Collecting memories

Q & A with Danny Lettieri, author of "Ho Ho, OH NO!: Twelve True Stories of Tinsel, Bedlam & Unconditional Love"

What was the inspiration behind this book?
Several years back, I started jotting down ideas for a potential memoir. Some of the ideas then turned into short stories, and I have amassed quite a few over the years. In 2025, I started looking through my stories and realized that there were several having to do with Christmas. Since that is my ultimate favorite time of the year (ya think?!), I decided to pull them together and see where it landed. The stories were developed, creating what you see today.

You've been "collecting" memories in writing for a long time. How did the stories in "Ho Ho, OH NO!" make the cut?
I am very sentimental by nature, and as of late, I have been doing a lot of reflecting about my life, more specifically, the holidays throughout the years. As a form of therapy, I looked at my collection of holiday memories and decided to flesh them out so that I could share them with the rest of the family. I had no idea that it would turn into a book at the time, but as the stories developed as well as the emotions behind the stories, I realized that these would be great to share with people.

In these stories, there are many people who have passed on. How did you feel writing about them and the memories they played such an important part in?
One of the main reasons for writing these stories was to honor those who are no longer with us. For me, the holidays aren't complete without these memories, and while I remember them, I wanted to chronicle them so that I will never forget. In doing so, I also realized how much better the holidays were keeping everyone's spirits alive.

What did you learn about your family when writing this book?
My biggest takeaway was gaining a true understanding as to what my mom did for us as a family and the weight of having to do it pretty much on her own, since my dad worked nights and slept during the day. From juggling finances to make sure we were fed and clothed, to creating the most fabulous holidays, she gave so much to us – and she gave up so much for us –and I didn't really process the complete picture until I started writing these stories. Also, I was able to understand my dad better, mainly, understanding that he really did the best that he could. In my youth, I felt that it wasn't enough, but today, I feel nothing but love for Dad. He did what he could, and isn't that all someone can do?

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What did you learn about yourself when writing this book?
One of the things that touched me the most was realizing that, as a kid, I put my parents on such a high pedestal, that no matter how hard they tried, they were bound to fall off, so to speak. Once I grew up, everything fell into perspective. One thing I am good at these days is putting myself in someone else's shoes, and once I did that with my parents, it made all the difference. I also put into perspective just what a royal pain in the ass I was, and that it must have been exhausting for my parents and siblings!

Your personality shines through in these stories, so much so that at the end the reader feels like they have come to know you. Was it challenging to find your true voice as a writer? If so, what was the most challenging?
The challenge for me was being comfortable with people hearing my voice. Growing up, I literally had no confidence, and other people's opinions were not only important to me, but they also paralyzed me. I would never have dreamed that one day I would read my stories aloud to an audience. The expression that writing is therapy is so true. Through writing, I was able to be open and honest, and find my true voice. Now, getting me to shut up is going to be a problem!

What do you hope readers take away from "Ho Ho, OH NO!"?
The main thing I want readers to take away from my stories is that there is no perfect holiday, and more importantly, that there is no need to strive for that perfect holiday. I used to think that if everything wasn't perfect, then it wasn't great. It's easy to see the flaws when one has that mindset. When I started writing these stories, I was giddy at times, remembering the holidays we spent together as a family. Situations that might have embarrassed me as a kid, made me literally laugh out loud. It made me love my family even more than I already do.

Also, know that it is okay to feel sad at times. I think about so many of our relatives who are no longer with us. Although I miss them, it also warms my heart – and definitely makes me laugh at times – thinking about our times together. I don't dwell on the sad part, but it comes with the memories, which is fine with me.