

# Ten Ways to Find “Good Fortune” in Holidays and Special Days

Based on the book: *How a Fortune Cookie Can Heal Grief...Twelve Gifts of Hope*

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*So maybe the holiday or special day ahead won't be as perfect as those you can remember from the past, but it doesn't have to be.*

The Christmas tree we dragged from the woods wasn't perfect, but I didn't expect the Christmas holiday to be perfect either. The long, gangly branches made the tree seem awkwardly out of balance. It was fat at the bottom and too skinny at the top. One of our guests during the holiday commented, "I can't believe you paid for that tree," with a teasing snicker.

Gramps would have liked the tree with wide spaces between the limbs. He always believed a bird should be able to fly through the tree. He didn't believe anything should be perfect. Little flaws were normal and good! It was definitely a "Charlie-Brown" tree—and we hand-picked it to grace our room last year. Maybe we purposely chose it because this year our family was again one-person-less, and our expectations for a perfect Christmas were already sabotaged. So what is all the fuss about to find the perfect tree, the perfect gift, or brag about the perfect holiday?

After the death of our son, so many years ago, it seemed no holiday could ever match up to those when we were all together. Over the years, I have learned so much more about my expectations for this highly-celebrated holiday. It isn't about a perfect tree, a perfect gift, or a perfect day. It's all about enjoying the moment and finding "good fortune" in the family and friends who are there to share it with you.

From my book, *How a Fortune Cookie Heals Grief, I'm sharing Ten Ways to Find "Good Fortune" in the Holidays*. Each of the ten ways brings hope by making the holiday more acceptable; if not perfect...better than you imagined.

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**1.** Holidays and special days repeat themselves. Be prepared, because when this holiday is over, another one follows shortly after. Prior to our loss, we may never have realized how many designated holidays and special days there are in a calendar year. For a period of time, after the loss of a loved one, it seems we are constantly anticipating how to adjust for the next "event." You may think you have it all figured out, but just when you think you have all the kinks out of the uncomfortable traditions and the holiday is history, another special day is about to happen. Then we have new challenges and new obstacles that confront us and demand equal attention. That's when it is appropriate to recognize that you have to plan ahead for each event, individually, and for those family and friends involved. Anticipate the emotional reactions of everyone who may attend. Each had different relationships and memories with the deceased and may expect something other than what you have planned. Your good fortune may be in your wise planning in advance to provide for a smooth event.

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**2.** Recognize that you may have conflicting thoughts about your obligations. Each of us weighs the value of events and social obligations differently. What you consider important or unimportant may differ from those hosting the event or special occasion. Sometimes it's hard to keep everyone involved happy. You may wish to avoid social interactions because it's more comfortable for you. Consider other family members and make an effort to communicate your feelings in advance of the anticipated event. It may

be your good fortune to ascertain if not attending is reasonable or if an acceptable compromise should be made. Talking to the host/hostess can produce viable alternatives such as limiting the time you are present, having an excuse for departure, providing your own transportation, and limiting your involvement. Obligations and expectations are easier to satisfy when everyone understands your actions.

- 3.** Evaluate and modify traditions that hurt. In the past, it may have been your good fortune to have time-honored family traditions, ceremonies and rituals that were always part of a “perfect holiday.” Life changes force us to evaluate how some traditions may affect us as we adjust to new situations. This is not limited to the death of a loved one, but may also include divorce, students who are away at college, or elderly parents. It may be wise from year to year, to evaluate and modify traditions to fit the new circumstances of family and extended family. Some traditions may be too painful to continue at all. Bottom-line, remember the number one rule about following traditions: If it hurts, change it. If not, keep it. You can always change things again a few years from now.
- 4.** Keep company with “good fellows.” True “good fortune” is to have friends and acquaintances who can be present to your life changes and be with you just as you are...in grief or in joy. These are the people in our lives who provide encouragement, positivity, and feel good to be around. Spend your time with them and know how blessed you are!
- 5.** Use ritual to honor memories. Ritual is a symbol that expresses what can’t always be put into words. Holidays are an excellent time to practice rituals that acknowledge and remember your loved one who died. Rituals may be simple, but heartfelt, like lighting a candle. Find a way to acknowledge how fortunate you are to have known this person who was a part of your life.
- 6.** Do your grief work actively. Healing grief doesn’t happen all by itself. The process of grieving appears to come naturally, but to fully incorporate this loss into your life and move from your painful loss to healing mourning requires “work.” Sometimes this happens best by becoming involved with others who are going through similar experiences. This is a great time to consider learning more about grief. Join a support group or grief education class.
- 7.** Focus on what you have...not on what you have lost. Sometimes we are so consumed by the death that we forget to remember the treasure of living that our loved one brought into our lives. Your loved one will always be a part of who you are and what you become because of your experience. Value his or her special characteristics. Tell their stories and remember their spirit! No one can take his or her place in your memories. But, when life must go on without him or her, it can be soothed by counting the blessings you have with those who are still living.
- 8.** Give yourself the GIFT OF HOPE. “In a world of sadness and grief, hope is the spark of sanity that allows us to look at something differently and imagine the bright spot.” Our lives are built on “hope.” Everyone can have it. It’s imagining something better than it may have been. It’s believing that bad things will stop and good things will come forth in our lives. It’s seeing the rainbow after the storm. It’s finding something to smile about. Each of us has the ability to create hope just by looking for the small gifts we are given every day.
- 9.** Recognize and accept the “gifts” that others may be trying to give you. Find good fortune in people who are reaching out to you in an effort to be compassionate or helpful. It’s easy to overlook this when we are grieving. It might be that unexpected social invitation that you dismissed. The flowers on your desk at work. The phone call to check up on how you are doing. The pie your neighbor baked for you. Maybe the lawn mower that got fixed when you didn’t know what to do. Our family and friends may be trying to help us, but we just don’t see it for what it is worth. People care, and people genuinely want to reach out. It’s okay to ask for help and accept help from others. Acknowledge their concern and appreciate the little gestures of caring.
- 10.** Celebrate small victories. A small victory is the satisfaction of completing something you didn’t want to do or achieving a goal you have set. Getting out of bed on some days may be the victory you achieved. But every day can have at least a small victory in it. You may surprise yourself at something you did that you didn’t think you could manage. Grief is a challenge. And you may feel you have more challenges than you can manage, but you don’t have to face them alone. Good fortune is found in the small victories and miracles we accomplish every day! Count them as small steps to greater gains.

So maybe the holiday or special day ahead won’t be as perfect as those you can remember from the past, but it doesn’t have to be. The fact that you got up this morning and remembered someone special in your life creates the perfect beginning to your attitude for the rest of the day. Your life was enriched by his or her presence. You are who you are because of his or her influence. You have people who care about you whether they are friends you can name or those who are nameless, at the moment, waiting to become a part of your existence. Perfect means: “at peace with your world today, at comfort with the problems of yesterday, and the anticipation of hope in tomorrow.”



May you find:  
FORTUNES in gifts of kindness.  
MEMORIES to soothe the moments.  
LOVE to fill your heart.  
PEACE to soothe your spirit.