



# Finding strength and healing through the holidays

BY SONA MEHRING, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 12/25/21 10:00 AM EST  
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season. It leaves me feeling inspired. [Ad Choices](#) Inspired by the immense power of hope and compassion that shine through a health crisis, whether it is moments of celebration or when there is no cure.

I can't pretend to explain the gift of healing, but for those who have no choice in taking on roles as caregivers and patients, sharing the ups and downs, the hopes and fears of their journey often provides a healing effect.

While the impact of sympathy and encouragement on results may be unclear, the love, hope and compassion that friends and family wish to give is undeniably an empowering force. In 1997, I experienced the gift of healing when I created a website for my dear friends, JoAnn and Darrin, when they endured a life-threatening pregnancy and the devastating loss of their newborn daughter, Brighid. It was the first CaringBridge site. Who

against two people in 2004 killing

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would've imagined that Darrin's overwhelmed and exhausted request for me to "just let everyone know what's going on," would take on a life of its own? I never expected the abundance of kindhearted people at Brigid's memorial service whose efforts of love and support flooded the internet to console her parents. I first saw what healing looks like on that day.

I have been humbled over the years witnessing the impact of how the healing components of having a place to share health-related updates became a lifeline — and a lifesaver. After his wife was diagnosed with breast cancer, a business executive created a site as a "form of self-defense," simply to organize the mayhem of sharing news. But he was astonished by the healing their social network provided. Messages of love helped a 34-year-old widow with a broken heart survive Christmas as her husband was unable to live to see the New Year. Being a mom, daughter, aunt, cousin, grandmother, friend and sister, I am adamant that no one should go through a health journey alone. "Leaning in," a cliché but perfectly adequate term for wrapping your arms around something you'd rather escape. People really are stronger together.

As a software engineer by trade, I have always sought data and logic that will also show what healing looks like. The research shows:

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- 88 percent of patients and their family caregivers who responded to a Forrester Research study said that connecting with family and friends had a positive impact on their healing process
- Social support was identified as the strongest of four factors identified as contributing to positive health and treatment outcomes by a Robert Wood Johnson and University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute study (social support: 40 percent; health behaviors: 30 percent; clinical care: 20 percent; physical environment: 10 percent).

As exciting data-gathering opportunities continue to arise, I've accepted that I won't be able to measure magic. According to an author fighting fatal mantle cell lymphoma, being surrounded by his loved ones with healing strength is "emotional sustenance." Is there a better gift than that?

If you are able to give — or receive — the gift of healing this holiday season, do it as much as you can. Say something, even if there are no words. It can take form in shoveling snow, making blankets for comfort, or delivering hotdish to a loved one. The blessings come as much from pausing to receive encouragement as they do from taking a minute to express it. We're taught that giving is greater to receiving, yet in the case of healing, the two are equal. My wish is that you, too, may feel "It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year" for a little while.

Sona Mehring is founder of the nonprofit organization [CaringBridge.org](http://CaringBridge.org), a free communication service for people facing health issues and their family. Since the site was founded almost 25 years ago, nearly 900,000 CaringBridge sites have received over 2.5 billion visits, and is home to the "[How We Heal](#)" project.

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