

H.O.P.E.

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H.O.P.E.

Helping Overcome and Provide Encouragement

HOME ALONE: Dealing with the holidays when a loved one has died

Harold, married 46 years to his high school sweetheart, was widowed in August. His wife, who had always been in the best of health, died suddenly and unexpectedly from an aneurism. With the holidays approaching, Harold confided in a good friend saying, "I'd love to hibernate from the end of November until the middle of January."

When a loved one has died, the holidays can be very difficult. Many grievers, like Harold, dread this time of year. Yet, a little thought and planning can ease those feelings.

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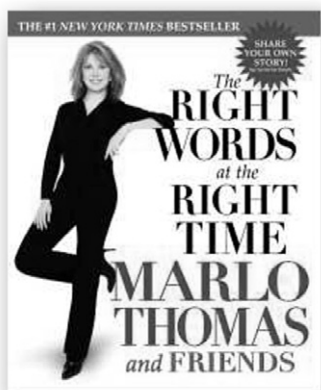
Dear friends,

Amy, an eight-year-old girl, was admitted to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. She had a very rare cancer of the brain and spine, and doctors did not believe she was going to make it. Her

mother, wanting to balance that negative prognosis, spoke gently to her daughter saying: "Cancer is a very powerful word, Amy, but there's an even more powerful word. That word is *love*, and you're surrounded by



it. That's why you're going to get well." Her daughter did, indeed, recover.



That story is told by actress Marlo Thomas, in her book *The Right Words at the Right Time*, and it shows the positive power which words and images can have on us. For those struggling with grief, it may be worth considering that story more deeply and trying to apply it to the grief journey. Here are some ways to do that.

You can say to yourself...

- "Death is a very powerful word, but there is an even more powerful word. That word is *love*, and I am surrounded by loving family, friends, neighbors, colleagues."
- "Grief is a very powerful word, but there is an even more powerful word. That word is *resilience*, and I am filled with resilience. I will make the journey through grief becoming better, not bitter."
- "Loneliness is a very powerful word, but there is an even more powerful word. That word is *friendship*, and I am fully capable of reaching out to old friends and new friends who can help offset loneliness."
- "Fear is a powerful word, but there is an even more powerful word. That word is *courage*, and I am courageous enough to take all the necessary steps in order to overcome grief."



HOME ALONE: Dealing with the holidays when a loved one has died

(continued from front page)

Here are 21 tips for managing the holiday season when there has been a loss to death.

1. Do what feels right.

Understand there is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holidays after a loved one has died. You can do it the same as always, or you can change your traditions.

2. Have a family conference.

Talk with your family about the best way to celebrate this year.

3. Plan how you will shop.

Some find it impossible to be in malls where they will see festive shoppers and hear holiday music. If that's your case, you can make holiday purchases from catalogs and through the Internet.

4. Light a memorial candle daily to remember your loved one.

If inclined, let the candle also be a reminder for you to offer a brief prayer for all those who are grieving during the holiday.

5. Donate money.

Give the amount you would have spent on gifts for your deceased loved one to a charity in his/her name.

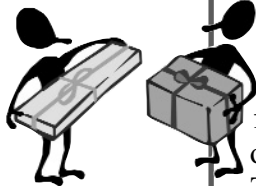
6. Purchase a gift for your loved one.

Donate it to his/her favorite charity.

7. Volunteer.

The holiday season is a wonderful time to help others.

The Salvation Army, Red Cross and other civic organizations are always in need of more help this time of year.



8. Eliminate unnecessary stress.

Try to find the balance between over-extending yourself and completely isolating yourself.

9. Be with supportive, comforting people.

Identify family members, friends and relatives with whom you are comfortable and who will allow you to be yourself. Spend a lot of time in their presence.

10. Deliberately say the name of the person who died.

Sometimes, family and friends will avoid talking about your deceased loved one for fear of further upsetting you. Be the one to bring up his/her name.

That way you let others know you want and need to talk about him/her.

11. Express your faith.

Attend as many services as possible during the holiday. Being with others engaged in the act of worship can be a great source of healing, comfort and insight.

12. Nurture yourself.

Do what you need to do during the holidays to maintain balance in your life. If you need to rest more, then rest. If you need to get away for a few days, then get away.

13. Don't try to do everything yourself.

The holidays are already demanding with more shopping, cooking, cleaning, entertaining, etc. Let family and friends assist you.

14. Lower your expectations.

Avoid striving for the "perfect" holiday.

15. Fill the empty chair with someone else.

One mother said she didn't know how she would get through holiday dinners because

her son had been killed in an auto accident. "The idea of an empty chair terrified me," she recalled. Her solution was to fill the chair with someone else. "Granddad came for Thanksgiving. A widowed friend came on Christmas Eve. A student who couldn't go home came on Christmas day."

16. Identify the joy in your life.

Even though you are grieving and have experienced a huge loss, try to identify the good which remains in your life. Make a list of the positives and review them with a grateful heart.

17. Don't forget that others have been down the grief path over the holidays.

Find them and seek out their counsel. What they have learned can help you.

18. Consider doing something very different on your first holiday without your loved one.

One man decided to work on Christmas, giving his coworker a wonderful opportunity to spend the holiday with his family.

19. Cry, but don't let the tears ruin the entire holiday.

Let yourself cry when you need to. You may be surprised how good it feels and how easily you can continue on after shedding some tears.

20. Be flexible.

Don't set plans in stone. Let things change, evolve when necessary.

21. Plan something you can look forward to after the holidays.

This can be a reward for getting through the holiday season.

