



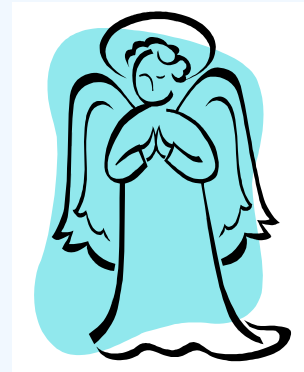
Articles & Poems for Christmas

MEDITATION

by Martha Whitmore Hickman, from *Healing After Loss*

Again at Christmas did we weave
The holly round the Christmas hearth;
The silent snow possess'd the earth,
And calmly fell our Christmas-eve.

The yule-log sparkled keen with frost,
No wing of wind the region swept,
But over all things brooding slept
The quiet sense of something lost.
-Alfred Tennyson



Holidays are among the hardest times for those who have lost a loved one. They are so fraught with family ritual, the layered memories of years.

Sometimes we feel free to talk about it – indeed, there's no way not to talk about it if the grief is fresh.

But after some time has passed, when the grief is in the background but not really yet assimilated into our lives, it may be even harder – the dull ache of absence, and everyone trying to be cheerful.

One year – the first year we tried to go back to our usual Christmas patterns – the unspoken gloom hovered behind our attempts at joy and repartee. Suddenly, almost as though by unspoken direction, we gathered in a circle, our arms around one another, and acknowledged our grief. Then we could get on with Christmas.

In this season I will find hope, and grief as well.

*The best way to handle your feelings is not
to "handle" them, but to feel them.*

- James E. Miller, *How Can I Help?*

As you consider how you will handle the upcoming holidays, these questions may help you identify and face the specific emotions, stresses, and concerns you are experiencing. The entire article may be read at www.griefshare.org.

Walking through the Holidays

1. How am I going to make it through the holiday season?
2. If this is the first Christmas I will be spending without my loved one, how do I feel right now? If it is the second or more, how am I planning to spend the holidays this year?
3. What are my plans for Christmas Eve and Day?
4. If I could do anything I want, what would I do on the above days?
5. Do I find myself trying to please my family (if applicable) and continuing with Christmas decorating and activities as in previous years?
6. Do I find myself dreading the places where people are happy and enjoying the season, such as stores, office parties and church services? Do I feel guilty if I don't want to participate in these activities? How do I feel about attending church during the holidays?
7. What am I doing for myself at this time? Am I getting enough rest? Am I able to sleep at night? Am I eating enough to be able to work? Am I exercising in any way, such as walking? Do I feel selfish because I want to be alone sometimes? Do I feel guilty if I don't want to do what my friends or family want me to do?
8. Am I wondering how long this hurting will last? Do I have a trusted friend who will listen to me and not give advice, but just love me?

- By Judy Hawk



Hope, like the gleaming taper's light,
Adorns and cheers our way;
And still, as darker grows the night,
Emits a brighter ray.

- Oliver Goldsmith

Lights of Love

Can you see our candles
Burning in the night?
Lights of love we send you
Rays of purest white.

Children we remember
Though missing from our sight
In honor and remembrance
We light candles in the night.

All across the big blue marble
Spinning out in space
Can you see the candles burning
From this human place?

Oh, angels gone before us
Who taught us perfect love
This night the world lights candles
That you may see them from above

Tonight the globe is lit by love
Of those who know great sorrow,
But as we remember our yesterdays
Let's light one candle for tomorrow

We will not forget,
And every year in deep December
On earth we will light candles
As we remember.

- Jacqueline Brown
Peace Valley TCF, New Britain, PA



Christmas is not a time nor a season,
but a state of mind.
To cherish peace and goodwill,
to be plenteous in mercy,
is to have the real spirit of Christmas.

- Calvin Coolidge

A Different Kind of RED

By Lela H. Chesson

"Try this," the saleslady said as she handed me a short red jacket.

I don't wear red, I almost said, but her smile was friendly and encouraging, and I knew it would be difficult to explain that I had not worn red in eight years. Not since the day my marvelous, magical 32-year-old son died of acute myelogenous leukemia.

As I placed my arms into the sleeves of the garment, I remembered the excruciating pain that came with getting up every morning in the weeks and months following my child's death. I recalled how difficult it was to decide what to wear. I would automatically push the bright shirts, sweaters, and pants to the back, to the side. They did not match my thoughts, my day, my life. *Does a mother who has watched her child die ever wear red again?* I asked myself. The answer was always *No*.

"Come over to the mirror," the saleslady motioned.

Suddenly I saw myself in red. I saw color. I saw life.

"Let me put that in a bag for you," she said.

I stood there with an apparent hesitancy. "I don't know."

"It's a beautiful shade of red," she quickly commented. "It's red, but it's a different kind of red. It has some touches of black in it, too."

I removed the jacket and looked more closely at the fabric. I could see swirls of black threads interwoven with the red. "Yes, it does," I said.

Will you ever wear red again?

Yes, you will.

It may take eight years. It may take longer. But one day you will decide to put some color back into your life. You will wear red again: a different kind of red.

Lela Chesson resides in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, with her husband, Shelton. They are the parents of two sons, Harrell and Juan. They have one grandchild, Catherine Grace, who was born a few weeks following the death of Juan, her father, in 1999.

From *The Compassionate Friends We Need Not Walk Alone*, Summer 2009



God gave us memory that we might have roses in December.

- James M. Barrie



Surviving the Holidays

The holidays are among the most difficult times for bereaved families grieving the death of a child. Below are some helpful suggestions that may aid you in surviving the holidays:

1. Call a family meeting and discuss your plans for the holiday season, understanding that it would be unusual for you not to feel emotionally, physically and psychologically drained. Don't set your expectations too high or you may find yourself disappointed.
2. Well intending friends and family may want to include you in their plans, believing it is best for you to 'get away' from grieving your loss. They do not understand that you cannot escape the grief that you feel. There is no obligation to say 'yes'. Only participate if you truly want to.
3. Try to take care of your health. It's important that you eat and drink properly, exercise and get plenty of rest.
4. Take time to do the things you as a person want to do. You may want time alone to reflect or to write your thoughts.
5. Consider eliminating such things as the festive decorations, cooking and baking you may normally enjoy. People will understand if you're not in a merry or joyous mood or simply don't have the energy. You may try placing an electric candle in your window in memory of your child. Don't feel obligated to send out holiday cards.
6. If it is necessary for you to buy gifts, consider ordering them over the internet or by phone. Most who are bereaved find it draining to go out and fight through crowded stores bustling with holiday cheer.
7. Many families that are in mourning may use the money they would have spent on gifts for their child to buy gifts for a child who would not be able to celebrate the holidays otherwise.
8. It is not unusual for you to want to include your child during the season. You may want to do something like: Ask friends and relatives who knew your child to send you a story about your child that you may not have known; ask friends and relatives to create an ornament or remembrance of some type that reminds them of your child so that you can place it around the house or on a holiday tree. If it was your tradition, include placing a stocking with those of other children in your house, even if you do not fill it like the others—this is a symbolic gesture in memory of your child.
9. If you have other children who normally celebrate the holidays, you may consider continuing to do so to create some sense of normalcy in the house and so they will not feel forgotten.
10. Consider attending a Compassionate Friends meeting or a memorial event such as The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting. Most families find some comfort by being with others who have experienced a similar loss.
11. Remember that the anticipation of a holiday is often worse than the holiday itself.
12. Be kind to yourself, and remember it is okay to cry.

From the Compassionate Friends website, www.compassionatefriends.org



Especially for Siblings

I ALWAYS SLEEP LATE ON CHRISTMAS

Somehow, I always sleep late on Christmas. Strange – that’s not how it used to be. Each year in anticipation of surprises left for me by the tree, I jumped from my bed at the crack of dawn. Now I always sleep late on Christmas. It just doesn’t seem so important anymore to be the one whose feet are first to hit the floor, as it was when I would stand over my brother’s bed and say, “Wake up! You can’t sleep late.

It’s Christmas!” There is no one now to keep me from missing Christmas dawn because of too much sleep. That time on that day is now lonely in a way. So, I always sleep late on Christmas Day.

Melanie Smith – TCF, Tuscaloosa, AL



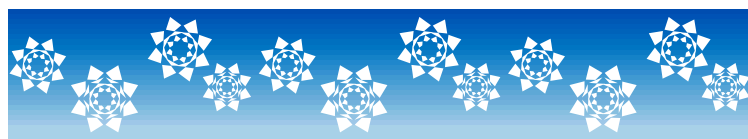
(The Best of) Ask Dr. Paulson

Mary A. Paulson, PhD, is a bereaved sibling as well as a child and adolescent psychologist at Harding Hospital in Worthington, Ohio. Her question and answer column, aimed at bereaved siblings and the family that loves them, appears in the quarterly TCF national magazine, We Need Not Walk Alone.

Q. My brother died 12 years ago, and I have married and have children of my own now. My parents still want me home at each holiday and want to celebrate my brother’s birthday, but I have my own family now and I can’t spend every holiday with them anymore. What do I do?

A. Every adult has to face the question about holidays whether they have lost a sibling or not. As an adult with a family of your own, you have to decide what role you are going to ask your extended family to take, and that’s a tricky maneuver for every relationship/family to go through. It is complicated by the fact that you lost a sibling. It is not uncommon for parents to have more difficulty letting their surviving children grow up and do the things adult children do: to individuate and develop separate and independent lives. So what would have been a tricky maneuver anyway now becomes a very difficult task. It may be important for you to take an objective look at your family and see how much of this is a result of your brother’s death, and how much of this is just your family’s style or pattern of relating, then address it with your family that way. Again, let them know that you celebrate your brother every day and don’t feel a need to do it specifically on his birthday (or holidays, etc.).

- Reprinted from *We Need Not Walk Alone*, the national magazine of TCF, copyright 2002



To All Siblings This Holiday Season...

Be guided by the reality that there is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holidays after your sibling has died. Do what you need to do to get yourself through the holidays. We grieve differently than our parents do. Yes, we need to respect their grief, but we need to remember ours. Our siblings would want us to laugh and sing the Christmas carols, but we just may not be ready yet. Guilt? Oh, yes, we will feel that this holiday season. But we may also celebrate their lives in our own special way. Whatever you choose to do, do what's good for you. Everyone is at a different stage in their grief. The holidays make the reality of loss even harder. I hope this holiday season you can find peace and love in memories. Please know you are not alone.

- Vera, Sara's sister (from TCF, St. Paul, MN newsletter)

Tonight I Light This Candle

- Song by Alan Pederson

Tonight I hold this candle in memory of you
Hoping someday, somehow, my love will shine through.
I close my eyes lost in the glow
There are so many things I want you to know.

This candle says I love you – This candle says I miss you.
This candle is saying I remember you.
When I'm holding it toward heaven,
It feels like you are near.
If you're looking down tonight
And see this candle burning bright,
It says I'm wishing you were here.

In the glow of this candle I can almost see your smile
And it carries me away for a little while
To another time, another place
When all it took to light up my world was your beautiful face.
Someday, someday I'll see you again
I'll hold you in my heart until then.

This candle says I love you – This candle says I miss you.
This candle is saying I remember you.
When I'm holding it toward heaven,
It feels like you are near.
If you're looking down tonight
And see this candle burning bright,
It says I'm wishing you were here.



Alan's CD is available on EverAshleymusic.com.