



Episode 3 New Calm Christmas Pod Casts

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00:05

Christmas can be a very special time, but it can also be a very stressful time. And given everything that has been going on this year, who knows what will unfold this holiday season? What if, for once, we just relaxed and gave ourselves permission to focus on what really matters.



00:26

Welcome to the Calm Christmas podcast with me Beth Kempton, just like my book of the same name. I hope the Calm Christmas podcast inspires connection, belonging, self care, nourishment, and joy and a little bit of festive magic.



00:51

Hello, and welcome to Episode 3, Comfort and Joy in Winter. Here in England, we are plunging back into national lockdown today. I know that restrictions are tightening in many places around the world. And so much of us have a lot on our minds this week. So comfort and joy feels like a very welcome theme to me. Today I thought I'd start us off with a short poem called winter days by Gareth Owen from the Oxford Book of Christmas Poems.



01:22

Biting air, winds blow, city street,s under snow. Noses red, lips sore, runny eyes, hands raw.

Chimneys smoke, cars crawl, piled snow on garden wall. Slush in gutters, ice in lanes, frosty patterns on window panes. Morning call, lift up head, nipped by winter, stay in bed.



01:48

Ever feel like that? I know the feeling.



01:52

Here's a short passage from my Calm Christmas book, reflecting on winter as a child because that feeling of the winter morning and what the weather does to our day definitely sticks in the mind.



02:08

It goes like this.



02:11

For us children, winter is getting dressed between the storage heater and the ring of drying clothes, trying not to burn our behinds as we balance on one leg to put on our school socks. It's Advent candles at Sunday school, afternoon baths and indoor picnic teas. It's baking, making, hot soup, casseroles and bedtime stories. Pressing noses against the window of the big toy shop in town, dreaming of what Santa might bring. Its gloopy porridge on Monday mornings, reluctant car engines, warm water poured over the windscreen and the laborious scraping of ice. A garden left to its own devices. The tree house ivy-covered and lonely. Wellies for splashing through puddles and see-through umbrellas, hot water bottles and extra blankets and not being allowed outside with wet hair. Grandma polishing the brasses and baking deep crust pies. Mum filling the cupboards and knowing that we'll be fine if we're snowed in, which never happens. The humdrum of daily life drumming like the rain on the roof.



03:13

This was the rhythm of childhood winters growing up in a city. The simple things that centred us while December swirled around our tiny shoulders.



03:21

These days like a heavy boot on a frozen puddle. December cracks me wide open as it closes in. It makes me worry about the farmers and the pigs and the shepherds and the sheep battling the cold and the rain. The homeless people tucked into doorways and under bridges. The elderly sitting alone at their breakfast tables hoping someone anyone might pop in the early risers in their dressing gowns carrying their worries into the kitchen to put the kettle on and figure out how to pay for Christmas. The sounds of winter are crackling poetry. Wind in the trees, rain on the roof, a spitting fire, the thump of a log falling away from the flames. rustling paper, mulled wine poured steaming into a glass. The rhythm of the shipping forecast calmly announcing that the storms will rage on. Joy and sorrow go together in winter like the play of light and shadow in the flicker of a candle. Every one of us will experience a full range of emotions before spring returns.



04:21

I've long wondered whether the January blues might be due to more than the miserable weather, the monotony of the return to work the short grey days and the long dark nights.



04:32

What if they're also a consequence of the way we spend December? What if the typical sluggishness lack of motivation and low mood or hangovers from the festive stress and excess of rich food and the disruption of our usual daily rhythms when Christmas descends. Imagine the difference it would make if we could usher ourselves through the month with care and allow plenty of time for rest, reflection and the emergence of new dreams.



04:59

So we talk about this idea of finding comfort and joy in winter a lot in my Calm Christmas book. But today, I think we're going to focus on talking about the importance of nourishing body, mind and spirit, seeking out small moments of joy, and establishing comforting winter rhythms that will see you right through the season. Christmas can be such a hectic time, with a little bit of mindfulness and the occasional pause. It can also offer us lots of opportunities for rejuvenation and for joy. You know, Christmas, which is the single most widely celebrated festival in the world, is actually considered so important that we max out our credit cards to the tune of 11 billion pounds a year here in the UK. So it's not really surprising that almost two thirds of us find the holiday season stressful. And

of course, that stress has an impact on us in many ways. The mental health charity Mind actually reported recently that 11% of people feel unable to cope at Christmas. And that figure rises to 31% among those who have existing mental health issues. And in the same way, as many as 28% of people, which rises to 44% of those with mental health problems, struggle with the pressure of organising the perfect Christmas. So let's just put that aside, shall we, this idea of a perfect Christmas. It's such a crazy goal to aim for. And as we've been talking about in previous episodes, it's so much healthier, and so much more nurturing, to pick an adjective that describes the kind of Christmas that you want a nice, you know, a cosy Christmas or quiet Christmas or magical Christmas, so much more chance of you making Christmas like that, then trying to make the perfect Christmas because it's not going to work for all the people all the time. So let's start that way. That's healthy. And, and let's just think about what happens if we do allow ourselves to get caught up into this crazy cycle of hectic things to do scheduled all this stuff that gets thrown at us at this time of year. You know, year in year out millions of people approach in the same old way. This huge buildup, mounting panic, followed by a massive energy crash. And even those of us who really love Christmas, we often take on far too much. And I'm not just talking about the festivities and you know, preparations for Christmas itself. But all the other stuff that's going on in our lives at this time of year, tend to keep on piling it on giving everything to others and leaving nothing for ourselves. Lots of us are missing a vital opportunity to relax, to reconnect and be rejuvenated instead of drained by this very special season, simply because of what we've come to believe about how it should be. But the events this year have changed so much in terms of our expectations of how things work, we've actually got an opportunity to do things differently. So perhaps it's time for a new kind of festive season. One that allows us to create magic and memories without sacrificing our well being, ushering us towards a lasting sense of serenity and contentment. My book on Christmas is all about this. And on today's show, I want to talk about the importance of finding comfort and joy in the darkest season instead of getting overwhelmed by it. I think you will find a lot of comfort in the pages of that book too. And I very much hope that you will read it.



08:19

But for now let's talk about noticing what's going on around us at this time of year.



08:26

Instead of overspending overpreparing and overdoing just about everything in an attempt to create the perfect Christmas. What if we just relaxed and focused on what really matters? As we notice the first brush of pine and the crisp winter air. As we wrap our hands

gleefully around a mug of hot chocolate. As we think long and hard about gifts, write cards, stir soup, stack kindling, open advent calendar doors to countdown to Christmas. Let's remember to look around and see what's going on. To use all our senses to be in the experience of the lead up to Christmas, to be gentle on ourselves. And to savour the magic of the season as it unfolds.



09:09

You know mindfulness can be a friend at this time of year as it can be at any time of year. It's very simple. Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention to the present moment. And focusing on the breath is a powerful way to connect to that present moment. There are lots of ways that we can employ mindfulness techniques over the holidays, from taking a mindful walk in nature, to giving our full attention to cooking and preparing food with love. From keeping up our yoga and meditation classes to setting a mindfulness prompts like taking three deep breaths every time we put the kettle on. And of course there are apps that we can use to help us like Headspace or Insight timer, the Calm app, Buddhify, all sorts of different ones out there some free, some very low cost, that can be a real friend during the chaos of this crazy season.



09:58

We can also give our full attention to conversations, heightening a sense of connection. We can agree guidelines around the use of devices over the holidays, which can really make a difference. Minimising screen time so that we and others don't keep getting distracted by social media, by WhatsApp, by emails and of course by the news. And if we feel anxious, we can imagine all our worries as a tangled set of fairy lights. I love doing this. And then just step back and look at those worries those fairy lights in this big tangle a separate from us, and then imagine untangling them slowly. And as you do this, you get so caught up in the idea of actually untangling a set of lights that you almost forget about the thing that had been bothering you so much, just a few moments before half ago, it really works.



10:49

We can also be mindful of what we eat and drink. And we can listen to a yoga nidra meditation to send us into a restful sleep. We can pause and really look around and take a deep breath and soak up the atmosphere of our home during the holidays. And of course, we can be very conscious about expressing gratitude for all we have. All these things are simple things, but each one of them makes a real difference and employing a

bunch of them together can really transform your experience of a difficult day in the middle of winter. So I encourage you to try some.



11:27

We can also look to other cultures and countries for ideas about how to keep warm and in good spirits through long winter. I'd like to share a few that I found on my explorations around the internet, particularly the BBC and Worldnomads.com had some great tips and interesting findings from around the world.



11:46

So in America, Lee Jeans have actually invented jeans that are made of magma-infused denim, made with molten rocks from actual volcanoes that retain the heat while you're wearing them. That's pretty cool. And I think it is a reminder that the right clothes can actually make a huge difference to keeping the heat in and the cold out and that our body temperature affects the way we feel. So that's just a fun example. But actually thinking about what you're wearing and layering up the clothes can make a big difference. Russians sweat out in banyas - I think that's how you pronounce it. Apologies if I'm wrong any Russians listening, and which are bathhouses of steam. I have been to Russia but I've never been in one of those.



12:32

And of course, Finns have their famous saunas love those. And Swedes keep themselves toasty by using their own ingenious invention, earbags. I had never seen these before, but they're brilliant. Such a great idea. I don't know why we don't have them here. They're just like ear muffs. Only without the headband, you snap them on directly to your ears. And to keep you warm throughout the colder months. I'm not sure what it's like for hearing traffic as you cross the road. But principle of keeping your ears warm. They're a great invention.



13:01

Here's what I do know about from lots of lovely experience of it. And that is in Japanese homes. They have the most brilliant piece of furniture called the kotatsu. And it's a table that has a heater fixed on the underside and a quilt coming down from each side of the table so you can sit with your legs underneath it. And they're under the quilt. So the quilt kind of comes around you as you're sat down, and your legs are all toasty and then you sit

there and eat your dinner or do your homework at the table. And some people have them built into the tatami floor so you're actually sitting on the floor but your feet go down below floor level as if you're sitting on a chair and the whole area underneath the table is heated to absolute delight and love them and I can tell you from a lot of experience with kotatsu falling asleep under one is very cosy and tempting but you do feel a bit woozy when you come around.



13:55

Apparently traditionally the Dutch keep their feet cosy with wooden foot stoves. Now I do have some Dutch friends I've never heard of this. I will be asking them about it. Perhaps you know about this. And I've never seen one but the photo I found showed a wooden box that was open on one side with a slab at the top. And then hot coals or charcoal are placed into this inside it and then the feet go on top of this slab to keep your feet warm. My feet get really cold and I'm sitting at my writing desk for too long so I could definitely do every one of those. Personally I make do with a combination of ankle warmers knitted ankle warmers or leg warmers like the old 80s dance movies and got some of those they really work and a cosy hot water bottle under my feet.



14:38

Apparently some Chinese people go even further than the foot stove and they use a bed stove. I found a fascinating piece about how people in the northeast of China have something called a kang bed and a platform of clay bricks with a hole underneath the heating elements. Which is just sounds delightful. Kind of the opposite of an electric blanket.



15:00

I love that. And I also forgot to mention that in Japan, they have heated toilet seats in the winter, which is very nice if you living in a snowy place. And in a video shot by the BBC, which interviewed lots of people who live in extreme climates, they advocated wearing many layers, as we've talked about, not filming selfies in minus temperatures to avoid your fingers freezing off, always carrying a hot drink, taking as many hot baths as you can and to keep moving. And I mean, it's so interesting, because they're all really simple kind of obvious things. But these are words spoken by people who live in the most extreme, cold climates in the world. And they're just simple things that they do to keep warm. And so I think sometimes we think these answers need to be complicated, but they don't. It's just thinking them through and being sensible, and taking the time to take care of ourselves by

you know, making a hot drink before you leave the house and getting all our layers on and all those things.



16:00

I once visited a place called Kakslauttanen in the Arctic Circle, where you can stay in an igloo under the stars and watch the Northern Lights. It was an incredible experience. And also my eyelashes froze. So cold. And it's in Finnish Lapland. And there the sun sets in late November and doesn't really rise until the middle of January. It can be as long as 50 days in northern Finland. And there is a measurable rise in mental health problems in the north of Finland during winter, with a lot of people affected by seasonal affective disorder. Of course, people are affected by that all over the world. But it's almost like the darker and the longer the winter, the more people are affected, and the worse the effects for very serious cases. And it's said that medication and light therapy can help but also going outside simply to find what natural light you can. Exercising, being social and taking vitamin D supplements are said to help as well. And it's interesting how when we don't feel good, we quite often want to kind of huddle inside, or stay away from everybody. But actually sometimes getting outside getting moving, doing exercise. All of those things can be really good for us.



17:15

And of course, if we're talking about ideas for comfort and joy in winter around the world, we can't not talk about Hygge spelled HYGGE, the Danish concept which became super trendy a couple of years ago, but it's one of those where it's kind of odd that it's trendy when it's something that has been around in the culture for a long time. I guess it's just come to light for those of us who don't speak Danish in recent years, and it's often translated as cosiness, but I believe actually means an awful lot more than that. And I have to say the most interesting and most in depth kind of soulful book that I've read on hygge, I have read a few. And is not actually the most famous one. But it is a real beauty. And it's called The Book of Hygge by Louisa Thompson Brits. I heard Louisa talk at a retreat a few years back, and we were each given a copy of her book. But it was so lovely, I actually gave it away to somebody else for Christmas without reading it. And then last year, I found it again. It kind of popped up in a bookshop in front of me as these things often do. And I bought it for myself and sat down to read it and was completely staggered. To read it some elements of what she was saying almost a mirror of things I had written about Wabi Sabi, which is a completely different concept, but had some fundamentals that were really similar. And those similarities were to do with finding contentment in the life that you have right now. So, according to Louisa, who there is a

feeling of belonging and warmth, a moment of comfort and contentment. And it's often represented when people who, whether they're Danish or not Danish, or trying to explain hygge in a visual format is often represented in objects and wintery imagery like cosy sweaters and fingerless gloves, holding a mug of hot chocolate, and fire light and candlelight and those kinds of things. But I believe, from this book and other things that I've picked up about her and my own sense of it, is that the point is not about those objects themselves, but about how those objects make you feel, and the atmosphere that is created with them, and also in the context of other people in that space and the connection between those people. It's a really interesting concept that obviously goes way beyond the idea of cosiness and perhaps it would make a lovely winter project to do your own research into hygge and bring a little more of it into your life this year. And of course, food is really important as a part of the strategy for keeping warm in many countries, and many cultures from stews to curries soups to freshly baked pies. And we're going to be exploring food later in this series. So make sure you subscribe to the Calm Christmas podcast so you get those future episodes as soon as they land. There are lots more ideas about finding comfort, enjoying winter and nourishing yourself through the season in my book, Calm Christmas, so you can take a look at that. And really make an effort to take good care of yourself this year. I'd love to hear your ideas too. Of course, always inspired by wherever in the world you are. So do come and share over on Instagram where you can find me @BethKempton, maybe post some pictures of what you do to keep warm to find joy to stay cosy in the winter, or if you're in the southern hemisphere, what your version of comfort, enjoy. In at this time of the year, I was going to say winter, I'm not going to in your summer, what you do to find comfort and joy at this time of the year.



21:00

Remember, when we surrender to the flow of winter, a powerful wave carries us far from the rush of everyday life, and inwards to the place where our truth lies waiting. This is a time to reconnect with our essence, our humanity, our deep seated creativity and our place in nature. Winter calls us back to that still place at the centre of our working lives.



21:23

And so before we wrap up, I'm going to share our get ahead tips for this week, things that you can do to help the progression towards Christmas feel slightly less hectic. And also to take good care of yourself.



21:38

When talking about doing some exercise, and one app I'd love to recommend that you could start right now is called Couch to 5K. It's produced by the National Health Service in the UK. I don't know if it's available outside the UK, but there's probably something similar. And it's a nine week free programme, an audio programme. And that will take you from now through to the New Year get running from a starting point of absolutely nothing through to 30 minutes at a time, which is, you know, on average about five kilometres. It is absolutely brilliant in terms of being motivating and helping you get out of the door with the trainers on three times a week for those nine weeks. So now's a great time to start. There's also other free ways to keep moving, sleep better, stay calm. I've mentioned some of them, Insight timer and other apps for meditation and mindfulness. There's Yoga with Adriene on YouTube, always good one. And simply journaling can be really good and a lovely habit to get into at this time of year. You can also get some tips for getting a good night's sleep and a winter wellness checklist in the digital Christmas Care Package which comes with my book Calm Christmas. So if you buy the book you'll find all the details for how to get access to that bonus Christmas care package in there.



22:54

You can also get busy in the garden this week. Ian Spence who's author of the Royal Horticultural Society's Gardening Through the Year book, a great book telling you what's going on in the garden and what to be doing in the garden every month of the year. He says November can be a damp warm month. Flowers may be scarce in the garden, but there are many berries, evergreen foliage and trees with decorative barked add interest on the duller of days. You can warm yourself up by tidying the garden and preparing for the winter ahead. It's also a good time to check your tools catch up on greenhouse maintenance, and begin planning your spring display. And a few of his recommendations include cleaning out nesting boxes and putting food out for the birds having a lawnmower serviced and checking your tools. Planting bare root trees, shrubs and roses. Starting off amaryllis bulbs if you want them to flower for Christmas, begin your winter pruning of deciduous trees and shrubs. And of course, as we mentioned before, ordering a seed catalogue on a very very cold wet day, it's lovely to curl up in your in your armchair and flick through a seed catalogue and imagining all the things that you might like to grow next year.



24:05

And then a couple of other things to be doing this week. Mark your calendar with self-care ideas from now through to January. There's this weird thing in the human psyche that if it's in the diary, it seems more likely it is actually going to happen. So planning that timing

can really help.



24:20

Also, I absolutely believe that budgeting is self-care because it helps you avoid the stress of overspending or the credit card hangover in January and most of us know what that feels like. And there's a great exercise in my book *calm Christmas*, which helps you figure out your Christmas spending and reminds you that anything you spend on Christmas is money you don't have leftover to spend on other things that really matter to you. Like investing in your dreams so that you can do what you love. And so spend wisely. And this week is a great week to be doing that exercise and be thinking about your budget and for Christmas itself. You know beyond just the presents but also the decorations and any events and all the stuff that goes around and it just because it's Christmas, and all those things that you do, getting your hair done getting your nails done, there's so many things that we use Christmas as an excuse to do and it all adds up. So having a budget can really, really help with that.



25:19

And lastly, I really encourage you to join my brand new live writing class called the Winter Writing Sanctuary, you can register now at dowhatyouloveforlife.com. And it won't cost you a penny. After such a difficult year, I've decided to make it available for free for everyone. It begins on Monday, November the 23rd. And it runs for two weeks online. So come and join me to nurture the writing habit to see you through the season. There's going to be daily inspiration and exercises from me in a private classroom, and a live broadcast where I'll be talking all about writing rhythms and rituals. And you'll be able to share your writing as part of a community of writers from around the world. And goodness knows do we need community right now.



26:11

Any of you who joined me earlier in the year for my Words Heal course, which was a really similar structure of two weeks, we'll know how transformational it was. The writing that came out of that course was amazing. And I know so many of the people who took it were completely blown away by the quality and beauty of their own writing. It really helped a lot of people with their confidence. And many have gone on to take their writing more seriously, keeping up the daily habit and even putting together book proposals and getting writing published in magazines and all sorts since that class. But this one is absolutely for all levels. You are very welcome. And you can book your place now at

dowhatyouloveforlife.com.



26:58

So to finish up today, seeing as we've been talking about comfort and joy in winter, I thought it was appropriate to take a few words from *The Book of Joy*, which is a wonderful book. And it's the documentation of a conversation between Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. And in it it says this.



27:16

When we rejoice, we celebrate our good fortune and the good fortune of others. We celebrate our good deeds and the good deeds of others. By rejoicing, you're much less likely to take a life for granted and can affirm and appreciate all that you have and have done. Impermanence, the Dalai Lama reminds us, is the nature of life. All things are slipping away. And there is a real danger of wasting our precious human life.



27:45

Gratitude helps us to catalogue celebrate and rejoice in each day and each moment before they slip through the vanishing hourglass of experience.



27:56

So my friend, get your gloves on, get your gratitude on and pour yourself a hot cup of tea and soak up the rest of your day. I will see you next time when we're going to be exploring how to have a slow Christmas



28:15

You've been listening to the Calm Christmas podcast with me, Beth Kempton. For more inspiration and ideas. cosy up with a copy of my book, *Calm Christmas and Happy New Year: A Little Book of Festive Joy*. It's available now from all good bookshops or listen to the audiobook read by me.



28:36

Wishing you a Calm Christmas and Happy New Year.