

Honoring the Past and Rebuilding the Future

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Published by Nan Zastrow

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DIP INTO DENIAL

Bob Baugher, Ph.D.

“I can’t believe she’s gone.” “It can’t be true. It’s like a dream—a nightmare.” “This just can’t be happening.” Words like these are common when a loved one dies. It’s a form of denial—not the type where a person absolutely refuses to acknowledge that a death has occurred, but rather our brain’s inability to grasp the horror of what has actually happened in our life. In this article we’ll look at what’s good and not so good about the denial process.

Consider the room you are in as you read this. Look around and imagine for a moment that, at some point in the future you have moved to a new location never to see this room again. How many memories are associated with the room? Hundreds? Thousands? These memories are stored in your brain and all it takes is the proper trigger or stimulus for them to come into your mind. If you later walk into a room with a similar-looking ceiling or floor, the memories may suddenly come flooding back. What does this have to do with death? Who in your life has died? How many thousands of memories of this person do you have stored in your brain? At the moment you found that this person died, your brain began to attempt to adjust to this significant new information. But, what an adjustment! How does a brain rectify its thousands of messages that tell us the person is alive with relatively fewer,

recent experiences that say the person is dead, never to return? The answer is: our brain uses the mechanism of denial.

When a death occurs, one way to understand how the denial process might work is to refer to the scale below with 100% denial at one end and 0% denial at the other:

Total		
No		No
Denial		Denial
100%-----	50%-----	0%

In this way it is helpful to see denial as a process that begins with no brain cells “getting” that your loved one died. At the other extreme is a point in which every single brain cell associated with your loved one’s life has been altered with the knowledge of the death. In my years of work with bereaved people, I have concluded that no one who has had a significant loved one die gets to 0% denial with that person. When I talk to people whose child, spouse, or sibling died 20, 30 or more years, I often ask if there are times when they still can’t believe that their loved one died, will never come back, is gone forever and so on. Invariably they say things like the following: “I know she’s dead. But sometimes I shake my head and still can’t believe it.”

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DIP INTO DENIAL...

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“Even years later I will sometimes hear a car approach the house and for a second think, ‘Oh, he’s home from work.’”

“Last month I was sitting in church and my heart skipped a beat because I saw a man who looked like my husband.”

“I’ll be driving down the street and glance at a girl riding a bicycle and—I know it’s crazy—I have to drive around the block and look once more even though I know it’s not her.”

When we think of the initial reactions to loss, we immediately think of denial. When we think of unhealthy grief reactions, we think of continued denial—or “bad” denial. So-called “good” denial serves the function of assisting our brain as it deals with the pain of loss. A helpful way to think about this is to imagine the brain as a large sponge with more than ten billion cells that contain life experiences stored deep within it. During every waking moment sensations from the outside world impinge on the outer layer. When a series of highly significant, negative death-related events (announcement of the death, seeing the dead body, going to the funeral) enter the outer layer and begin working their way deep inside, the brain cannot handle this highly negative, painful, and incompatible information and attempts to find a way to comprehend and adjust to it. So, it uses the mechanism of denial—sort of like adding a cushiony fluid to the tissues thereby protecting the deeper layers. In this way significant, especially painful information takes longer to really “sink in.” Denial, therefore, is a way for the brain to buy time, a way to provide this cushion as the long-term memories begin their painful process of adjusting to the significant news of death.



Have you ever had a dream that someone you knew died? And when you woke up, even though you knew they were still alive, you felt temporarily different about this person? Your brain was trying to make sense what it perceived to be “new” information. As the hours and day wore on, your brain was able to categorize the new experience as “false.” When a real death occurs, because of its past experience with dreams of death, your brain may initially interpret the feelings surrounding the death as “feeling like a dream—a nightmare.” Did you feel this way when the death first occurred? Many people report that the funeral “felt like a dream,” or “...was a haze.” or “...seemed unreal.” This is especially true when the death is unexpected, when none of your brain cells had any time to adjust to the new information. This is why people often appear to be functioning—at least going through the motions of living—during the first few days, weeks, and months following the death of a loved one. They are still in shock. The deeper

parts of their brain have not yet begun to process the enormity of their loss.

As time goes by and the shock begins to wear off, the brain begins to “let in” the harsh reality of the death; and the person often feels worse than they did earlier. During the first few years following the death of their loved one, many bereaved people report the awful realization that, in some ways, the second year was more difficult. We’re beginning to see this from reports of the relatives and friends who lost loved ones in 9-11. A good part of the reason for this is that not until the second year that much of the shock has worn off, denial is decreasing, and more brain cells have “gotten” the fuller impact of the death.

As you continue to encounter the harsh and painful reminders that your loved one is dead, your brain, in its own way, will gradually, albeit painfully, begin to absorb the reality of what has taken place. In an attempt to move through their

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denial some people bombard their brain with the harsh realities of the death. You may feel a great need to talk and talk about it. You may return again and again to the place where your loved one died. We continue to see this in the hundreds of people who return to visit Ground Zero. Other people find ways to avoid the truth of what has taken place by, for example, choosing never to visit the place where their loved one died, not talking about it, avoiding the reminders, and finding any way they can to deny that the death has occurred.

Is this unhealthy? Is there a point where this becomes unhealthy? The answer is complex because one of the ways that some people cope with the intensity of their loss is to take moments during the day and pretend that their loved one is still alive. For example, bereaved par-

ents have told me that, at times, they have soothed their pain by saying, "She is down the street at her friend's house." "He is away at college." "He is at the store with her father." These episodes of denial, coupled with a deeper understanding that the death really did occur are, in themselves, not an unhealthy form of denial.

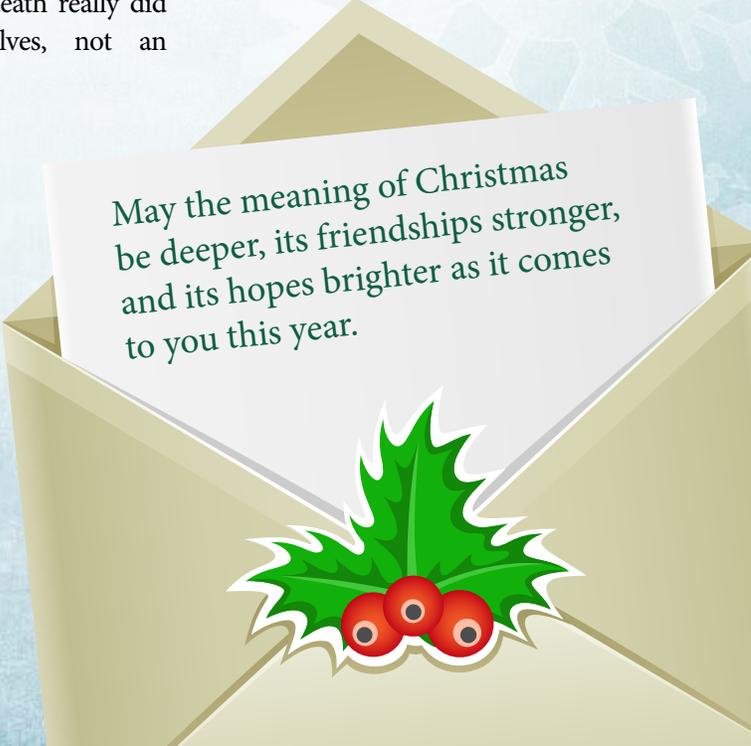
What is unhealthy (bad denial) is when a person says, "My husband didn't die. He's OK." "My brother is away and will be back." "This isn't true, someone is playing a trick on me. I know she's still alive."

During the years of coping with your loss, keep in mind that, as your denial continues to come and go, it is your brain's way of protecting itself. It is up to you to decide how much "reality" to take in. Be kind to yourself and don't let someone else decide how much input on the death you need. Most importantly, as see yourself move down the denial scale and feel more of the pain of your loss, realize that your brain is continuing to go through the most dramatic adjustment in the human condition. It's called bereavement.

Dip into Denial originally published in Grief Magazine, 2003, Vol 4, Issue 1.

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May the meaning of Christmas
be deeper, its friendships stronger,
and its hopes brighter as it comes
to you this year.



HOW TO RE-INVENT THE MAGIC IN YOUR HOLIDAYS AFTER LOSS

NAN ZASTROW

Co-Founder,
Wings – A Grief Education Ministry

The holiday are quickly approaching and it's always a time of great anxiety for families who are struggling to maintain some sense of "normal" after the death of a loved one. This article was published in 2014 in the Grief Digest magazine, and I'd like to share it in my ELetter.

the holidays right. The magic that makes it happen comes from within and emanates from your soul outward. It shines in honor of the past moments of love.

Whether or not you believe in "magic"; there is something special about the word that excites even the seasoned soul. Magic is like hope. It is powerful, creative, and encourages us to believe in all the possi

Remember, there is no such thing as a perfect life. Everyone has challenges; some more than others. For some bereaved, there will be no reason to change the holiday celebration; but for others even minor tweaking can make the day more comfortable and create positive outcomes.



***"Magic is like hope. It is powerful, creative, and encourages us to believe in all the possibilities, even when we can't see them."
– Nan Zastrow***

As the holidays approach, the newly bereaved frantically search for ways to re-invent the magic after the death of a loved one. This holiday will be different. How can we expect it to be the same? An overwhelming sadness can often spoil the best attempts at making the holiday a pleasant family gathering. However, it is possible to re-invent the special moments, feelings, and memories that make

bilities, even when we can't see them. We are intrigued. We want to be mystified. We want to believe that magical happenings lead the way to happiness.

You can make the magic happen for you this holiday but, it requires two commitments. (1.) Be open to change--big or small and (2.) Make a commitment to be part of the planning process so your holiday can be all you want it to be.

The bereaved often cope with Five Dilemmas as the holidays approach. Each is manageable.

FIVE DILEMMAS THAT THREATEN THE MAGIC:

1. EXPECTATIONS: The expectations of others and our own personal expectations of what the "day" should be may differ. We covet our vision of what the perfect holiday was in the past before the death of our loved one. Grief and sadness leads us to assume that holiday events can never be the way they were before.

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- Be careful about adopting an “attitude” that may make you stubborn or selfish. In doing so, you are disregarding the feelings of others who are also coping with the loss. Putting aside your personal preferences for the good of all involved becomes the challenge. Making the decisions about the traditions you’ve practiced in the past and what you will do going forward requires a group (or family) effort, a group plan, and a group decision.

- Be considerate of the feelings of others and try to include their ideas when you begin the planning process. Set realistic goals about what you can or can’t do. Perhaps your schedule of celebration in the past was too aggressive for this first or second holiday after loss.

- Make sure you plan ahead for each gathering and event. Don’t just expect things to happen and that everyone will be comfortable. Even the children need to be involved in the planning process. Often their innocent wisdom can teach all of us a lesson about what’s really important.

- One word of advice: don’t change your traditions so drastically that no one will recognize them. Minor tweaking may be all you need to create a “magic touch.”

One of the best ways to tie everyone’s expectations together is to create a “new tradition” that honors your loved one and/or gets everyone involved. For example: We purchase a large bunch of living flowers for the holiday table. These flowers absorb the love, humor, and joy of everyone present during our gatherings. Then we take the flowers to the cemetery and place them by our son’s marker. It’s a magical feeling that that shows he is not forgotten.

2. MAKING DECISIONS

Should I go to the holiday party? Should I put up a tree? Will I send greeting cards? Is it okay to visit neighbors and friends who are celebrating the day? There are so many decisions that weigh on our minds as the holidays approach. Each challenges our personal feelings and can get in the way of making comfortable decisions. Sometimes we feel like we should avoid all reminders of a holiday “without” or loved one. We may even consider “canceling” the celebrations. You may try to impose your feelings on the rest of the family because you feel guilty and think that you should deprive yourself of any pleasure.

In reality, the holiday is a family event. Generations before us have faced the same challenges and discovered ways to continue to make the holidays a joyful occasion. The day may continue a legacy of traditions or be re-invented with new traditions that fit the needs of a changing family structure.

Sometimes the decisions are simple and affect only you. Other times the decisions you make may affect a larger group of people. But all of you are coping with the same loss—in different ways. Accept that everyone is trying to work with you to help you cope during this difficult time. A good decision is a compromise. Re-invent the magic by mixing some old traditions along with something new.

3. WOUNDED SPIRITS AND BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS.

“Sometimes the only soul that can mend a broken heart is the one that broke it. For they are holding all the pieces.” (author unknown)

It’s not uncommon for families to “break-down” after a loss or when a relationship changes. Family hurt doesn’t just happen after the death of a loved one. Many factors result in broken relationships including death, divorce, remarriage, etc. In today’s world, blended families are the norm. The future requires planned and unplanned interaction between restructured families. There will be special weddings, baptisms, funerals, and holidays that invite or require restructured families to mingle.

Our past relationships continue to influence our lives forever. Regardless of the turn of events, people from our past may be there in our future. We need to reconcile how we will manage such interactions before it becomes an issue.

- Avoid a standoff. There is never a good time to ask family members to determine whose side they support.

- Experience your restructured family as a mature adult. You can set an example for children to demonstrate living in harmony which is critical even when emotions are divided.

- If your family must gather and tensions are still elevated, set some rules such as not discussing the issues that separate you. Reserve the day or the event for peaceful interaction. Appoint a family member who can handle momentary loss of control and bring everyone back to unity, if needed.

- Remember, “things” are just things. But, people from our past or present are part

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of our support system in good and bad times—whether we agree with them or not.

You can re-invent the magic by putting your relationships in perspective. They have been and always will be a part of your life. Handle them with dignity and respect.

4. SOCIAL EVENTS AND GATHERINGS

Family and Friends may urge you to move on, go to social events, and be happy. You can continue to torment yourself with self-pity over your loss, and you may even desire telling family and friends to “mind their own business.” Accept that they are trying to companion you and be gracious of their thoughts.

There is no magic to be found or created if you aren't willing to take some risks. Take a risk in yourself and experiment with invitations and social events. Set your own rules about how long you will stay, and whether or not you drive yourself or hitch a ride. You can be in control of the

place and time. Surprisingly you may find a few moments of joy in the company of good people.

The magic that leads to healing your grief resides in finding new places to go, people to meet, and events that challenge you to find joy again.

5. FEELING ALONE— MY LOVED ONE IS FORGOTTEN

If you feel that holidays and special days are about a significant person in your life; and now you don't have one...this can fuel much of your sadness during the holidays. This emotion is overwhelming at times and very understandable. In a world where couples and families thrive, a person who has lost someone special feels isolated from the rest. It can even cause anger because you think others don't care.

Unfortunately this is part of the process of grieving and discovering your new “you” after loss. No one can do that for you. However, others can be instrumental in helping you through the difficult times

if you give them a chance. Break the ice; encourage your friends to share memories. Be adventurous and try something new as you reinvent “you.” Most of your family and friends want to be part of your healing if you give them a chance. “Tomorrow is just today...repeated...if you don't change anything.”

There is no formula for absolute success in re-inventing your holiday. Reinventing is all about changing your celebrations to meet the changes of life events. It's not about forgetting. It's about keeping what feels good and tweaking what hurts. Much of the success depends upon your attitude and your desire to make something different acceptable. Magical moments are possible even during sad times. The magic comes through memories repeated, joy expressed, love shared, and your own creative ideas. You can do it! Reinvent your holidays... create some magic...and believe in all the possibilities!

W Grief Tip: **DON'T CANCEL THE HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS**

...even if you think it would make life easier. The quickest and easiest decision for families who are grieving is to “run away” from the social expectations and the gaiety of holiday celebrations all around. It may be possible to “run away” from it for a year or two, but the reality is the holidays will come along again next year. Eventually you need to deal with the raw emotions this event may bring. The best solution is to re-invent the holiday so it is comfortable for everyone involved.

Create a new or revised celebration that allows time for remembrance. Limit your social activities, but don't isolate yourself from others. Sometimes all the anxiety that leads up to the holiday quickly diffuses itself once the day arrives and you know you only need to get through 24 more hours of worrying about it! Find peace and love by surrounding yourself with those who support you during your grief!

HOLIDAY GRIEF AND THE LESSONS FROM TANGLED CHRISTMAS LIGHTS – Jan Borgman, MSW, LISW-S, FT

I knew the holidays were coming but I didn't want to deal with them and I really didn't want to put up any of the holiday decorations. Well-meaning family and friends kept telling me that I needed to "get into the spirit" of the holidays. I agreed that I would at least get the boxes out of storage and go through them. I soon realized that each box held memories of past holidays and celebrations. At times, I was overwhelmed with the feelings that I experienced as I opened the boxes that held my precious decorations. By the time I found the holidays lights that were at the bottom of a box, I wasn't in the mood to deal with the impossible task that was before me as the lights were a tangled mess.

As I tried to untangle the ball of lights, I began to see this mangled mess as part of my grief journey. I felt tangled in my grief and my emotions were like a ball wadded up within me. It would have been much easier to just toss the lights aside and purchase new ones but I didn't want to face the crowds at the store.

For some reason, I got lost in the distraction as I tried to figure out the best way to untangle the strands of lights that were before me. I plugged them to make sure they worked before I would spend any time dealing with them. Through the tears that had gathered in my eyes, the lights seemed to sparkle. I found comfort in their brightness and I became determined to conquer the mess.

As I sat there trying to find which way to move the wires to get them free, I began to see how this tangled ball of lights represented my experience of grief. I re-



alized that the only way I was going to get through this experience was to be patient. I've learned a lot about being patient as I deal with my grief. It would have been easy, so many times in the past year, to give up and to walk away from the memories and the pain. But when I faced my frustration and fears, I found strength I never knew I had.

This was a similar challenge as I tried to untangle the strands of lights. As the ball became smaller, I knew I was making progress. Each time I thought I was past the worst tangle, I would find another one, but this time it was smaller and easier to figure out. As I work through my grief, the same can be said. Each new challenge seems smaller and easier to manage because of the progress I have already made.

And as I gazed upon the lights, I realized that each of the colors represent a part of my grief. The red lights remind me of the love I shared. I recalled the happy times and the wonderful memories I hold in my heart. The red lights also remind me of the things I need to stop doing such as denying my feelings and blaming myself.

The blue lights represent my sadness. There are times when I feel "blue" or sad. Once I own my feelings of being down they are easier to accept because I'm embracing my pain instead of denying it. Admitting that I was sad made it easier to reach out and ask for help or to find things to distract me.

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LESSONS FROM TANGLED CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

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The yellow lights represent the brightness in my life as I smile at all the memories I hold. I found myself laughing at some of the past holiday experiences and the things we did or shared. I realize how full my life is because of the life we shared. The brightness truly outshines the sadness.

The orange lights remind me that the warmth of our love will always shine upon me because of the life we shared. I hold so many memories and I have been blessed to know the gift of love.

And the green lights represent my hope for the future. Hope gives me permission to move forward with my life as I learn to

live with my loss. Learning to live with loss doesn't mean forgetting the person who died but being able to create new memories to compliment the memories already held.

As I finally got the last of the lights untangled, I felt a sense of accomplishment that I stayed with the task and didn't give up. When I plugged them in, I noticed that some of the bulbs were burnt out but the strand of lights were still lit. It reminded me that even though those we love may no longer be with us, they are still part of our lives. Just as the other lights stayed lit, when someone we love dies, it doesn't mean that we have to stop living.

Alone, the colors would not be as bright but together they provide a soft, comforting glow. The lights represent aspects of my life and my grief. The red, blue, yellow, orange and green lights represent my love, my sadness, my memories, my joy and my hope. I have the opportunity to keep the love glowing through my memories and the life I live.

I never imagined that those tangled Christmas lights would help me find meaning in my grief and strength to face the holidays.

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- Follow the EVENTS calendar posted at the website wingsgrief.org
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Christmas

~Anonymous

Every time a hand reaches out
To help another...that is Christmas
Every time someone puts anger aside
And strives for understanding
That is Christmas
Every time people forget their differences
And realize their love for each other
That is Christmas
May this Christmas bring us
Closer to the spirit of human understanding
Closer to the blessing of peace

Music Fills Your Memories With Hope



A Community Program for Grieving Families

Not everyone associates the holiday season with joyful memories. Holidays often evoke complex emotions about relationships and people in our lives who have died. Music has the ability to trigger memories of sad times when we were struggling, angry or emotionally hurt. But, it can also remind us of happy times, memories of events and family and friends that bring us joy.

This year we are offering a program that creates a safe place to FEEL your emotions through the gift of music with Living River a local Christian quartet. Join us for a blended combination of spiritual songs, feel-good music, and traditional Christmas music. Sometimes things that hurt can soothe us when we listen to music that says the words we want to hear.



For information, contact:

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**Saturday,
December 3, 2016
4:00 – 6:00 pm**

Plaza Hotel and Suites

**201 N. 17th Ave,
Wausau, WI**

***Public is welcome.
Free admission.
Registration not required.***

Other sponsors

Brainard Funeral Homes
Helke Funeral Home
Peterson Kraemer Funeral Homes



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Reader Feedback



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

THE APPROACHING FALL SEASON REMINDS US THAT THE HOLIDAYS ARE SOON TO FOLLOW. WHETHER IT IS YOUR FIRST HOLIDAY AFTER THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE, OR MANY SUCCESSIVE HOLIDAYS BEYOND THE FIRST, THERE IS ALWAYS THAT THOUGHT: "WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?"

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO CELEBRATE THE MEMORY OF YOUR LOVED ONE THIS YEAR? PLEASE SHARE WITH US YOUR ONGOING TRADITION FOR REMEMBRANCE, OR SHARE WITH OUR READERS A NEW IDEA OF WHAT YOU MIGHT DO THIS YEAR TO HONOR THE LIFE OF YOUR LOVED ONE.

My late Father loved raisin pie. When our family gets together for the holidays, one of my siblings often brings his favorite pie, and we have a happy memory with our dessert. –

Margie, Wausau, WI

My son, Drey, died in 2012. This Christmas will be our 5th one without him. Each year we have done something different. We've made Christmas ornaments with his name, we attended a remembrance event where we lit a candle, we paid for a group of Ohio State students breakfast without them knowing it until we had left the restaurant (they were about the same age Drey should have been). And we always include Drey's Christmas stocking with the others. We made the mistake last Christmas of not doing any specific (besides the stocking) in remembrance of Drey. We won't make that mistake again. This year I plan to light a candle, get a box of tissues, and re-read the Christmas cards his friends sent in 2012 about their favorite memories of Drey.

Denise, Columbus, OH

We started a Jesse Angel Tree the year after he died. It's a smaller 4 foot tree that I sit on a card table. We have a few early on engraved ornaments and his childhood ornaments. Each year I add either an angel ornament or an ornament that I feel Jesse would like. This year I may need to get a Cleveland Indians ornament if they win the world series as this was his favorite team.

When I lived in Maryland I went to the cemetery. I had an ongoing reindeer that my florist made out of wreath material and put it on his grave. I also brought cookies for him (the animals were feed well!). I now have a friend or my brother pick up the reindeer and take it for me.

I still have the Jesse angel tree and I found a carved set of angel wings a while back. That will be the ornament this year.

In his honor I usually go to Wal Mart and pay off someone's lay-a-way that has kids and my husband and I pay for meals for others at restaurants. We take turns picking who to pay for.

Deb, Merrill, WI

My tradition my late husband and I started last year was a Christmas Eve box, it will have a new pair of pj's, a snack, and a movie that my son will get. This is a tradition I will keep going until my son gets too old for them.

Jen, Wausau, WI

Realizing that our love for a person who has passed never dies, we reminisce on past holidays with them, as we hang very special ornaments in their memory. Their names come up frequently during the holidays as family gathers. We are so grateful that God gave us these wonderful people, even though it was perhaps brief. We often purchase a Poinsettias in their name and place it at the church altar. That has always been meaningful to us.

Karen, Venice, FL

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WHAT DO YOU THINK...

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We do this on our son Darren's birthday, and some holidays. We go to San Diego and have dinner with all of his friends that live there. He graduated from SDSU and now even some of his professors attend. It is always upbeat to hear what everyone is doing. They all have special things in their home or offices that still keep Darren's memory alive.

Maxine, North Hollywood, CA

Say a prayer in honor of your loved one.
Amen!

Richard

We lost several family members in the fall of 2014 and 2015, and it just so happens their birthdays are also in the fall so we get a bunch of paper lanterns, write notes to them on them and light them and send them off.

Emily, Rothschild, WI

Since my beloved father passed in 2013 I do a couple of things to remember and honor him during the holidays. On Thanksgiving and Christmas morning I start the day by saying a prayer of thanks for having had such a wonderful loving father who lived a long and full life. Then I do a 15-20 minute meditation where I reflect on all the happy memories I have of him. Finally, I make sure I have a favorite photo of him out in the kitchen or living room so that while we eat or open gifts we can see his face and feel him near. He will always be loved and missed but especially so during the holidays.

Marjorie, Clarence Center, New York

After all the Christmas gifts were opened, my late husband brought out envelopes of scratch-off lottery tickets for each of us. Sitting around the kitchen table, feverishly scratching off, shouts of "I won," are still part of our Christmas tradition. I bought the tickets the first few years but now my oldest son has taken on his dad's role and treats us all to this Christmas tradition. His dad would love it that we are continuing this fun, family time that he started.

Nancy, Mosinee, WI

As my family moved closer together we are going to light candles for dad. Each year we seem to do something different. My mom had recently moved, so the tree and lights she put up on dad's table have had to find a new place.

Every year for the last couple years we have tried different things. Do whatever makes you comfortable. Memories are worth talking about with those who love and care for you.

Kim, Naples, IN

The first year without Pam we all lit a variety of candles. It really was very pretty. When we each lit our own candle we would tell a favorite story about Pam. Now we have an angel candle; and she burns bright for our holiday--kind of a quiet, gentle, but always with us presence.

Gale, Rothschild, WI

This is my 4th holiday season since the death of my husband Dan. I decided I would host the holiday dinner for my children, grandkids and my sister's family. Several years ago my daughter made me a lantern to light on special occasions and place in the area where we all gather.

I will light that lantern during our dinner; and I will mention Dan in our table prayer. I always mention him and state that I know you are with us in spirit and we miss you here, but please watch over each and everyone of us as we go through our days until we see each other again.

I think that reminds everyone at the meal that we all are still connected, even in death. And it opens the conversation so those present can also mention missing him or others who have died, without feeling uncomfortable.

Jeanette, Aniwa, WI

My husband died 22 months ago. God had a new plan for me this fall. I'm moving to Neenah. Found a wonderful condo and will be near family and dear friends. What I may be doing this holiday in remembrance is host our family Christmas for the first time ever because I'm returning home to where they have been for many years! It sounds odd, but we always went somewhere else for the Holidays because everyone lived somewhere else. Now I'm joining a few and can actually create a new celebration.

Marilyn, Wausau, WI
