

# Handling Grief During the Holidays

Compiled by The Compassionate Friends Minneapolis Chapter

## Thanksgiving

I remember – the inability to chew or swallow that first Thanksgiving after Linda died; the choke-backed tears, the sick heart, the hollowness, the painful memories of Thanksgivings past and the blessed relief sleep brought to my pain.

I remember – the busyness of working as a volunteer that second and third Thanksgiving after Linda died; the good feeling it gave me of “running away” from it all, and the blessed relief sleep brought to my pain.

I remember – the inability to prepare any of her favorite foods that fourth Thanksgiving after Linda died; the tears that fell at the smell of turkey cooking, the parade, football games, the emptiness, the incomplete family, and the blessed relief sleep brought to my pain.

I remember – awakening with a lightness and joy in my heart that fifth Thanksgiving after Linda died; the thankfulness for having my remaining family together, the beautiful memories of past Thanksgivings, the “wholeness” of me and the blessed relief peace brought to my pain.

By Priscilla J. Norton, TCF, Pawtucket, RI  
In Memory of Linda

## Reduce Holiday Anxiety

The holidays are upon us. Office parties, church parties, club parties, party-parties. Pressures to buy, to bake, and to bask in the season are applied from within and without. As the holidays approach, most bereaved parents feel anxiety, apprehension and some little bit of fear. The past is gone along with our beautiful children. We live in the now, the new reality, of holidays without our children.

Newly bereaved parents are especially vulnerable; even seasoned parents can't avoid the momentary tearfulness, the anxiety and the pain of this season completely. But there are ways to cope.

Avoid loud, noisy parties. If you plan to do any shopping, do not go into stores during peak traffic times. Take a friend with you who can help you to focus on what you must buy and then leave.

Avoid depressing and maudlin movies and shows. Do as much or as little as you feel is appropriate. Take “holiday breaks.” Do some gardening: this is an ideal time to plant trees and shrubs. Clean out the garage. Stay busy with tasks that are unrelated to the holiday rush. Send cards if you decide you're up to the task. If you're not ready to do this, don't do it. Don't put pressure on yourself to live up to the expectations of others.

Find what is right for you. Pressures from others mean nothing. You choose whether a celebration is in order. You choose how to celebrate. You choose the old traditions or you choose some new ones...maybe you choose nothing and decide to go with the flow of the moment. As bereaved parents, you will always remember your child at Christmas, but as the years add up and grief starts to release its grip on your soul, you may find that you can keep your child in your heart and have room for the spirit of Christmas, as well.

Each of us learns to deal with Christmas in our own way. Each year I am a different person with a new perspective on the holidays. This year I may decide to skip it all or immerse myself in the season. My truth is ever changing.

The holidays do get better. Life does get better. The days will gradually become softer and sweeter. The nights will ease into gentleness.

Friendships will again have luster, and relationships will become deeper and more meaningful. That is the future for each of us. The present is driven by where we are in our grief. So for this and every Christmas holiday season, be who you are and mark the day as you choose.

May we all have serenity throughout the holiday season and in the years ahead.

Annette Mennen Baldwin, TCF, Katy, TX  
In Memory of my son, Todd Mennen

## Tips for Handling Grief and the Holidays

Can you handle the holidays without stress? Most cannot. There's too much to do in too little time. There's nostalgia, increased social activities and expectations, the search for the perfect gifts, the cooking of the perfect meal.

For those who are grieving the loss of a loved one, holidays become especially difficult. Memories and the absence of the person are painful. Your melancholy is out of balance with the holiday cheer mindsets, and you don't want to bring others down. Holiday music triggers feelings and memories. With parties come more opportunities for alcohol consumption, which may bring on more depression. Holiday demands, combined with energy loss from coping with grief, can bring on new levels of exhaustion.

There are ways to survive the holidays. *Bereavement & Loss Resources* (from Rivendell Resources) offers tips for handling the holidays:

- Re-examine your priorities: greeting cards, holiday baking, decorating, putting up a tree, family dinner, etc. Do I really enjoy doing this? Is this a task that can be shared?
- Recognize your loved one's presence in the family. Burn a special candle to quietly include your loved one. Hang a stocking for your loved one in which people can put notes with their thoughts or feelings. Listen to music especially liked by the deceased. Look at photographs.
- Observe the holidays in ways that are comfortable for you. There is no right or wrong way of handling holidays. Once you've decided how to observe the time, let others know.
- Try to get enough rest. Holidays can be emotionally and physically draining.
- Allow yourself to express your feelings. Holidays often magnify feelings of loss. It is natural to feel sadness. Share concerns, apprehensions, feelings with a friend. The need for support is often greater during holidays.
- Keep in mind that the experience of many bereaved persons is that they do come to enjoy holidays again. There will be other holiday seasons to celebrate.
- Don't be afraid to have fun. Laughter and joy are not disrespectful. Give yourself and your family members permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holidays.

From the Delaware Hospice website.



## *Dealing with Bereavement and Grief during the Holiday Season*

First know that people grieve in different ways, and any advice offered is done so for general purposes. You may find some of these tips helpful and that others might not be for you. There is no set way that people are supposed to grieve. We all do it in our own time and in our own way.

Overall, we know that most bereaved people generally cope with their loss pretty well. There is certainly sadness, but most people are able to continue moving forward and slowly rebuild their lives. During the holidays, however, many people find themselves having strong emotional reactions just as they would to other important dates (e.g. loved ones birth date, date of their passing). These reactions are often called anniversary reactions.

The holidays come with an expectation of cheerfulness and joy that many people who are grieving the loss of a loved one can find difficult to live up to. Those who are grieving often feel uncomfortable about expressing their sadness out of a fear of “being a downer.” Others are often full of well-intended advice as to how to lessen the pain. However, sometimes seemingly innocent remarks can be intensely painful for someone who is mourning. For example, a blessing around the Christmas dinner table giving thanks “for the whole family being together” can feel like a knife in the heart. The holiday season can bring with it sudden reminders of the loss through the endless parade of past rituals, traditions and memories.

Here are 10 suggestions of things to try if you’re grieving the loss of a loved one through the holiday season:

### **Do Less**

- Grieving takes a lot out of us physically and emotionally, leaving us depleted of energy. Reduce the pressure on yourself to do it all. Consider cutting back on things like sending out cards, entertaining, baking, decorating, putting up a tree, buying presents, etc.
- Be direct. If you are not in the holiday spirit, be clear about this with others. Let others know what they can, and cannot, expect of you this year.

### **Change Your Traditions**

- Consider changing your normal holiday routine if the thought of a standard Christmas is too difficult to bear. Perhaps this year you might decide to go on a special trip or have dinner with friends rather than the traditional family get-together.

### **Create New Traditions**

- You may choose to honor your loved one by creating a new tradition that allows you to keep their memory present. This might be done by setting a special place for your loved one at the dinner table,

or spending part of the day reminiscing about them. Or perhaps hanging a stocking filled with memory keepsakes of them. Sometimes these honoring traditions give you and others permission to talk about your loved one and remember them at this time of year.

### **Ask For Help**

- Talk to someone if you feel you need to. Keeping your feelings all bottled up can exacerbate feelings of isolation. Share your feelings with someone you trust. You may also consider joining a grief group, or starting one of your own.

### **Leave When You Need To**

- Attending social gatherings can be a good way of coping with the loneliness and isolation of grief; however, there may be times that you feel the need to excuse yourself early...that’s ok.

### **Dedicate a Gift**

- All the holiday shopping can remind us of gifts that we would have thought to buy for our loved one. Consider donating or dedicating a gift in your loved one’s honor.

### **Do Something Meaningful**

- Give back. Volunteer. Do for others. Service is a very powerful healer and scientists have found that doing a kindness is an effective way to alleviate depressive symptoms.

### **Self-Care**

- Grief can wear our bodies down. This, along with holiday stress, can deplete our body’s energy and can leave us prone to colds, flus, aches and pains. Take care of yourself by getting proper sleep, eating healthy foods and exercising.

### **Be Gentle With Yourself**

- Accept that feelings of anguish are normal and to be expected during the holiday season. Don’t assume that if you’re having a difficult time with your grief during the holidays that this is a sign you are not healing. Know that you are doing the best that you can and that bereavement takes time.

Prepared by Sheila Gothjelsen, R. Psych (AB).  
Leduc Beaumont Devon Primary Care Network,  
Grief & The Holidays for “Health in a Minute”



## A Holiday Letter to Family and Friends

*Thank you for not expecting too much from us this holiday season.*

*The absence of our child when the "whole family" gathers seems to accentuate our incomplete family. It is difficult to cope with the "spirit" of the holidays on the radio, TV, in the newspapers and stores. We will need the patience and understanding of our family and friends to help us through the holidays as best we can.*

*Our family traditions may be too painful for us to continue this year. We may want to change the way we spend Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Hanukkah. Please understand this and maybe some time in the future we will have these traditions again. Whatever our thoughts are for coping with the day, please take our feelings into consideration when you make your plans.*

*Please allow us to talk about our child, if we feel a need. Perhaps the single most helpful thing you can do for us is to include our child in the holidays. We want to hear his/her name, to have you recall fond memories of their lives, to know that you, too, are feeling their absence and remembering them with love.*

*As we work through our grief, we will need your patience and support, especially during these holiday times and the "special" days throughout the year.*

*Thank you for not expecting too much from us this holiday season.*

*Love, a bereaved parent/family.*

Marge Henning  
TCF West Orange and Madison, WI



Every snowflake that falls is unique and has its own individual design. There are beautiful patterns in each snowflake and even the tiniest of flakes have their own markings. These patterns change again and again—even after the flake touches the ground. Each snowflake is a cause for wonder, each flake is one of a kind. No two are exactly alike.

Like the snowflake, our beautiful children were each unique and special; some we only dreamed about and some danced upon the earth. They filled our lives with wonder and transformed our world. We held them too briefly, but we will hold them in our hearts forever. We shall remember them always.

At this time of remembering, it may help to reflect upon how our lives have been enriched by the love we have **given** and the love we have received from our children. Our children leave treasures behind that time can never take away.

Denise Falzon, TCF Lake Area, MI

### Holiday Suggestion

One of our favorite suggestions for bringing our child's presence into the holidays, is instead of signing your loved one's name on your holiday cards or letters, add a symbol that represents your loved one.

Be it a butterfly, an angel, a bird, a star or sun, or perhaps a flower, choose whichever symbol has a special meaning to you as a family. Some families purchase a special stamp and pad with the logo on it and use it often.





## Getting Through the Holidays



Holiday time: The whole world seems consumed with tinsel and glitter...the holidays are coming. For the person or family that is dealing with the death of a loved one, the holidays are often anticipated with a sense of fear and dread. The days, weeks, months following a death often seem more pain-filled than one can stand and then the holidays arrive. Many bereaved persons talk in terms of trying to “survive” the holidays. The work and pain of grief does not take a vacation. At holiday time there is not a choice of pain or no pain, but the challenge is how to manage the pain. The following comments are intended as an aid in exploring options that may ease the pain of these first holidays.

1. During grief you have less energy, so re-evaluate your priorities and decide what is really meaningful for yourself and your family. Begin with a family meeting to decide just what part of old traditions you would like to carry on and what new traditions you might like to start. Include the children in your planning as they have needs and ideas to share.
2. Do what makes you comfortable, not what others think should make you comfortable. Do not set unrealistic expectations for yourself to be joyful. Your life has changed and the holidays will be different.
3. Decide what you can handle and let these be known to family and friends: whether to talk about the deceased; whether you can handle responsibility of the family dinner or if you wish someone else take over some of these traditional tasks; whether you will stay home for the holidays or choose a totally different holiday environment this year.
4. Don't be afraid to make changes...open presents Christmas Eve instead of Christmas morning; have dinner at a different time; attend a different church for your Christmas service; let children take over decorating the tree, making cookies, etc.
5. Great comfort may come in doing something for others. You may wish to consider giving a gift in memory of your loved one; donating the money you would have spent for a gift to a particular charity; adopting a needy family for the holidays; inviting a guest (foreign student, senior citizen, etc.) to share festivities.
6. If you are sending Christmas cards, consider a photocopied letter that is mailed early. That will let friends know the changes in your life and perhaps save some discomfort when holiday greetings arrive. If the thought of sending holiday cards is simply too exhausting, yet you discover that some of your friends are still unaware of your loss, you may enclose the simple little funeral service card inside the already bought greeting card. Some have found the response from friends is most rewarding.
7. Make your entire shopping list out ahead of time. Then shop early, avoid stores when they are overcrowded, take a friend with you and shop early in the day when the stores are not so busy. Hustle and bustle adds to one's stress so catalog shopping is another option that may relieve some pressure.
8. If you hang stockings, do you want one in memory of your loved one, or is that too painful? One possibility is to put thoughts and feelings about our loved one on notes and put them in that special stocking. Family members may wish to read them at some time during the holiday.
9. Spread the workload among the family. Fatigue can lead to depression under normal circumstances so try not to tax your limited emotional and physical resources.
10. This may be the time to enrich your religious experience and add a new dimension to your life.
11. Perhaps you might find comfort in taking a decorated tree or other decoration to the cemetery.
12. Recall the memories – they are a very important part of you. Perhaps this is the year to establish a new tradition in memory of the person you love...burn a special candle to quietly include your absent loved one, buy a living plant in memory.
13. Take time for yourself as exhaustion alters perspectives and blows everything out of proportion. Getting adequate rest will make the days ahead less difficult.
14. Planning holidays that will bring the most comfort depends more on feelings of the family rather than on how things have been done in the past. Do not set unrealistic goals for yourself. The world will not end if you do not attend every holiday function. Have faith in yourself. You will indeed adjust and be able to smile and function more with ease. Many bereaved families have affirmed that the anticipation of the day is far worse than the day itself.
15. Know that whatever you choose to do this year, you may decide to handle things differently next year. Growth and change go hand in hand.
16. Be kind to yourself. Let the holidays come.

Gail Noller, Coordinator for Hospice Care  
Mercy Hospice Program, Mercy Medical Center,  
Coon Rapids, Minnesota.

*Adapted November 1985 from several sources including the  
Bradshaw Family of Funeral Homes, Minneapolis, MN and  
Hilltop Hospice Bereavement Program, Grand Junction, Colorado.*

# Angel of Hope -The Miraculous Story of the Christmas Box Angel

by Richard Paul Evans Salt Lake City, Utah Reprinted from November 2000 Bereavement Magazine

In the shadow of the snow-clad Wasatch mountain range in Salt Lake City, a statue of a dove-winged angel stands watch over a cemetery. Though it rises above tombstones, it marks no burial. Though it claims no body, it itself is claimed by thousands. The angel's face is that of a child's, its arms raised as a child to be lifted. Subtly (almost imperceptibly) inscribed in its right wing is the word hope. This is the story of that angel.

It was only twelve days before Christmas. My book, *The Christmas Box*, had risen to number one on the national bestseller lists, and my book signings had become frenzied affairs - sometimes extending upwards of six hours. It was a harried Saturday afternoon close to the holiday, and the crowds were enormous. Suddenly a woman outside the roped stanchions of the line approached my table. As I glanced up I noticed that her eyes were filled with pain.

"I don't have time to wait in your line, Mr. Evans," she said loudly. There was a strange, desperate quality to her voice. The line quieted, and those near the table turned to see this peculiar woman. "I just want you to know that my little girl was killed by a car last Thursday. I have read your book every day since then, and it is the only thing that is keeping me going."

I walked around the table and embraced the woman as she buried her head into my shoulder and wept. A few minutes later I returned to the table. Those in line stood silent, stunned by the incident. After a moment, another woman said somberly, "I read that this happens at your book signings."

"Almost every one," I replied.

The Christmas Box was a story I had written for my daughters to express my love to them in a way that would be timeless. I could not have imagined that this tale for two little girls would spread to millions throughout the world.

The very genesis of *The Christmas Box* was shrouded in spirituality. As I started to write, the story began to write itself - pouring into my mind in torrents of inspiration. It would come to me in the middle of the night or early in the morning. It came to me like a jigsaw puzzle with pieces here and there - chapters out of sequence. For four weeks I wasn't sure what the story was about...until one extraordinary morning.

At four a.m., the story woke me. Having already grown accustomed to my inspiration's poor sense of timing, I went out to the kitchen table and began to write. Just a few sentences in, I was suddenly overcome with emotion. I understood, for the first time, what this story was about - the pain my mother felt over losing a child. At that moment, something beautiful happened...something I had never before, or have since, experienced. I could feel the spiritual presence of someone with me in the room. I believe it was my little sister, Sue, who had died when I was only two years old. Though I had never met her, there was something familiar about her presence. I said out loud, "Sue, you gave me this story for Mom." Instantly it came to my mind, in the same way the story had come to my mind, *"Dedicate this book to me."*

I still had no intention of publishing *The Christmas Box*, but I knew that I needed to share it with my mother and family. I went to a local copy shop and had twenty copies made. Two days later, on Christmas Eve, 1992, I presented the books to my family. My

mother wept as I shared my experience, because I now knew of her pain. I later learned that in the four weeks following that Christmas Eve, the twenty copies were passed on again and again and read more than one hundred and sixty times.

A few weeks later bookstores began calling with orders for the unpublished book. I sent the book out to local publishers, who wasted little time in returning it, claiming "it would never sell." We were still receiving steady orders for the book when my wife, Keri, and I decided to self-publish. Distributing locally, we sold 19,000 copies, but it was only the beginning. By Christmas of 1995, *The Christmas Box* had spread throughout the world, selling nearly three million copies in more than thirty countries and fourteen different languages. Just as surprising, were the number of calls we were receiving from grateful readers, sharing remarkable stories of grief and healing. Keri and I felt very grateful to be a part of something that was bringing peace so many.

There are several parts of *The Christmas Box* that are not fiction. The angel monument at the heart of the tale actually had existed. I learned of the angel from a neighbor whom I often visited, an elderly widow named Leah Perry. As a child, Leah had lived next to the Salt Lake City cemetery and would often play behind its walls. One wintry day, while walking through the cemetery, she heard a horrible wailing. She looked up to see a woman kneeling at the base of a sandstone angel statue, clawing at the frozen ground as if it held her from something she wanted desperately. After the woman left, Leah approached the statue. Etched in its stone base were three words: "Our little angel."

The idea of recreating the angel came to me two years later while at a book signing. As I sat alone, hoping for a sale, I noticed a woman across the hallway staring at me. Her eyes expressed her silent melancholy. After a few moments she approached, and I asked if she would like a book signed. She shook her head. "I have already read your book." She took a deep breath and sighed. "You're not old enough."

"To be a writer?" I asked.

"No. To have experienced this. The story isn't true."

"No, ma'am. It's mostly fiction."

She turned away sorrowfully. "I wanted it to be true. I wanted a place to go. I wanted to lay a flower at the angel."

I called Leah and asked if she would take me to see the angel. We drove up to the cemetery and began combing the area she had walked nearly eighty years before, but we couldn't find the angel. After searching for nearly an hour, Leah raised her hands in frustration. Then, hitting a granite headstone with her wooden cane, she exclaimed, "It was right here, by Mr. Bean!"

Leah called me the next day. "I phoned the Sexton," she said triumphantly. "He said there was flooding in that part of the cemetery, and many of the headstones were spoiled - especially the older ones. The angel was gone."

As I thought of grieving parents wandering the cemetery, I had the sudden wish to rebuild the angel - to provide a place for them to grieve the deaths of their children.

*(Continued on reverse...)*



*Angel of Hope* continued...

When I told my mother of my desire, she began to cry. "Sue was never buried," she said. My sister had been stillborn, and in the social mindset of the day (one I still have difficulty understanding) the doctors, caretakers and clergy simply patted my mother on the back (figuratively and literally) and told her that it didn't count - that it wasn't really a baby - to go home and just forget. My mother carried the pain alone for thirty years.

I asked a neighbor of mine, a funeral director, if he knew where I could find an angel sculpture. He told me of a renowned local sculptor named Ortho Fairbanks.

"You could never afford him," my neighbor said, "But his son, Jared, is also a sculptor. He might be willing to help."

I phoned Jared and was surprised by his response. "You need to talk to my father," he said.

"I don't think we can afford your father."

Jared was insistent. "You need to talk to him," he repeated.

The next day I met with Ortho Fairbanks and his wife, Myrna, in their living room. As I explained the purpose of the angel, the sculptor pushed back tears. He went into another room, returning a few moments later with the casting of a headstone he had made for their own child. Myrna spoke for both of them. "Don't worry about the cost. Whatever it takes to build this will be done."

I felt strongly that the new statue, like the original, should be placed in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. I called the cemetery and explained my intentions to the sexton's secretary. She asked that I send a written request. I sent the letter, including with it a copy of The Christmas Box. The next time we spoke, she was excited about the prospect of the angel statue.

She understood. She, too, had lost a child. "You'll have to meet with the sexton," she said. "He's out of town for the week. If you can call back next Thursday, I'll arrange a meeting."

The following Thursday I called. The woman greeted me despondently "There's a problem, Richard," she said sadly.

"What's wrong?"

"You'll just have to talk to the sexton. He's available to meet with you tomorrow."

From the tone of her voice, I knew that our request had been denied. The next day I drove up to the cemetery, contemplating the doomed meeting and wondering if an appeal was possible. For the first time I began to wonder if the angel would ever stand in the cemetery. Suddenly there came a strong impression: The place has been chosen. Doubt replaced the thought. They're not even going to let me build it, I thought. The impression came again: The place has been chosen.

The sexton had never heard of The Christmas Box and probably would not have cared if he had. "I've heard your request, Mr. Evans, and I'm going to have to deny it."

Despite the secretary's warning, his response still came as a surprise. "May I ask why?"

He sat back in his chair, his fingers knit behind his head. "I get a lot of requests like yours, and I just can't do it. In the first place, this would have to be approved by the City Arts Council, the director of parks, the city attorneys and architects, the city council, probably even the mayor. The red tape is considerable. It couldn't possibly be done by this fall, even if I had the desire to go to that much

trouble, which, frankly I don't have time for. Besides, there is no place to put a monument. This cemetery is one hundred and fifty years old. The plots are all privately owned. I'm sorry, but we just don't have the space."

The sexton returned to his paperwork. I just sat, my mind reeling in confusion. I thought I had received inspiration. Not knowing what to do, I did nothing. I just sat there. After a few minutes he looked up again, no doubt wondering why I was sitting in his office. "What is it that you are trying to accomplish. Mr. Evans?" he asked.

I looked down for a moment then back into his eyes. "I just want to build a place where people can come to grieve and be healed."

I may never fully understand what happened next. I consider it nothing short of miraculous. The sexton's countenance suddenly changed. He stood up, walked over to a map on the wall, then, with a pen, made an X in the center of the cemetery "Here," he said. "It could go right here."

The statue was set in place only two days before its dedication. By noon of December 6, 1994, flowers, sent from around the country, had already piled at the monument's base until much of the four-foot granite base was concealed. Nearly four hundred gathered that winter night in the bitter cold of the cemetery - illuminated only by the candles they held, which somehow defied the waves of freezing rain that had already drenched the crowd.

My mother, June Evans, laid the first flower, a single white rose, for Sue. She was followed by Myrna Fairbanks, the sculptor's wife, who placed a white flower for her son, Hyrum. As the crowd proceeded toward the angel to lay their own flowers, reporters and television camera crews were observed brushing back tears from usually stoic faces. "In twenty years of newscasting," said one hardened newscaster, "Nothing has gotten to me before. Not like this."

A woman, mourning her own stillborn child, poignantly summed up the event: "Finally someone has said it is okay to cry."

Since its dedication, the statue has attracted a steady flow of visitors. Its base is adorned, year 'round, with flowers and notes to loved ones. Even tourist buses wind their way through the cemetery. We announced at the statue's dedication that the ceremony would be held every year on December 6th, and as word of the angel continued to spread, the crowds at the ceremony grew considerably, with many attendees flying in from other states. Others, unable to attend the event, held their own angel ceremonies, lighting candles and laying flowers at the base of an angel.

That first night, as I witnessed the procession of those laying flowers, I understood finally that I had been a cog in some great cosmic machination - a process where the end, perhaps, was known from the beginning. The realization dawned that someday people would come from all over the world to find solace in the statue's presence and to rest their grief in the out-stretched arms of an angel...a stone angel...an angel with hope in its wings.

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***Every December 6th a candlelight ceremony of healing and remembrance is held at the angel statue in memory of those who have lost children. There are two locations in the Minneapolis metro area, one in Maple Grove ([friendsoftheangel.org](http://friendsoftheangel.org)), and a location in Chanhassen ([williamswings.org/angel-hope](http://williamswings.org/angel-hope)).***

# A Holiday Inventory

Preparation is key when it comes to coping with the holiday season. Sometimes, the anticipation of the occasion may be more difficult than the actual day itself. The more you can prepare and think ahead of time about the upcoming holidays, the easier it could be for you.

Take a few minutes and think about what traditions are meaningful to you and if it is important to incorporate them this year. Sometimes we have traditions during the holidays that may or may not be ones we like to keep. Take this opportunity to evaluate what you feel you "have" to do and what you feel you can "stop or take a break" from doing. Keep in mind you may have a different perspective next holiday season. Activities that seemed important or appropriate one year can be re-evaluated, and new traditions may be added at any time.

Trying to accomplish all the items on your Holiday "to do list" on your own will completely bring your stress to another level. It can be helpful to also think about which people can be supportive of you and which situations might be difficult for you.

Use the resource on the back side to help you and your family with holiday planning. The end result could be a holiday that is meaningful for everybody. It is our hope that you will have a holiday season where duties are shared so that one person doesn't end up exhausted and resentful, and where the spirit of love has the chance to break through and be shared.

You may use the form on the reverse side in any way that would be helpful to your family, but may we suggest the following:

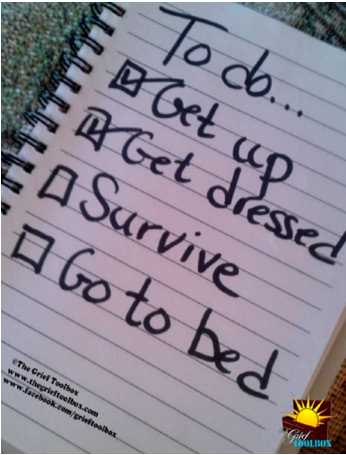
1. Schedule a family meeting where you can all sit down and together fill out the Holiday Job List.
2. Involve all family members in the discussion of plans for the holiday. Children, especially younger ones, may have opinions of which we may not be aware.
3. Use the completed form as a guide to ranking holiday activities in order of importance to the majority of family members.
4. Enlist the cooperation of all family members so that everyone will play a part in making the holidays meaningful.







## A Holiday To Do List for Siblings:



As a reflection back on the past 13 (Wow! has it really been that long?!) Christmases, I would like to share some ways that I have handled the holidays, as well as some additional thoughts. This time of the year is bittersweet for me now, as opposed to the first Christmas without my older brother, David. That was the worst.

At any rate, I can handle November and December much better now. I suppose I've learned a little along the way, and gained strength each year. Nonetheless, the anniversary of his death always gets

to me. Unfortunately, it falls between Thanksgiving and Christmas on December 9th. Here's my list of suggestions for honoring a sibling whom you have lost, and on simply making it through yourself:

- Hang that stocking. Go ahead. Put up your sibling's stocking. It isn't as though your brother or sister never existed, and isn't still a part of your life.
- Write a poem or letter to your sibling and put it in the stocking.
- Put up a tree, or continue with your holiday traditions. Yes, this is VERY difficult. But for most of our siblings, this was their favorite time of year. Celebrate how blessed you have been to have had your sister or brother for holidays past. Decorate the way THEY have wanted to, instead of the way you would do it.
- Create a "memory" box. This is simply a box of belongings from your sibling, or pictures of your sibling, etc. Wrap it in festive holiday paper, and put it under your tree if you have one.
- Buy a gift for your sibling. Maybe it is something they truly would have wanted for the holidays, maybe it's something the two of you would have enjoyed together or gotten a good laugh out of. This can be VERY therapeutic.
- Go somewhere that your sibling would have wanted to go-- the beach, a movie they would have liked, a favorite restaurant, wherever. "Share" this time with your sibling. This is also good on their birthday. Celebrate that they had a life and that they are a part of yours!
- Bake a favorite holiday goody of your sibling's.
- Get together with your family and cry (and LAUGH – it's OK to do this) at some great family memories from years past that involved your sibling. Share thoughts on great places you may have visited for the holidays, or anecdotes of you and your sibling trying to peek at what your gifts were ahead of time.
- Put together a photo album of your sibling. This could be of your sibling's life in general, or of a specific subject, like the sport your sibling played, or holidays past.
- Give your album to your parents. Cry (and LAUGH!) at the pictures and the memories they generate.

I hope that you are blessed this holiday season, and that my suggestions are helpful. Please know that the holidays get easier with time, and that you WILL make it through, even though it may seem impossible.

Amy Baker Ferry, TCF, Heart of Florida Chapter  
In loving memory of my brother, David



## Holiday Thoughts

*For those who think that  
Christmas and Chanukah  
are just nice days  
to give and get presents,  
bereaved parents  
have another message.*

*Mixed with the joy  
is the knowledge of sadness.  
With the hope of birth comes  
the threat of death.  
We should not try to cover up  
our sadness in front of people,  
for we have a lesson to teach them.*

*But the holidays  
have a lesson for us, too.  
Yes, there is death.  
Yes, there is great bitterness in life.  
There is darkness.  
But there is hope.  
There is birth.  
There is light.*

*In a society which works so hard  
to deny death,  
perhaps only bereaved parents  
and a few others  
can truly understand  
the depths of these holidays.*

Dennis Klass  
TCF St. Louis, MO

# A Candle Lighting Memorial Tradition

A memorial candle lighting ceremony with spoken verses has been especially comforting during difficult times, like the holidays, birthdays and anniversaries. A simple display of five candles may be placed on any table or fireplace mantel. If you want to create a special arrangement suitable for any season or occasion, use a wooden tray, footed cake plate, or decorative bowl, then add some greens, river rocks, garland, berries, unshelled nuts, or floral picks. Pinterest.com is a great resource for creative inspiration.

You can do this ceremony by yourself, or with a group (friends or family of your loved one who has passed). Everyone gets a candle to light, and then taking turns, read the verses below. After the candles are lit, a new ritual takes its place as a lasting tradition to help you include your loved one in celebration.



As we light these five candles in memory of and in honor of you,  
we light one for our grief, one for our courage, one for our memories,  
one for our love, and one for our hope.

This candle represents our grief. The pain of losing you is intense.  
It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.

This candle represents our courage – to confront our sorrow,  
to comfort each other, and to change our lives.

This candle is in your memory – the times we laughed, the times  
we cried, the times we were angry with each other, the silly things  
you did, and the caring and joy you gave to us.

This candle is the light of love. As we enter this holiday season,  
day by day we cherish the special place in our hearts that will  
always be reserved for you. We thank you for the gift your living  
brought to each of us.

And this candle is the light of hope. It reminds us of the love and  
the memories of you that are ours forever. May the glow of the flame  
be our source of hopefulness now and forever.

We love you.