

What Christmas cards don't say

Why can't our image-conscious letters include family fights, foreclosures, and job anxiety?

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I received a Christmas card from a friend. The front of the Christmas card was loaded with photos of happy, smiling people living their Best Lives Now! The family update on the reverse was peppered with exclamation points, jolly news, and travel destinations in bold.

Then we had coffee.

Though we hadn't talked for several months, we are close-enough friends for honesty over steaming mugs. No surprise, the card only showed the tip of the iceberg of her family's life. There were travels and a family wedding. But there've also been family fights, job anxiety, and loneliness.

I wondered about all of our image-conscious cards. Why can't we just put it all out there in our Christmas letters? Why not write, "This will be the last time you get a card from this address, we're going into foreclosure," or "As I blew out the candles on my birthday cake, I was pretty sure I've wasted my life," or even, "I don't really like my kids this year. I'm a pretty nice person. How did I raise this bunch of jerks?"

Why not? Because not everything is everyone's business. Secrets are how we protect those tender places that aren't read for public scrutiny. We all know that if we put our dirty laundry on the line, someone will point at it and say, "Ick. That's really gross."

There is power in bearing witness to the complicated truth of our lives. When we tell someone else about our struggles, insecurities, and personal triumphs, we each get a little less lonely. When we can unfold the layers of lives before another person without covering a part with our thumb, we create a holy text. I have found healing when I've shared my hurt places with someone else.

But it's OK for Christmas cards to have only the updates that are fine for other people to talk about in the grocery store check-out line.

This year, when I open cheery Christmas cards and read the enclosed brag letters, I'll celebrate the joyous news. And I'll pray for the very real people and all the complicated, difficult, messy stories they're not yet telling.

Originally posted at [Waking Up Earley](#)