

Christmas and the Holidays

By Sheila Munafo-Kanoza

For many when we hear the word “Christmas,” it signifies that the holidays are arriving: that there is so much that still needs to be done. For those of us who grieve, the word “Christmas” stands out as the bold reminder of yet another hurdle we must endure in our journey of grief. Your sense of being out of step with the rest of the world may intensify during this time.

Life changes with the death of a loved one: and the celebrations of the holidays are different. For many you may wish that you could go to bed and wake up the day after Christmas. But I assure you that whatever you do Christmas and the Holidays will still be there.

It is important to address your grief issues in some practical way and concrete way. It is important to remember that Christmas and the Holidays may be different but it is also important for you to recognize that you do have a choice on how you allow it to effect you.

“Christmas is a time to give of yourself and to yourself.”

Do what you think will be comfortable for you. Remember, you can always choose something different this year and do things differently next year.

If you find it comforting to talk about your loved one, let your family and friends know; share with them not to be afraid to mention your loved one by their name. It is not unusual for family and friends to be afraid to talk about their loved one who has died for fear of causing hurt or pain.

You need to take the step and be the ice breaker. The memories shared create a **Power of Connection**. “The memories that we hold deep within our hearts and souls are ours forever;” when we share our memories with each other you will find a peace that comes and you may feel your loved ones presence.

Relive pleasant memories: Light a candle in memory of your loved one, say their name and recall happy holiday memories and rituals. Celebrate the holidays, change them, and make new memories that flow from the old ones. Bring some of your childhood memories into this holiday season for this might create the energy of the new.

“Memories are the Power of Connection and Communication.”

After the death of a loved one many of us discover that we have little control over anything. But what we do have control over is how we respond. We must remember that we are not the only person in our families or our circle of friends who is grieving. And that just because one person died it doesn't mean that we have to die our loved one's death is enough.

- Keep in mind that sometimes the anticipation of an event can be more difficult than the event itself. Remember Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza, Holidays, Birthdays and Everyday all have one thing in common and that is **they all last 24 hours**. So break the days down, hour to hour, minute to minute whatever you feel you can handle.
- Our minds can be our greatest source of strength or they can be a greatest enemy. It can take us to depths that we may never go yet in a way we do for we have to go deep within in order to heal we have to feel our pain we have to move through our grief not around our grief. When you see yourself going to deep allow your mind to take you to a happy place; “remembering a special memory can give us a **power of connection** to our loved one.”
- I see grief like this; we had a physical relationship with our loved our lives were intertwined and their death left us with a giant hole with all of our interconnections being blown apart by their death, we have to find ways to mend our interweaving, as we do things they will help knit the pieces back together but there will always be that hole where that their loved filled as it will never be completely filled. So we do what we have to, to mend our hearts and souls.
- Communication is important--Talk things over with your family. Remember that family members may feel differently than you about continuing the family’s holiday traditions. Try to talk openly with each other about your expectations. Make changes according to the wishes of those who are hurting most.

The power of communication is so important.

Plan in advance where to spend the holidays:

- Balance Solitude with sociability: Being alone can help renew our strength but being with the right friends and family can also be supportive. Try to attend holiday events and enjoy them if you can. Having a good time is not a betrayal of your loved one, nor is it a denial of your grief and loss.
- Consider whether you want to be with your family and friends for the holiday, or whether it would be more healing for you to be by yourself or go away (this year).
- Some survivors find it comforting to acknowledge the holidays, birthdays or special days of their loved ones by a Creating a special Gift Giving to give to someone less fortunate in memory of your loved one.
- Set aside some “letting go” time: Set aside some time for crying, for writing down your thoughts and feelings or for talking to your loved one.
- Above all, bear in mind that there is no "right" way to handle holidays, anniversaries, or birthdays. You and your family may decide to try several different approaches before finding one that feels best for you.

For me the **“First”** Christmas for my children and I without their father, Vince, brought a different type of grieving. I wanted to remember Vince, but I was **“afraid”** of the pain of not having him here. Christmas had been the time of year we all truly loved. Vince loved to

buy and decorate for Christmas. Christmas mornings at our home, was like a winter wonderland. It put a twinkle in all of our eyes. A twinkle that I knew would never be again.

Our relationship with our loved one's does not end when they die it simply changes; We go from a physical relations, limbo (your grief), to a spiritual relationship.

For me it was a time that I couldn't dwell on what I didn't have, instead I had to look at what I did have. I had three children, parents, siblings and friends who loved me and who needed my help my permission to help them experience a **Christmas that would be full of love**. It was getting back to the basics of giving, thanking, remembering, visiting someone who's lonely that brought the spirit of the Christmas Season back into our lives.

The hustle and the bustle of the SEASON can trigger many feelings, emotions and anxiety, mix it with grief and it can be quite overwhelming.

- Slow down, listen to your heart and look through the eyes of Jesus. Go back and remember the blessings and the special memories of the Christmas past.
- Take an inventory of what it was that you loved and what was it that you didn't love. Get rid of what bogged you down.
- Communicate, take the time to let people know your needs, but take the time to listen to what their needs are. If you have children talk with them, share your ideas with them and ask them what it is that they would like to do. You may want Christmas one way but is your way the way it needs to be for everyone one around you??? Remember Scrooge.
- Simplify; give yourself permission to do this.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help or accept help. Remember it is in giving that we receive. The gift you may give someone is allowing them to help you.
- If you cannot decorate or send cards that's okay but still find a way to share the light of your love with others.
- If you want your loved one to be remembered then you might have to be the one to say their name. I can guarantee that your loved one is on everyone's mind and they are looking at you to take the lead.
- If you've lost a child and want your child to be remembered communicate with your family that you would like your child to be remembered.
- A simple letter, a simple phone call, a simple smile are gifts from the heart that will be cherished forever.

- And if you're a family member or a close friend please know that we really need your love and support and we need for you to remember our loved ones now and forever.

CHRISTMAS itself is to remember the gift of our Lord. Allow the light of our God to be seen through you.

I want you to read and listen to the words of this poem.

What is Death?

Death is nothing at all.
I have only slipped away into the next room.
I am I and you are you.
Whatever we were to each other,
that we still are.

Call me by my old familiar name.
Speak to me in the easy way
which you always used.
Put no difference in your tone.
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed
at the little jokes we enjoyed together.
Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.
Let my name be ever the household word
that it always was.
Let it be spoken without affect,
without the trace of a shadow on it.

Life means all that it ever meant.
It is the same that it ever was.
There is absolutely unbroken continuity.
Why should I be out of mind
because I am out of sight?

I am waiting for you,
for an interval,
somewhere very near,
just around the corner.

All is well.
~ *Henry Scott Holland*

In closing I want you to take the time you need to go deep within your heart and soul and cherish what has meant the most to you in your life. I want you to think of those who have come and gone and I want you to think about the love that you have surrounding you at this very minute.

Is there someone who you need to forgive, or that you wish you could say I love you to? Life is a precious gift; for we know not the hour nor the day. So live today to the fullest so that we live no regrets.

As we journey through our grief, we look at all the missed opportunities that we wish we could have said I love you one more time. Let's not look back but forward and let's make that most of the time we have letting those who are with us now know how much they mean to us. Take the time to share the precious memories of your lives.

Our wish for you is a moment, when least expected, and when you need it most that that someone will say to you Merry Christmas.

This Christmas, do a **FIRST**,

- Don't put more stress into your life,
- Don't worry about making it perfect,
- Don't worry about all the cards and all the parties or about what everyone else wants you to do.
- Instead, do something for yourself.
- Discover what blessings remain in your life and enjoy the **firsts**.
- The memories you create will be as precious as the ones created from the Christmas of the past.
- Remember the most precious gifts from God is our loved ones; those with us, and those who have been called home by God. Take the time to see what God has given to you.