



November/December, 2008

Pathways

A Newsletter to Help in Bereavement

How To Remember A Loved One At The Holidays

Holidays can create feelings of dread and anxiety in those who are bereaved. The clichéd images of family togetherness and the often unrealistic expectations of a season filled with picture-perfect, joyful gatherings can cause tremendous stress for those who are not grieving — let alone those in the midst of the painful, isolating experience of loss.

How does one celebrate the holidays when a loved one is so sorely missed? Creating new rituals and new traditions that pay tribute to the memory of the deceased is one way to survive, and perhaps even embrace, the holidays when a loved one has died. Here are some suggestions of what you can do.

*Decorate a wreath with pictures and items that were loved by the person who died and place the wreath at his or her grave.

*Wrap a favorite keepsake of the deceased or a framed picture of your loved one, and give it as a gift to another grieving family member.

*Tell the stories behind the ornaments on the Christmas tree and the role your loved one played in making those memories. Create a special ornament labeled with the name of the deceased and hang it on the tree.

*Decorate a candle and light it at meal time in memory of your loved

one. If you celebrate Chanukah, recall a memory of the deceased on each of the eight nights that you light the Menorah.

*Make a book of pictures and memorabilia about the deceased to give or simply to share with one another. This is a good activity for children as well.

*Make a donation to a favorite charity in the person's honor. Create a scholarship to keep the memory of the deceased alive and announce it at a holiday gathering of family and friends.

*Purchase a holiday book — perhaps a favorite of the deceased — and donate it to your local library or school. Ask your librarian to place a label in the front cover inscribed, "In memory of (your loved one's name)."

*Bring your loved one's favorite food to share at a holiday dinner. Mention their name in the blessing over the food or propose a toast to their memory.

*Share anecdotes and favorite stories about the person who died. Sometimes others need permission to talk about the deceased. Let them know you would rather keep the memory of your loved one alive than pretend nothing has changed.

*Encourage grieving children to

draw pictures and create gifts inspired by their memories of the deceased to give to other family members.

*Decorate and hang a cut-out star in your home with your hopes and dreams for the future. Thinking about tomorrow is part of your healing.

Then once you've remembered your loved one, make sure you remember yourself. Take care of yourself. Be gentle. Do what you can do — no more and no less.

If it's too hard to be in the same place where you spent holidays together with your loved one, opt for a change of scene and go somewhere new. If you can't afford a vacation, go to a restaurant, — or a friend or family member's home that doesn't have painful associations with previous holidays. Although you can't erase thoughts and memories of the deceased, it may help to create a new holiday experience.

Reprinted with permission from *Grief Letter*, published by the New England Center for Loss and Transition.
Illustration by artist Roscha Folger.

Pathways is published bi-monthly by the Upstate New York Hospice Alliance