

## Life after Loss...'Celebrating' the Holidays

**['Life after loss - How to celebrate the holidays' - article printed in *Lansing State Journal/Towne Courier* 11.27.11]**

With the holidays upon us, there may be some in your life that wish the season would just go away or zoom right past them. That's how you may feel if you are in the midst of a gut-wrenching grief process after experiencing a traumatic or major loss.

The holidays are supposed to be full of singing, laughter, joy and children. Yet, those grieving cannot even fathom the holiday cheer, especially if this is the 1st season without your child or loved one. Family and friends may encourage you to 'let go' of your loved one or get 'over it' so everyone can move on and celebrate.

Yet, grief, at any time of year, is not a matter of 'letting go' or something to 'get over' ~ although that's what some may believe is needed in order for you to find joy again. They want you to get back to your old self so they don't feel so uncomfortable in your presence. It's understandable, but it doesn't make it any easier for those grieving. Grief is hard...and many just don't know what to say or do.

If you have ever experienced a major loss in your life, whether it is through death or another cause, then you KNOW that feeling of others around you not knowing how to deal with the intensity and length of your grief. So they may offer all kinds of suggestions for you to get done with your process. Unfortunately grief doesn't have a definite timetable and depending on the type of loss and other factors, it can be a very long time before you feel you have somewhat processed and integrated your loss.

So if you are not 'in the spirit' this year whether it's your 1st holiday season or not, that's okay. Give yourself permission to do something different, even if others urge you to participate in the same traditions of years past.

You have a right to make your own choices...and that may include doing absolutely nothing or possibly creating a new ritual for yourself or your family. The point is it's **YOU** making that decision, not others.

It's not about being in denial, but more of taking a time-out for awhile so you can decide how you'd like to eventually acknowledge and celebrate your loved one's eternal and spiritual life. And just because they are no longer here physically doesn't mean you have to 'let go' of them ~ in fact, cherishing all the endearing love and memories of their life, no matter how short or long, will ultimately lead you to 'healing your fractured heart' over time and in your own way.

So wherever you are in your grief process...I wish you a blessed and healing holiday season.

Deb Lee Gould, MEd  
Bereaved Parent & Grief Consultant  
Okemos, MI  
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