

## Holiday reflections

By Tabitha Wells

Last Christmas brought with it a number of changes in our lives. A new nephew, with another nephew or a niece to follow in March and me moving to a different location to work were some of the positive things. But it was also a difficult time. We were fresh out of losing my husband's father suddenly and unexpectedly, and I was still reeling from the miscarriage I had experienced two weeks prior to that.

It was an odd place to be in emotionally -- both fully excited about the good things happening, and wholly devastated by the loss. There were days where I quite literally sobbed uncontrollably in the bathroom at work because the grief was simply too overwhelming.

Christmas has always been my favourite time of year, thus bringing new conflict into my emotional turmoil. Much like the constant mood swings and ups and downs of my bipolar, I was emotionally all over the place simply from the combination of life, the time of year, and the losses which had occurred.

I almost didn't even decorate for Christmas, an unusual thing for me given that most years, Scott has to hold me back to stop me from decorating November 1.

That emotional confusion continued on into 2018, despite my best hopes for the year. While I was successful in many areas and doing well, there was this deep sadness inside of me -- a grief unlike any other I had ever experienced. The longer it took us to get pregnant, the deeper that darkness grew. It was consuming. More so than I had ever expected.

Eventually, it faded, bringing with it a sense of apathy towards my dream of being a parent. I wasn't depressed or hurting anymore, though the sadness of our loss never left me. Instead, I just sort of stopped believing it could ever happen.

But then one day, it did. Those two blue lines appeared thicker than with the first pregnancy, a solid "hey it's happening!?"

As we head into this Christmas, the pain and loss of last year feels like a lifetime ago. This Christmas is bringing its own emotional rollercoasters, but most of them are positive. Some are bittersweet. Some are hard. But one thing this Christmas has that last year didn't, was an abundance of hope.

Sure, there is the realization that we will not have another Christmas with just the two of us snuggling in front of the tree in our quiet house for many, many years. But there's also the joy of knowing that next year, we'll get to see the wonder in our son's eyes as he marvels at the lights and tree. And the year after that, when he sort of understands presents and we get to experience with him what it means to have Santa's gifts waiting on Christmas morning.

It means the end of a perfectly cleaned, perfectly organized, and perfectly decorated house -- but the beginning of memories of childhood wonder, and magic, and probably a lot of sticky things that I won't want to know what they're from.

There is the wonder of my son moving and kicking like crazy inside me -- an experience I won't ever have again. Sitting beside the Christmas tree, candles all aglow, it makes it feel that much more magical and mysterious, breeding with it the excitement that in only a few more weeks, we'll get to meet the little guy.

But this year is also about thankfulness. It's about being thankful that, despite the amount of devastation and loss we experienced, I was able to keep my head above the water and not be overtaken by my BiPolar, thankful that we had family who walked through it with us. Personally, I was thankful for the friends I have -- for my circle -- who sat with me and cried with me, and at times, emotionally carried me through. For a husband who understood that what I was experiencing was at times darker than what he did,

and the patience he had with me while I tried to find my way back.

And I'm thankful that this year, exactly one year later, we have so much to look forward to. That instead of mourning we are busily planning and moving things around, decorating, shopping, and all of the fun and excitement that comes with preparing to bring a child into your home.

There are struggles, too ? health problems and risks that have arisen ? that make it difficult and sometimes bring back the fears of what we experienced before.

Despite those struggles, this year, the magic of Christmas is healing again. It's exciting again.

So as we celebrate the first Christmas with the wee ones born last year, and our last one together, I'm taking a break from all the craziness and darkness in life to enjoy the light. Embrace the twinkling and the upbeat music, the snuggles and family, stockings, and fires. The cheesy Christmas movies, and replacing every hand towel, soap, and blanket with festive ones. The time to rest and heal and prepare for the new year.

As 2018 comes to a close, may your festive holiday season be filled with the things that bring you hope and joy this year. Take time for you, to enjoy and to focus on the things that can heal your soul.

Happy holidays to all!

See you in 2019!