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WingsTM
A Grief Education Ministry

Honoring the Past and
Rebuilding the Future

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Contents of this ELetter

- Coping with the Holidays
- O Christmas Tree Why Should I Adorn Thee?
- From the Archives: The Ghost of Christmas Past
- Rest In Peace Mr. President - Franklin Roosevelt
- Zoom Grief Flyer
- Grief Tip - Be Realistic
- What Do You Think - Special Traditions
- Poems, Verses and Quotes
- On the Lighter Side
- The Christmas Ornament

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Coping with the Holidays

Bob Baugher, Ph.D., Highline College, Des Moines, Washington

Holidays used to be a wonderful time of year. The death of your child may have changed much of the way you move through the last weeks of the year. In this article we will look at how bereaved parents coped during the months of November and December during the first few years following the death of their child.

As I've done in previous articles I called on parents and said, "I'm writing an article for TCF magazine about coping with the upcoming holidays. Looking back, what did you do that helped you through those rough two months?" Here's what they said.

On December 23rd four of us couples met at the cemetery where our children are buried and we had a short ceremony at each child's grave. We each brought a coffee can with a candle inserted in it and something to read such as a poem or letter to our child. We lit the candle, did our reading. In this way it signified that our child is with us. We leave the candles and coffee cans and pick them up the next day. Years later it continues to feel good to look forward to taking this day out for our child—to honor our child. As we finish at the last grave we do a closing ceremony (such as holding hands or singing a song). Afterward we go out to dinner.

Perhaps you're not ready to do anything. Here is what a mother said:

What helped me during the holidays was absolutely refusing to smile and refusing to carry on the usual traditions. I did what was comfortable for me. My relatives didn't seem to like it; but I was a mess and just couldn't bring myself to do any sort of so-called "celebrating." The first year I actually stayed by myself. The second year I scheduled myself to work. This year I may either do volunteer work or head to Canada. Thanksgiving is great in Canada—no Thanksgiving!

Here is what a couple has done since their son died six years ago:

The first year I went to the mall to buy people things. I walked into the stores, looked at items, picked them up, and put them back. I walked out of store after store, frustrated. So, I didn't get anybody anything the first year. The next year I went to a craft store and bought a large candle, a little artificial tree, miniature lights, and decorations. We put the candle and tree in our kitchen, where we spend the majority of our time. The candle stays lit all day. Over the years we buy ornaments that remind us of our son. At holiday dinner, just before we eat, we each go around and say the name of a person who died. But we have learned

COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS...CONTINUED

to do it quick before the food gets cold. Then, as we're eating we say, "Remember when. . . ?" Sometimes our food gets a little salty, but it's worth it. It's like our son is there with us. The first time we did it a couple people were uncomfortable, but once they got into it, it was OK.

A mother whose daughter died eight years ago suggested the following:

A stocking is hung for each person in the family, including my daughter. Into her stocking family members write a note stating what she taught them. The notes are read after dinner. It is a wonderful way to talk about her life and acknowledge what she meant to us.

A couple whose son died four years ago shares their experience of the first three years:

During the first Christmas my daughter thought she would help by keeping me busy shopping for her three children. There I was pushing a cart with a gift list of toys and tears streaming down my cheeks. All I wanted to do was crawl in a hole and pull everything with me. I'm not sure how we made it through the holidays, but we eventually realized that things would never be as they were before. The other family members thought they were helping, but we had to decide for ourselves what was best. The second Christmas was the hardest. On Christmas Eve we went to church and to the cemetery and on Christmas day we delivered our gifts and spent the day alone. We were feeling sorry for ourselves, but that's all we felt we could do at the time. The next years we decided to do something for others. I called the nursing home and asked the director if they needed any help serving the holiday meal. She was very excited to have us. A few days before, we had our grandchildren over and instead of making cookies, we made table favors, including cards, candy, and ribbons. On Christmas day we dressed in our Santa hats and headed to the nursing home. When we arrived, we were greeted with smiling, appreciative faces. We served their breakfast and many of the residents took us back to their rooms to see their gifts and family pictures. While honoring the memory of our son we forgot our grief that Christmas day.

In closing, let me leave you with some holiday stress-relievers:

1. There is not enough time for everything. Ask yourself, "What am I willing to give up?" and then, let them go.
2. Practice on saying "No." to the things you do not want to do. Here are versions of the same message: "No thanks." "I just can't." "I won't be doing it this year." "Sorry." Remember, when you say, "No" you don't have to give reasons.
3. Plan ahead. Make yourself sit down and write out your "Things to do" list. Then go through it and, as mentioned in #1, ask yourself, "What can I omit?" Also, arrange your list in priority fashion to put the most important things at the top of the list.
4. If you must purchase gifts, ask yourself, "How can I do this with the least amount of stress? For example, consider using the Internet, having someone else pick up the gifts, consider giving money or gift cards as gifts, or have a family lottery where each person picks a name from a hat and buys only that person a gift. Try one of these ideas this year as an experiment just to see how it works.
5. Start early. Pick a date to get done many of your obligations now. Don't put it off. Remember how crazy last minute stuff can be. You don't need any more craziness in your life.
6. Do not rely on your memory to keep track of things to do in your life. Presume you will forget things and write everything down.
7. Ask yourself, "How can I work smarter, not harder?"
8. And finally ask yourself, "In what ways do I wish to keep things the same and how do

I want to change things?"

As you finish this article and begin to put it down, you might be saying to yourself, "Yes, there were a couple good ideas. I should do them some time." Quick! Capture the moment now! Tape this article up on your wall so that you will see it everyday as a reminder of helpful ways to get through the holidays. I'm willing to bet that your child would agree with me. So, get started, OK?

(P.S. Thanks to TCF parents Ann & Neal, Roger & Sue, Joyce, Susan, Denise & Mushroom)



EDITOR'S JOURNAL

NAN ZASTROW

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O CHRISTMAS TREE—WHY SHOULD I ADORN THEE?

10 REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD CONSIDER DECORATING A TREE WHEN GRIEVING

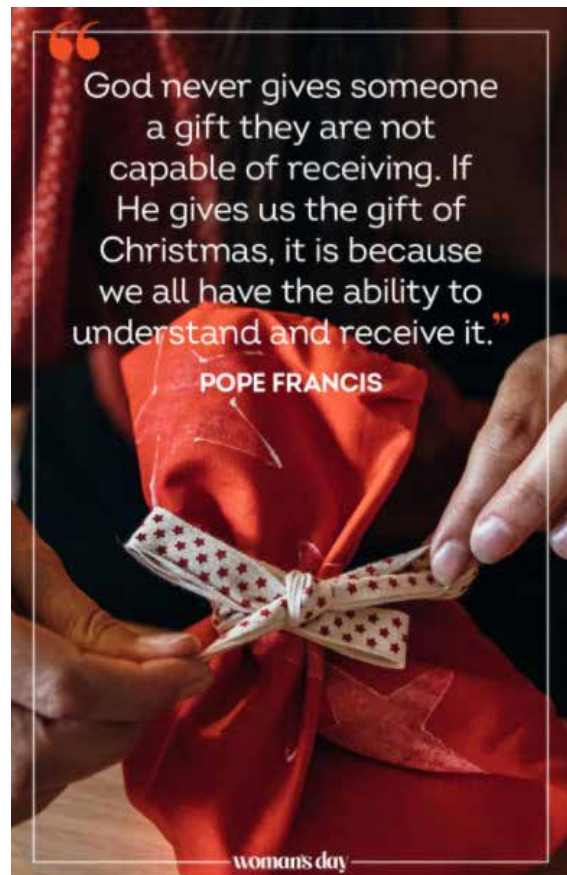
We dragged the tubs of Christmas ornaments from the basement just like we always did before he died. They sat on the living room floor unopened. A naked evergreen tree sat unadorned in the corner of the room beckoning to be touched and beautified. In my heart, there was an incredible emptiness and fear. The thought of putting up a Christmas tree after the death of our son, Chad, created questions and strong protest. Why should I put up a Christmas tree? Isn't it selfish to put up a tree, a symbol of family and joy, when my loved one was not here to share it with us?

Together we finally gave into the necessity of trying to normalize the holiday by decorating the tree. To lighten the task, we decided to create a theme of angels, bells, stars, and white lights. Then we hung ornaments with special stories mingled among the traditional ones. As difficult and emotional as it was, we did it! And I must admit it was worth the moments of tears and sadness. Standing back and looking at the shimmering tree filled our hearts with hope.

Celebrating or not celebrating is a personal choice. There is no doubt, traditions bring back a flood of memories. Decorating a tree is one of them. If putting up a Christmas tree laden with sparkling lights, cherished ornaments, and memories seems difficult no matter how long it has been since your loved one died, here are some reasons to assure you that it is okay and even healing to carry on this time-honored tradition.

Reasons to consider PUTTING UP AND DECORATING A TREE:

1. There is reason to celebrate. If sharing a story, baking your loved one's favorite dish, enjoying the beauty of the seasonal elements, or gathering in the comfort of



others makes you happy, then you should absolutely celebrate the season. Decorating a tree is a celebration in many ways. It's creating a new beginning every year. Christmas is not a story of hope. It is HOPE. Christ is the reason for this season. That alone gives permission to celebrate.

2. Challenging yourself to do something difficult builds resilience. Overcoming this task, brings you one step closer to managing the unpredictable and lingering emotions of grief. Resilient people develop strong coping skills from adversity, and they bounce back. Stimulate your determination to discover and celebrate how far you have come on your path to healing.

3. Putting up a tree often introduces conversations about which traditions are still comfortable and which ones need to change. These important conversations within a family establish the entire plan for holiday celebrations. If it feels good to decorate as usual, this may be the one variable that families confirm that even though some things change, some can remain the same and continue to be a source of treasured family rituals. Introducing new or modified traditions isn't about forgetting the past. It's about moving forward in the present.

4. Unpacking the decorations generates memories. Keepsake ornaments often recall forgotten stories, milestones, and humor. Yes, it may be painful, initially, but oh how precious the memories! Add a memorial ornament to remember your loved one every year. Hanging it next year will make you smile!

5. Trimming a tree with music in the background can soothe the raw emotions of grief. Music heals and can help you process the sadness you feel during the holidays. Music draws out memories that can connect you with your loved one including favorite songs, bonding words, and memories of special events. It also reduces depression and anxiety while it improves your mood.

6. Decorating a tree can be inspirational and reflect who you are. When you use your creativity in the comfort of your home, you can set a style that reflects things

you like, colors that appeal to you, and a theme of things you like. Life has changed and so can your tree become a source of creative joy to banish the holiday blues. Start early. Research shows that people who decorate early tap into the spirit of the season and this makes them happier. Inspire yourself by recreating childhood memories or be motivated to create a new theme. Either can trigger those happy hormones.



7. Putting up a tree can bring families together. You have experienced a life-changing event and family and friends may not know how you wish to celebrate the holiday. When you decorate your tree, it sends a message to family and friends that though the holidays may be difficult you want to preserve stability and family values. Choose to make this a family event whether it's dragging a fresh evergreen out of the woods or primping the branches of your store-bought tree. Do it together.

○ CHRISTMAS TREE...CONTINUED

8. Putting up a tree earlier in your grief makes it easier next year. The longer you delay the more likely you will never appreciate or continue the benefits of this simple holiday tradition. Don't allow one year to become 3-4 or more. There is no right or wrong. Some people are 100% happy with their decision to not decorate a tree or celebrate the season. However, research suggests that people are better off doing "something" rather than nothing at all. Let the tree bring you joy!

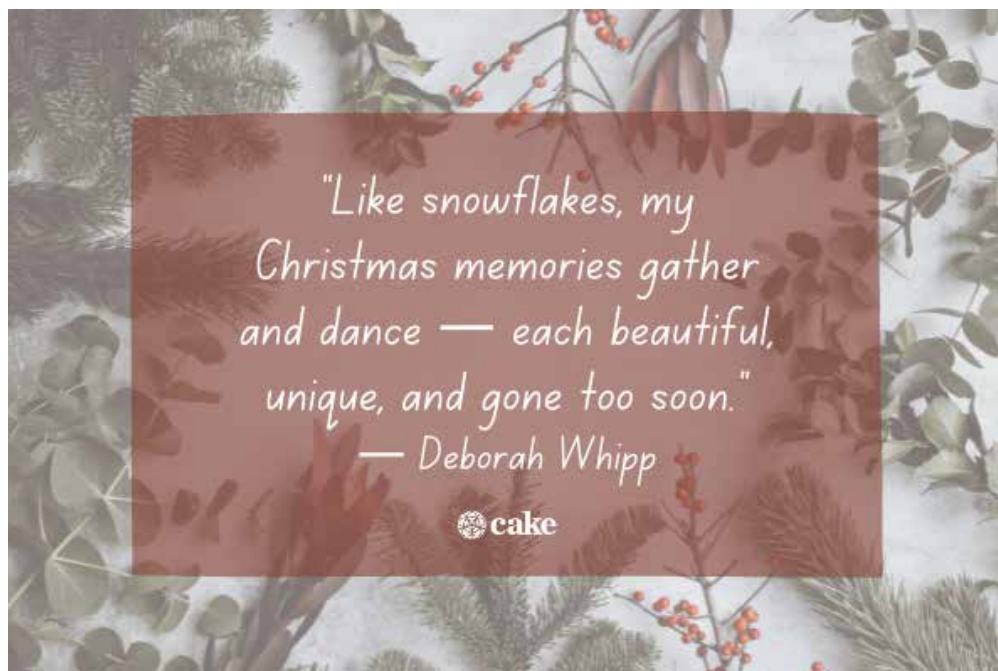
9. Putting up the tree just feels good to be acting "normal" during these less than normal circumstances of life. The reality is holidays will come and go year-after-year. At some point, you can't ignore them anymore. It's important to resume living and do things that seem normal. Remember how the pandemic changed lives? So has grief interrupted your life with unexpected and abrupt changes. It's time to live again. You deserve to feel good and enjoy the beauty of the season. What was normal before can become a new normal again.

10. Decorating a tree that shines brightly represents your love for the person who died. All the rituals you take pride in during the holiday express that you will never forget. These are "connectors" to memories and happy times. Reawaken that kind of spirit. Add a star to the top

of your tree since a star represents the Star of Bethlehem and points to heaven. A lighted tree beams with the message of Hope. How could you ever forget your loved one at such a beautiful time of year? Light up a tree and let it shine!

"I'll always feel you close to me and though you're far from sight, I'll search for you among the stars that shine on Christmas night."

Holiday traditions are what you want them to be. It takes heart and soul, and you need to be invested in the task, or it won't do you or anyone in your family any good. A time will come when you look forward to celebrating your holidays blending old traditions as well as creating new traditions based on life changes as they occur. Adding color, lights and some sparkle can't hurt. It may actually lift your spirits. Even if you are decorating alone and don't expect a lot of visitors during the season, light up your life. If for no other reason, put up the tree because you love it! And it feels good! Your loved one encourages you in spirit and would want to see that you still can find Love, Peace, and Joy in this simple tradition.



Reader Feedback

After the loss of a loved one, family holiday traditions often change. That often includes a “special tradition” you may do in remembrance of a loved one who died. What tradition will you do this year in remembrance?



My son, Darren Russell, was murdered while teaching English in China on April 14, 2005. The following year, I started the tradition of having a Memorial Birthday Dinner in San Diego. His birthday was Sept. 22, 1969.

So this past Saturday, Sept. 24th, I took out two of his professors as well as his friends that lived in San Diego. It is always uplifting to see how they are all doing, and there is always a new, positive Darren story I have never heard. Afterwards, one of the professors, who is also a photographer, takes photos at sunset of whatever dog I have. For years it was a red labradoodle named Dara. Now it is a white mini-labradoodle named Toby. We make calendars from the photos and everyone loves them. There are so many signs from Darren the two weeks before his dinner. He is always with me, albeit not physically.

The only year missed in 17 years was last year. My husband had died of pancreatic cancer. Dinner on Sat. was also special because everyone mentioned how they loved my husband's sense of humor.

Maxine
North Hollywood, CA

I remember that first year of our loss it was suggested that we each light a candle and say a few words, or short story about what we remembered, or missed, about our daughter. For our

family it was a very touching idea with shared stories. We had over 20 beautiful candles glowing for the rest of the afternoon.

Gale
Schofield, WI

Our annual traditions continue to change as new members join our family. However, one constant is paying it forward as often as we can. In honor of our son Jon's birthday in November, we purchase a newborn gift and deliver to the hospital, asking staff to share with a new mom and her son.

We also be sure to include his favorite dessert when we gather for holiday meals.

Tara
Antigo, WI

I think that we will definitely still do “family prayer” in honor of Jim. We would gather the whole family together in a circle and hold hands. Jim would have a special prayer that often included something such as welcoming a new baby to the family, or saying goodbye to a beloved family member, and twice welcoming a grandson back from Iraq and then Afghanistan. The grandkids seem to look forward to it, and that has always warmed my heart. One Christmas we even played “Once Upon a Christmas by Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton while we stayed in our circle.

That was an emotional “family prayer” time.

Carole
Weston, WI

With mom having passed, I will be alone. Go to church and have a meal at a restaurant. Then I will go to the cemetery with some flowers. Have a “talk” with mom and dad. Then go home. It's still very hard and sad.

Deb

I will remember my Mom by baking many of her “Christmas classics” - We put together a cookbook in 2010 of family favorites and my Mom hand wrote the recipes and family members shared why they picked those recipes and the memories behind them - this is now a family treasure...

Writing is another outlet for me in dealing with my grief of losing her.

Sheila
Schofield, WI

My husband, Bob, died in October 1999. Even though Christmas was a little over 2 months away; we already had some Christmas gifts purchased for him. So every year since Bob died, we put the same unopened, wrapped present by the nativity manger scene in his remembrance.

Diane
Weston, WI

The Christmas Ornament

I learned a lesson of love from my youngest son, Scotty, after TJ died. I didn't feel like celebrating anything, let alone putting Christmas decorations up. But TJ wasn't my only child. Scotty was 5 years old when TJ died, and although he missed his little brother, he was excited about getting the Christmas tree decorated for the holidays.

Always before, I found so much joy in carefully hanging each ornament on the tree, recalling the special meaning of each and every one. Each clothespin reindeer Scott had constructed, each felt ornament that my mom had lovingly sewn. The lacy crocheted snowflakes from Grandma's treasures and the Hallmark yearly ornaments purchased for the boys, reflecting some memory frozen in time.

But this year, the memories would surely be too painful for me to handle. I couldn't bear to think about TJ not being with us this year. But there was Scotty dancing around the tree, waiting with anticipation in his eyes as I opened the boxes of decorations that I knew would tear my emotional wounds wide open again.

Carefully, I unwrapped each ornament, handing them to Scotty to place on the tree. Out came the clothespin reindeer, the snowflakes and the ceramic ornaments. Then I unwrapped the beautiful glass ball announcing "Baby's First Christmas, 1978", celebrating the arrival of Scott, our first born. Scotty placed it on the tree, right in the front. Reaching for the next ornament and unwrapping it, I looked down at the ornament that said, "Baby's First Christmas, 1980" on it. I felt a crushing pain where my heart had been. There would be no more Christmas's for TJ. He had lived only three short years. With tears running down my cheeks, I hastily wrapped the paper back around the ornament. Scotty reached over with his small hands and stopped me.

"What are you doing, Mommy? That's TJ's ball!" I looked into his eyes and wondered how I would explain. In his infinite child's wisdom, he wrapped his little arms around me and hugged me. "It's okay Mommy. I miss TJ too." "I want to put his ball on the tree next to mine so I will always remember him when I look at it." "I don't want to forget him, I want to REMEMBER him!", he said emphatically.

I looked down and realized that I could not forget my pain or cover it up by avoiding the things that held my memories of TJ. It may take some time to be able to look on these treasures and feel the joy again, but it would come. I learned from a small boy that remembering, not trying to forget, held the key to hope and healing for my heart. And today, 25 years later, we still put TJ's ornaments on our tree, and I smile and remember the joy.

-- *Debbi Northrop-Wicks, Lincoln, Nebraska*



THE CHILD THAT IS NOT THERE

*IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME,
THE GIFTS ARE WRAPPED,
AND PILED BENEATH THE TREE,
YET EVERY YEAR THERE'S AN ABSENCE,
THAT IS ONLY FELT BY ME.*

*I PREPARE THE TABLE FOR THE FEAST,
AND BOW MY HEAD IN PRAYER,
I TRY MY BEST TO HIDE MY GRIEF,
FOR THE CHILD THAT IS NOT THERE.*

*WE RAISE OUR GLASSES FOR A TOAST,
TO FAMILY AND TO FRIENDS,
BUT ALL THAT I AM WISHING FOR,
IS TO HOLD YOU ONCE AGAIN.*

*SO AMIDST THE CHRISTMAS JOY,
IS AN EMPTINESS I BEAR,
AN EVER PRESENT HEARTACHE
FOR THE CHILD THAT IS NOT THERE.*

*AND WHEN I SEE MY CHILDREN LAUGH,
WITH THAT TWINKLE IN THEIR EYES,
I CANNOT HELP BUT WONDER,
IF YOU THINK OF ME SOMETIMES.*

*AND WHEN THE DAY COMES
TO AN END,
NO GRIEF CAN QUITE COMPARE,
TO ANOTHER CHRISTMAS YEARNING
FOR THE CHILD THAT IS NOT THERE.*

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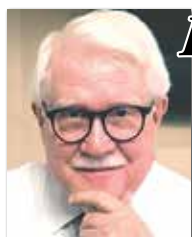
Be Good to Yourself SELF CARE TIP

Be Realistic

Be realistic in your expectations for yourself. Grief can consume your physical and emotional energy no matter what the season. Holidays are especially difficult because you may be adjusting to changes in traditions due to your loved one's death.

Respect what your mind and body are telling you. Avoid added stress. Ask family to pitch in and share duties you considered "yours. Next year may be different, but this year the focus is on you! Be realistic in your social invitations. Limiting obligations will eliminate stress. It's okay to say "no, not today."

Be gentle with yourself. Think about the meaning of the holidays and take pleasure in small things that bring you comfort. Memories allow us to hold onto the ones we love. Share them.



Rest In Peace, Mr. President

By Todd Van Beck

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Rest in Peace, Mr. President. That was the hope...that our presidents would rest in peace, but that has not always happened. For example, between 1865 and 1901 Lincoln's remains were moved 18 times.

Funerals are a reflection of how people live their lives, and this remains true for the funerals of our U.S. presidents. This series offers a glimpse into the deaths and funerals of our presidents, while offering overdue recognition to the scores of funeral professionals who labored ceaselessly to carry out the wishes of the presidents, their families, and in some cases, the wishes of the United States government. Each account tells an interesting story. —TVB

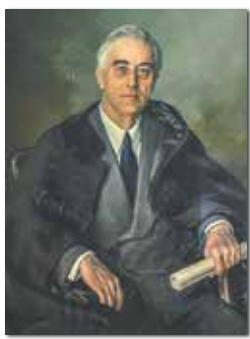
FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

the thirty-second President of the United States of America

Roosevelt arrived in Warm Springs, Georgia suffering from exhaustion. His doctor recommended total rest, and for several days, he followed those instructions. At Easter services on April 1, there was a noticeable tremor in his movements. He dropped his prayer book and glasses during the service.

At the Little White House in Warm Springs, Roosevelt slept late on the morning of April 12. He ate a light breakfast around 9:30 AM in preparation for a barbecue planned for that afternoon. FDR seated himself at his desk to go over some State Department papers, while chatting with two visiting cousins and two other women, one of whom was there to do his portrait.

Roosevelt continued to sign routine official papers, while the artist worked on her portrait. At 1:00 PM, he told her that they only had fifteen more minutes before they were to eat lunch and prepare for the barbecue. Suddenly his hand fell, with the fingers twitch-



Elizabeth Shoumatoff was working on this portrait when Franklin D. Roosevelt died.

ing. One of his cousins asked if he had dropped something, and he murmured "I have a terrific headache." Then, Roosevelt's arm fell to his side, his head sagged, and his entire body slumped in the chair. It was 1:15 PM.

The medical prognosis was plain; Roosevelt had suffered what the doctor would characterize as a "massive cerebral hemorrhage." But there was nothing any of the doctors could have done; the cerebral hemorrhage had been too severe. At 3:35 PM, President Franklin D. Roosevelt died on his small bed in his beloved second home in Warm Springs.

Nothing happened concerning the care of FDR's remains until about 7:30 PM, when a call was made directly to Fred W. Patterson, head of **H. M. Patterson & Son Funeral Home** in Atlanta. Mr. Patterson and his team arrived at the little cottage and the body of the president was embalmed in his bedroom. Roosevelt was casketed in a National Seamless Copper Deposit.

The funeral train pulled out from Warm Springs around 9:05 AM. The windows on the train car holding Roosevelt's coffin were left open, and the coffin was easily visible. Thousands of people gathered along the tracks as the train made its way through south and central Georgia to Atlanta.

The train arrived in Atlanta at 1:30 PM on April 13. Sometime on the afternoon of April 13, 1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt crossed the border of Georgia for the last time.

The funeral train arrived in Washington, DC on April 14, which was the 80th anniversary of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. The funeral procession of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on the streets of Washington DC was impressive. The president's casket was drawn on a military caisson with six white horses and was escorted by men on motorcycles. Crowds lined the sidewalks. The

funeral procession went directly to the White House, where the casket was placed in the East Room.

At the White House, Mrs. Roosevelt asked that the casket be opened. She placed some flowers inside and then ordered it to be permanently sealed.

Later that evening, the funeral procession returned the casket to Union Station, where it was put on a funeral train en route to Hyde Park along the same route that Lincoln's funeral train had taken.

Joseph Gawler's Sons Funeral Directors were serving the Roosevelt family in Washington DC.

Upon arriving at Hyde Park, **Mr. Henry Page**, who owned the **Ralph Vander Worden Funeral Home**, was waiting with his funeral coach. Mr. Page had previously buried the President's mother. The Vander Worden Funeral Home was a well-established funeral company, which had served the Roosevelt family many times over the years.

Six hundred West Point cadets stood in formation at the gravesite as a simple Episcopal funeral service was held. As the body was being lowered into the grave, the rector of St. James Episcopal Church prayed, "Now the laborer's tale is o'er. Now the battle day is passed. Now upon the farther shore, lands the voyager at last." Then three volleys were fired and the bugler played taps.

Todd W. Van Beck is the Director of Professional Development at Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science where he began his career 40 years ago. He is one of the best known and most well-regarded practitioners, educators, writers and speakers in the funeral profession. On May 30, 2018 Van Beck celebrated 50 years in funeral service. You can reach Todd at 615-327-3927.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

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THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Unlike Ebenezer Scrooge’s ghost, my “ghost of Christmas past,” didn’t haunt me with bad deeds, greediness or distant memories. Instead, it caused an intense aching pain that validated my loss of dreams. For many holidays after the death of my son, Chad, the ghost of Christmas past could haunt my memories and shake my spirit long before the air was filled with the miracles and magic of the holiday season. The chains that linked me to holidays-gone-by were ever so real.

Prior to Chad’s death, my holiday memories were rich with tradition, child-like anticipation and remembrance of good times. One of my favorite memories of Chad occurred when he was about eight years old. In the children’s Christmas program, he played one of the three kings in search of the Baby Jesus, and his gift to Him was a teddy bear. I can still picture the smile on his face as he marched across the makeshift stage in his regal robe. With a lump in my throat, I was filled with loving pride. I’ll also never forget his last holiday with us. He was beginning his own life as a grown young man with his own apartment and his own Christmas tree. His own dreams were beginning to unfold.

For the first few holidays, the emotional walls I built in an attempt to preserve the visions of holidays-past prevented my spirit from healing. I thought the walls would shelter me from my pain by keeping old memories fresh. Instead, my memories became scarred with tears and soiled with self-pity. I couldn’t even find joy in the real reason for the season. The ghost of Christmas past lived within me, and I feared nothing could take it away from me.

In my journey through grief, I’ve learned that the underlying challenge in dealing with most grief experiences is accepting that grief (like life) is about adjusting to change. Managing that change means sorting through complex emotions, making trial-and-error attempts to change the way we do things, and putting forth a valiant effort at rewriting our future and rebuilding our dreams.

“Change” during the holidays

For the bereaved, holidays represent difficult change. As humans, we like to believe that we are flexible. We welcome change that makes things easier for us, but we resist with the greatest tenacity difficult change that affects our lifestyle and our relationships. I remember sitting on the golf course in August, five months after Chad died and saying to my sister, “I don’t know what I am going to do about the holidays. I just can’t handle it!” I was consumed with the unknown.

It’s okay to change

People who grieve aren’t alone in adopting new traditions. Others have given us their examples. When families change due to marriage, divorce, children, job relocation, military deployment or college etc., we accept that it’s okay to change the way we celebrate to accommodate these life changes. We think little of doing so. In fact, we often become very creative in how we manage that change. Therefore, the death of a family member should also be considered an acceptable change, and we should expect our families and friends to be supportive and understanding. In my first year of grieving, I didn’t under-

stand this. I struggled to make everything “the way it was” even though I knew it could never be. But I had enough common sense to know that I had to modify my traditions to cope with the emotional holidays ahead.

That’s when my husband, Gary, and I began formulating a plan. We vowed to shake the dread that threatened to tarnish our good memories, chase away our family and friends and turn our lives into bitter defeat. We agreed to be open and honest with each other as we discussed how to proceed.

Formulating a plan

First, we made a list of our primary traditions.

Second, we each scored our personal preference for each tradition.

Third, we recorded them on a chart—like the one below.

We each had our own chart of traditions, and we scored them by preference on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being time honored (we wanted to keep these traditions.)

Attending special church services	5	5
Attending holiday programs	3	5
Attending holiday parties	2	3
Decorating a tree	5	4
Sending holiday cards	2	3
Dinner at Grandma’s on Christmas Eve	4	4
Large family dinner on Christmas Day	4	4
Baking cookies, etc.	2	3

Finally, we determined what we could live without, and which traditions were essential to keep.

Anything that we scored 3 or lower could easily be eliminated or temporarily discontinued. We then took the items that rated 4 and 5, discussed them and made compromises. A compromise sometimes meant re-evaluating how we did the tradition before and accepting that we could both give a little and modify it.

Initiating the changes...

We took our decisions to the family, and, surprisingly, the changes met little resistance. Holiday religious services were meaningful; we agreed to leave that unchanged. Hosting the holiday dinner would be difficult. We didn’t want to give that up entirely, so we compromised on how we would handle it. Our invitation to dinner included a set time of 6:30 to 10:00 p.m. We chose not to host any Christmas Day celebration.

With great emotional pain, we trimmed a Christmas tree but changed the theme to reflect our loss into hope with ornaments of angels, bells, nativity characters, stars and white lights.



While these were the major changes, even the best-laid plans can backfire. We dressed to go to the evening church services and as we were about to leave, both of us were overcome with incredible sadness and tears. We just couldn't face the celebration service, so we didn't go. For the next few years, we went to holiday services at a different church until we could go to our own again.

I felt relieved that I was not obligated to continue everything in the same way as I had in the past. The limited-time holiday dinner was a good choice. Loving family surrounded us, and it was only during the last few minutes of goodbyes that we became truly emotional. On Christmas Day, we were invited out for dinner. We notified our



hostess well in advance that we might only stay for a short time. When we felt "uncomfortable," we excused ourselves and went home. We still continue these modified traditions today.

The truth is some of us never truly adjust to change, but we compensate by shifting our attitudes to accept what has altered our lives. This makes it even more important to have an evolving process for change and the addition of rituals that make it bearable.

Rituals for Remembrance...

One time-honored ritual came from my mother: lighting a candle in remembrance. Our candle glows for at least twenty-four hours, beginning at noon on Christmas Eve Day. It signifies love and remembrance for deceased family members.

We added the ritual of placing "living flowers" on our holiday table to remind us of how fortunate we are to have each other, breathe the same air and share our love. The flowers absorb the euphoria of love and peace. After our celebration, we take a few of the flowers from the bouquet to the cemetery, where we intertwine them with the cedar and evergreen boughs of Chad's wreath.

We also adopted a ritual of making snow angels at the cemetery for the benefit of our Down's-syndrome daughter, Jalane, because she received such great pleasure in doing this. Though the snow doesn't always cooperate, we do it whenever we can. We scatter angel confetti, join hands, plop down on the bed of white next to Chad, and we make angels. (I have to admit that it's usually Jalane doing this now as we have aged.)

Changing traditions doesn't mean that the Ghost of Christmas past doesn't stop at my door anymore, it means I've found ways to make him leave quicker. By modifying our traditions to meet our changed lives, we've controlled the ghost of Christmas past who had threatened to destroy our memories. The good memories live in my heart, and the haunting melody of "if only" has since vanished. Now, my spirit dances with the visions of treasured moments. Each year, I remember Chad—the child king—and I give his teddy bear a hug to say, "Thanks for being a part of my life." The sorrow can fade, but the memories and love will last forever.

AN ATHEIST IN THE WOODS

An atheist was walking through the woods.

'What majestic trees!

'What powerful rivers!

'What beautiful animals!

He said to himself.

As he was walking alongside the river, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him.

He turned to look. He saw a 7-foot grizzly bear charge towards him.

He ran as fast as he could up the path. He looked over his shoulder & saw that the bear was closing in on him.

He looked over his shoulder again, & the bear was even closer.

He tripped & fell on the ground.

He rolled over to pick himself up but saw that the bear was right on top of him, reaching for him with his left paw & raising his right paw to strike him.

At that instant the Atheist cried out, 'Oh my God!'

Time Stopped.

The bear froze.

The forest was silent.

As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky.

'You deny my existence for all these years, teach others I don't exist and even credit creation to cosmic accident.'

'Do you expect me to help you out of this predicament?'

Am I to count you as a believer?'

The atheist looked directly into the light, 'It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask you to treat me as a Christian now, but perhaps you could make the BEAR a Christian?'

'Very Well,' said the voice.

The light went out. The sounds of the forest resumed.

And the bear dropped his right paw, brought both paws together, bowed his head & spoke:

'Lord bless this food, which I am about to receive from thy bounty through Christ our Lord, Amen.'



An elderly woman decided to prepare her will and told her preacher she had two final requests.

First, she wanted to be cremated, and second, she wanted her ashes scattered over Wal-Mart.

'WalMart?' the preacher exclaimed.

'Why Wal-Mart?'

'Then I'll be sure my daughters visit me twice a week'



Just before the funeral services, the undertaker came up to the very elderly widow and asked, 'How old was your husband?' '98,' she replied. 'Two years older than me' 'So you're 96,' the undertaker commented. She responded, 'Hardly worth going home, is it?'



There is no charge for these groups. Registration is required for virtual groups to receive the link and for in-person groups to save a spot.



Living River In Concert

*A free music concert
with the blend of Christmas
favorites and heart-warming
sing-along songs.*

Friday, Dec. 16, 2022
Holiday Inn & Suites
at Cedar Creek, Mosinee
7:00–9:00 p.m.



Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2023

6:00-7:00 p.m. CST

As the New Year approaches, those who grieve realize that life moves forward whether they like it or not. Just because the calendar changes, it doesn't mean you are "over it." You are facing the reality of "how will I go on without my loved one."

Those around you may be full of energy with resolutions and plans while you are still trying to survive one day at a time. It's possible to glide into the New Year if you can approach it as a new opportunity to heal from the pain of your past.

This program offers an opportunity to face the New Year with Hope. Committing to most resolutions often fails. This isn't about resolutions. We are suggesting 3 attainable FRESH STARTS that you can stick to. They can intentionally give you a new perspective about your grief and a desire to heal emotionally. Whether this is your first year without your loved one or many years since, now is the time to heal. You will not always be bereaved so consider starting your personal transition now. Take this step to move forward in the future, find joy, and live your life with meaning again.

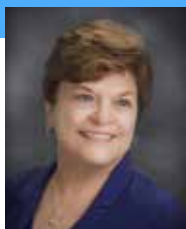


Tuesday, February 7, 2023
6:00–7:00pm CST

Have you ever thought that your loved one who died is supporting you, reassuring you and even cheering you on from beyond? Do you believe in the possibilities of messages and symbols as "signs" that your loved one can connect with you? Do you continue to "talk" to your loved one to relieve the stress of grief and give you a sense of peace? If these questions intrigue you, you may want to attend our session on Visits from the Twilight Zone where our curiosity and inner spirit beckon us to believe in things we can't see or confirm. Learn about the behaviors that may prevent you from receiving this gift. And learn what gifts are out there just waiting for your acknowledgement.

Watch for the next set of programs, including in-person group beginning in Feb–March, 2023

Register online at wingsgrief.org or email: nanwings1@gmail.com



Certified Grief
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When the Holidays Hurt...

practical ideas and inspiration
for healing grief

Nan Zastrow

For nearly two decades, Nan, and her husband, Gary, have inspired the bereaved through community holiday programs for those who grieve.

They offer ideas to preserve holiday sanity and sanctity based on their own experiences.

Learn how to unwrap and add heart-warming, commemorative rituals into the holiday that honors and remembers your loved one who died. In this book is a collection of stories meant to inspire you and encourage you as you plan your first holidays after your loss.

\$7.95

What will you find in this book?

Discover new possibilities for a season of good memories and joy through some of these chapters:

- * Rejoice in the presence of angels—the earthly kind
- * Be entertained by our signature story of hope, “The Legend of the Ebber”—a charming story written in rhyme about a fictitious character that is out to spoil the holidays. Read how the miracle unfolds.
- * Gain comforting advice on how to tame your holiday blues
- * Find out how to paint your holiday the way you want it to be
- * Learn how to tell which traditions are silver and which are gold—to help you decide what you might consider changing or not changing
- * Share the priceless lessons of the Gifts of Hope that can heal your holiday grief with a lesson from a fortune cookie
- * Determine which boxes are under your Christmas tree that can outshine the mysteries of Pandora’s Box.
- * Find ways to decorate your holidays with hope, ideas, and rituals that heal.

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Footprints in the Snow

*Best Wishes for a
Holiday Season filled with
Love, Beauty, and Family.*

Gary & Nan Zastrow

One white and wintry Christmas Eve
In a village, long ago.
A young child took a journey
Leaving footprints in the snow.
Clutched within her tiny hand
She carried a small tattered heart
Fashioned from some scraps of cloth
Wrapped in the charm of childlike art.

A manger scene of wood and straw
Was the child's destination.
Her only Christmas wish
To join Christ's birthday celebration.
She placed her precious handmade gift
Upon the straw with care,
And before she turned to leave,
Whispered a simple prayer.

The villagers who stood nearby
Recall the night with awe.
Retelling every detail
Of the miracle they saw.
A second set of footprints
Appeared next to the girl's own,
They seemed to walk right by her side,
To see her safely home.

But there's no mystery in the presence
Of this unseen Friend—
For once God's touched your heart,
You'll never walk alone again.

*From a Christmas card
Author unknown*

