, in and outside of AA.

I used to be very uncomfortable about the holidays as I never knew how to act around normal people. I felt like a charity case and never got into the spirit of reaching out to others. My family always celebrated Christmas, and I always (due to My discomfort) would put a damper on it by complaining about the tacky gifts that people would buy for each other and the mad rush to go shopping and all the commercializing it had become. I explained this to a dear friend once, and he asked, "*Does the rest of the family enjoy it?*" I said *yes*. He then said, "*why don't you just take a back seat and watch the joy in their eyes as they experience these things?*" I did that exact thing and have been doing it ever since and it has changed my appreciation of this time of year.

This change of attitude has inspired me to apply the unselfish lessons that I've come to understand, and *I spend the holiday season looking for the opportunity to brighten the lives of those less fortunate than myself. I often do these things anonymously and without fanfare.* I also consider how I used to feel when I was the one on the receiving end of a charitable gesture and am very careful to do these things in a way that *preserves their dignity.* I don't have to wait for the holidays to do these things. *Every day is Christmas at my home.* More recently I started to contemplate the difference between Joy and Happiness as I always thought that they were synonymous, and they are in some respects, but they do have some different qualities. I am generally a very happy person as the result of being very diligent when it comes to working the steps of the program and practicing the principles in all of my affairs. I am not without the little inconveniences and irritations that come with my day-to-day activities, but they are nowhere near the problems I encountered prior to becoming a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. They do not lower my level of happiness because I simply take them as they come. Over a period of time, as I mature on this journey, my *mean* level of happiness continues to rise, and I am generally very happy as the result. When I look at the word Joy, I do not feel that I am in a constant state of Joy, but I do have many little things that happen on a day-to-day basis that rise above my state of happiness, and they sometimes bring tears to my eyes. We all can identify with the term "tears of joy." Even unhappy people can have tears of joy occasionally. I was introduced to the principle that "happiness is a byproduct of right living and not an end in itself" I have been living by that principle ever since *and you can believe me when I tell you that I reap more than my share of joy.*