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By Bob Riter

About this time last year, I wrote a column on buying holiday gifts for people with cancer. I discouraged gifts that focused on illness. No one I know wants a stocking stuffer titled, "Prunes and Persimmons: Fighting Your Cancer with Foods that Begin with P."

I recommended gifts with a future orientation - tickets for upcoming concerts or perhaps a trip to somewhere pleasant. Thinking about life *after* cancer often brings a smile.

But what if your loved one has advanced cancer and this holiday season may be their last? Gifts with a future orientation might be well-intentioned, but they ignore the elephant in the room.

If your mother is nearing the end of her life, why not celebrate that life?

A photo album or scrapbook that captures your mother's life will have more meaning for her than a new pair of slippers. Ask her friends and other family members to contribute photos and mementoes. They'll be delighted.

And I think it's a wonderful tribute to make donations in a person's honor *before* they die. Suggest donations to your mom's favorite charity, perhaps creating a special fund in her honor.

Some people say that gifts that celebrate a person's life are wrong because they imply the person is dying.

Hello? If your mom is dying, she knows that she's dying. Giving her a family scrapbook isn't going to push her over the edge.

Holidays bring families together and most of us make special efforts to join loved ones if a family member is seriously ill. Sharing stories is not an admission of impending death - it's a celebration of life and a recognition that a person's life continues to have meaning.

There's no question that holidays take on an added poignancy when a loved one is nearing the end of life. Expect some tears. But expect laughter as well. It's all about life.

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