



It's holiday time and the world is filled with music, tinsel and glitter. Everything seems to sparkle and there is always so much to do! It is a festive time of year, filled with joyous occasions and family gatherings. But when your family circle has been broken by death, the holidays may only serve to remind you of the empty space at the table, the hole in your heart.

The holidays are a time when the past and the present collide. We either try to recreate the wonderful memories of our past or to clean the slate completely and start all over again. When the family fabric has been torn apart by death, the holiday season becomes one of the most difficult experiences the bereaved must endure. From Halloween to New Year's, it's a season often filled with despair and renewed grief. Yet, the holiday season can also be a time of reflection and renewal, of recollection and reconnection.

No one can grieve for you. We each must walk that path one footstep at a time. Handling the holidays isn't a matter of eliminating the pain, but rather how we manage the pain we experience. The most important thing to remember is that this is YOUR TIME and YOUR GRIEF and DO WHATEVER IS COMFORTABLE AND "RIGHT" FOR YOU. Your family and friends want to help and perhaps the best gift they could give you is the love and patience you need to help you through this season of despair.

The following are offered as suggestions for handling your holiday grief:

Become Aware Of Your Feelings And Acknowledge Them.

Tears, depression, anger, guilt and loneliness are all a natural part of grief. These feelings may return again and again during the holiday season as well as other "earlier symptoms" you may have experienced. Once you can acknowledge them and embrace them, they will dissipate more quickly. Do not be afraid or ashamed of your emotions.

Be Gentle With Yourself. Grief hurts! Be kind and patient. Let go of the *oughts* and *shoulds*. Try to forgive yourself for surviving the death of your loved one. Let go of the guilt you may experience if you happen to find yourself enjoying a moment or two of the holiday season. Your loved one enjoyed the holidays *with* you, let those memories surround you now.

Make Lists. The bereaved often can't remember things, so make lists of everything you have to do. Ask yourself the following questions about everything on your list:

- ✦ Do you *really enjoy* doing this?
- ✦ Do others *expect* me to do this?
- ✦ Can *someone else* do this?
- ✦ Will it still be the holidays without this?
- ✦ What would happen if it didn't get done?

Change Things. See what happens if you would:

- ✦ Have dinner at a different time or place
- ✦ Attend a different church service
- ✦ Open presents at a different time
- ✦ Ask others to help or take over hosting the holidays
- ✦ Send a New Year's note instead of holiday cards

Work At Lifting Depression. Take responsibility for yourself. We cannot wait for someone else to give us joy. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat. Create your own healing environment. (Hot Chocolate, Soup, Cookies, No Veggies!)

Share Your Holidays

- ✦ Visit a nursing home or day care center
- ✦ Volunteer at a soup kitchen or shelter
- ✦ Invite a child to go for a walk or sledding
- ✦ Take a friend shopping

Take Care Of Yourself. Eat right. Exercise (at least watch someone else). Gift wrap some broccoli. Get plenty of rest. Be nice to yourself. If nothing else, JOG YOUR MEMORY

Pass On Family Treasures If you have special items of your loved one's that other family members would treasure, wrap them up and give them this holiday season. Pass on the treasures rather than keep them locked away in a box.

Buy Your Loved One a Gift. Give it away to someone who would not otherwise have a gift. When love is shared, it grows.

Shop If You Must

You can survive holiday shopping if you:

- ◆ Make out the entire list ahead of time
- ◆ Go on one of your “good” days
- ◆ Take a friend along
- ◆ Shop when the stores are the least busy
- ◆ Try catalog shopping or give Holiday IVO certificates

Plan a Special Moment or Memorial for your loved one. Order a special bouquet for your church alter or donate a poinsettia to a nursing home in your loved one’s memory. Plant a living Christmas tree in the yard or place a favorite flower on your breakfast table or mantle. Keep your loved one picture where you can see it often. Include your loved in your table blessing as your family gathers to celebrate the season.

Decorate something. Don’t toss out the entire season! If you don’t feel like decorating the whole house, try doing just a room or a corner or perhaps just a table. Decorate the grave if the cemetery allows that. Do whatever feels “right” for you and your family.

Be thankful for something. Think of all the things your loved shared with you...love, happiness, joy, laughter. Write these “gifts” on pieces of paper and keep them someplace close to you. Some put these “notes” in the stocking or hang them on the tree or place them in a special box. Some place them in a memory book while others keep them under the pillow or in a secret place. Wherever you place them, know that these small pieces of paper are tangible evidence that someone lived and loved us and that we are rich beyond measure because of the gifts they shared with us!

Light a candle. Light a special candle in celebration and gratitude of your loved one’s life. Know that you carry this light within you always. *No light that was born in love can ever be extinguished.*

*MAY LOVE BE WHAT YOU REMEMBER THE MOST
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON AND ALWAYS!*



THANKS FOR THE LITTLE WHILE

**Thank you for life. For its good times and bad
Thank you for love, even when I can't feel it.
Thank you for the love I used to share,
For the arms that held me tight.**

**Thank you for my family
In faraway places, in different times**

**Thank you for the songs we sang,
For the dreams we saved
For the smiles we shared**

**Thank you for the strength the eludes me just now
Thank you for the weakness that sends me to my knees
Thank you for the searching, the reaching, the hoping**

**Thank you for the bonds of memory that hold me in place in this
universe, even when I don't believe in it anymore or forget what it is all
about.**

**Thank you, most of all, for having been blessed with the love I have
known, even now when I fear I will forget it.**

**Thank you for memory and for filling it full measure for me. It
wasn't nearly long enough, but it will have to do. Thanks for
the moments we danced.**

Thanks for the little while.....