



One Is Silver and the Other Gold; Measuring the Value of Holiday Traditions

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*“I believe that we are here for a reason,
I believe that as each day unfolds,
We see less of the shadow
And more of the sun.
Less of the tarnish
And more of the gold.”*

A ninety-year-old man owned a piece of property with a cabin on a small lake in a township in central Wisconsin. He lived in Chicago. He didn't go to the cabin because his wife had died about seven years before, and the five-hour trip seemed more of a burden than a pleasure. But he still wanted to own the cabin because it was rich with golden memories of good times in their lives.

As time passed, the cabin deteriorated both inside and outside. The septic system didn't work. Mice and rodents had taken over inside the building. Floors were rotted, dust and mildew permeated the small cabin, and it needed thousands of dollars to make it habitable again. The man finally decided it was time to sell. His memories sparkled with good times and happiness, but his “golden” piece of property had been tarnished by time. He finally contacted a realtor to sell his property.

The man hoped to sell his beloved cabin for a handsome profit. He remembered better days when his wife had maintained it, and they enjoyed their weekend getaways there. Someone once told him that he could probably get a handsome amount for the nice cabin on the lake, and he treasured those dreams. After the cabin had been listed for over a year, he finally got an offer much lower than he desired, but decided to accept it since there had been little interest before this time.

Like the man in this true story, we, the bereaved, are remembering holidays that were once filled with good times and memories, rich and golden. The death of someone loved in our lives has tarnished our memories and traditions. Our expectations of the holidays are far different than before, and we wonder how we will be able to handle the approaching holidays. What do we do about “family” traditions? What is right to do? What should we avoid?

When I was growing up, I was a Brownie and Girl Scout and I sang a familiar song: Make new friends, but keep the old...one is silver and the other gold. How simple this verse is when you are young and life has not yet tarnished your view of the world. It was easy to accept that friends come in all sizes, all shapes, all nationalities, all creeds, and they accumulate through all our interactions in life. Whether those friendships were silver or gold friendships didn't really matter. We considered them both valuable.

Like silver and gold friendships, we can invest wisely in holiday traditions—and discover that all that glitters is not gold. This cute little song became the inspiration for our Holiday Workshop.

All that glitters is not gold.

This familiar cliché is used to describe something that is “authentic,” worth a lot of money, or is a very good idea.

We are influenced in our lives by the value of gold. We measure “things” by the gold standard. We have gold credit cards and gold memberships that offer elite privileges. We applaud gold medals for athletes and Olympic winners. Advertisers use the word “gold” in their ads to make us perceive their product as superior to another’s. We even yearn for streets paved in gold in heaven. We’ve set our expectations high.

Holiday traditions are like that. They are golden—and a rich part of the legacy we leave our children. They identify who we are by what we do. We pass them on with elaborate stories of how they came about. We expect that these traditions will be continued from our children to their children. That is until “things” happen that cause us to measure the value of those traditions that now may bring us pain.

If we labeled our traditions “gold” or “silver,” a gold tradition would be one that is time-honored and never changes because it is so meaningful. Gold traditions are passed down from generation to generation. Families grow bigger and smaller, but the traditions still work. We can safely implement them into blended families. Gold traditions have the potential to last throughout our lifetimes.

Gold traditions in our family were the Christmas Eve dinner and Christmas Day feast, going to church for a special Christmas Eve service, and holding a large family gathering that lasted the entire day. After our son died, the “gold” traditions hurt. The memories of holidays past were more painful than we anticipated, and the thought of continuing the celebrations without him seemed inappropriate. It was time to re-evaluate and change some of those golden memories to silver traditions.

Silver traditions create silver linings

A silver tradition is either a new tradition or one that you have changed slightly to accommodate your new situation because of life changes. A silver tradition may need a little polish since initially it may appear dull. Changing the way we do things is perfectly acceptable. A silver tradition can last one year, five years, or forever.

For our family, we changed the family get-together and feasting experience. Instead of a feast on Christmas Day, we had a small sit-down dinner at a specified time, not lasting the entire day. Surprisingly, this worked for everyone and gave flexibility to their visiting schedules at a busy time of year. We’ve continued this tradition for the past fourteen years. Grief is not the only circumstance that creates silver traditions. Marriage, divorce, families separated by distance, and job changes may require an adjustment to our life schedules.

Changing a tradition doesn’t make it less meaningful...its value is measured by its appropriateness for everyone involved. One great thing about a silver tradition is that you own it! There is a silver lining in every thought-out, purposeful tradition we alter.

Create your own silver lining

Both silver and gold traditions bring value to your life for different reasons. Silver traditions may tarnish over time and require maintenance to restore the luster that made them brilliant at the time. But that is the beauty of honoring both kinds of traditions and allowing life changes to balance out the past and the present.

When the holiday season is over, it’s time to reevaluate your tradition. How did it work for you? Was it easier or harder? Then decide if you may want to return to the gold tradition next year because you really missed how the day(s) progressed or if you would rather continue with the new tradition. You are in control and have the ability to change what doesn’t work.

There are 3 rules for polishing your tarnished traditions:

Rule #1: CONSIDER OPTIONS

Rule #2: COMMUNICATE

Rule #3: FOLLOW YOUR HEART

If you follow these rules as you evaluate which tradition is silver and which is gold, you can expect to create a wonderful silver lining in your holiday that can last for many years to come.

- Take control of your holiday season to create a time that is comfortable and makes you feel at peace.
- Do something that makes you feel good. Holidays don’t have to be painful. Find ways to compromise.
- Don’t sweat the small stuff. It’s easy to get “lost” in all the things we can’t change or control. Let it be.
- Discover support. Seek out people who care, people who will listen. Form a stronger relationship with your spiritual self and with God.
- Take care of today now. Live one day at a time. Don’t set your expectations so high that you have to struggle to meet them. Focus on what you can reasonably do today and be patient with yourself. Each day you will get stronger and smarter about your grief.

The man in our true story who sold his “golden memories” followed the rules and created a new silver lining in his life. Months later, my husband, Gary, (the realtor involved) called to see how he was doing. He was energetic and happy as they spoke. He had considered his options of selling his cabin by the lake before doing so. He communicated his desire to his family and friends. And then he followed his heart.

He purchased a brand-new Mustang car that both he and his wife had always envied, and he admitted he was having a great time in his life. He still had his golden memories, and his decisions created a silver lining that made him content with his choices.

May your holiday be filled with golden memories and silver treasures that bring your comfort and peace.

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For a complete *One Is Silver and the Other Gold Holiday Program*, visit our website www.wingsgrief.org. This program is available complete with a gold & silver ritual and a format for group discussions that helps program participants determine which traditions are silver and which are gold. Also includes a “fun” activity, “What do you value most—silver or gold?” and an original prayer/reading by Nan Zastrow. Download PDF format or send \$12.95 (plus \$1.50 Shipping & Handling) to get your Program Guide from Wings, PO Box 1051, Wausau, WI 54401. Phone: 715.845.3424.