



THE CARE COURIER



Holidays 2024, Vol 10 Issue 5

When you are grieving during the holidays, you may want to run and hide, binge-watch movies, drink and eat all the celebratory treats. You will find yourself crying both happy and sad tears. You may want to skip the whole thing. But frankly, holidays can't be avoided. What are some helpful things to remember to get you to January 2, 2025?

GRIEVING WITH RUDOLPH AND HIS SHINY NOSE

The television version of *Rudolph Red-Nosed Reindeer* probably wouldn't be produced these days in the way it was decades ago. It's harsh. Losing a loved one is harsh, but there is always hope. Consider a little vulnerable reindeer with a bright shiny nose who faces shame, isolation and denial of his gift. Rudolph must journey through his pain, face misunderstanding, and join with others to create a new identity as the hero of his own story. Ultimately, all the naysayers, including Santa and the reindeer discover what they misunderstood or avoided was a gift for the whole community.

For this article, let's consider your grief as a shiny red nose and see what lessons we can glean as we enter into the Reindeer games of the holidays.

Quest: *Healing grief is a long arduous journey, one step at a time*

Rudolph early on learns that life is not fair, and the journey is not easy. Like Rudolph, you will get through it, facing many things you did not expect. Along the way, you will discover you have what it takes, even if you don't feel like it right now. Holidays are overwhelming when you are grieving. You have permission to make your own way. You may decide to simplify or take a break from all the hustle and bustle. You may decide to throw yourself into it all and have fun with the kids. Just be honest with yourself and others. Enjoy good food and all the traditions. Feel the feelings and tell stories about your loved one. Laugh and cry. This holiday, remember to pace yourself and take breaks. A quest is a marathon, not a sprint.

Ignorance: *Others didn't know what to do with Rudolph's shiny nose*

Ignorance is simply a lack of knowledge or information. Recognizing ignorance allows you to have compassion for those around you. Rudolph's father, the reindeer, and even Santa didn't understand anything about Rudolph when they saw his shiny nose. They had no experience which fostered unrealistic and uncaring expectations. What you are going through is raw and real and until someone loses a loved one, they don't understand what you are going through. Even if they have lost someone, their words may sting even if they mean well. Your grief is unique; the words "I know exactly how you feel," can never be true even if the person is trying to show empathy. Only you know the depth of your relationship and your loss. Losing a spouse is very different than losing a parent, losing a child, or losing someone to suicide, each of these embodies unique issues. It can be helpful to nod, thank a person for their kindness, and give grace to yourself, saying, "They are clueless and don't know any better, just like me before I lost my loved one."

Identity: *Be true to yourself*

Like Rudolph, you can't hide your "shiny nose" right now. Your grief is so blinding and revealing, causing some to demand you to cover it with mud and disguise it. It makes others uncomfortable. Is anyone telling you to "move on," or "just try to be happy?" Have you heard, "I thought you had faith. He/she is in heaven, in a better place and out of pain?" That may be true, but you are here on earth wishing they were sitting with you or going out to look at lights!

Yet, you may be telling yourself the same things. Remember poor Rudolph could barely breathe. So it is when we stuff down the glare of our grief. Recognize that it's ok to feel anything you are feeling. If you start to feel happy at times, that's okay. No guilt. ***There is power in the word "and." You will feel happy and sad. Lonely and enjoying people. Energized and tired. Focused and Foggy. Again, it's okay. You aren't going crazy. This is just how it will be for a while. Be true to yourself.*** Continued on pg 2

Allies: Surround yourself with understanding people

Clarisse, the doe who charms Rudolph, so he flies sky-high is the heroine. She sees who Rudolph truly is. She sees the bright shiny nose and is not threatened by it. She encourages Rudolph to be his true self. When he goes missing, she takes risks to find him. She believes in him when others don't. Who do you want around you this holiday season? "Phone A Friend" and share a cup of coffee. A true ally listens and refrains from unwanted advice. Clarify your needs, but also ask about their lives too.

Deniers: Realize that not everyone can handle your grief

This is not Santa's best moment. Santa has high expectations of his reindeer and Rudolph is isolated by him and the other reindeer. There will be those who will avoid you by not inviting you to their reindeer games. Some can only handle happy things. They just can't deal with it all. "Ghosting" even by the nicest of "friends" is not uncommon. They might circle back later and if you truly like them, just do fun or interesting things that give you a break from your grief. Some will even later admit that they just didn't know how to handle it, or that they were dealing with so many other things in their personal life and couldn't give you the love you deserved. Be gracious, keep the friendship, or just let them go. I'm glad Santa came around in the end!

Abominable Monster: Face your fears and hurts to heal your heart

The monster terrorized because of an infected tooth. Hermey the Elf pulls it out, bringing relief, and restoration. We all harbor traumas and fears we believe will destroy us. Yet when we face them, even hold them gently, even the scariest can be tamed. When we do, we gain strength even using them to our advantage. Once healed they give us a fresh compassionate perspective about ourselves and others.



How do you do this? By being honest with yourself. Grief opens all old wounds. Unresolved festering memories and emotions may surface, especially during the holidays. Consider talking to a compassionate confidential friend, counselor or pastor.

I'm sure the monster felt pain when the tooth was pulled, yet it was temporary and gave relief for the rest of his life. Some of us stuff down the pain; I offer this from personal experience: For those festering memories, the balm your heart needs is most likely forgiveness, for yourself and others. Take this Christmas to give yourself the gift of forgiveness, even if you do it with clenched teeth at first.

Forgiveness is a decision. We can forgive even when we don't feel like it, even if the anger/hatred/resentment is justified. It's a decision to let go of what is poisoning your own soul. If it is helpful, write a "letter" to that person (even if they've been dead for years), don't edit your feelings, just get it out! ALL of it! You can rip it up, even burn it. Give it to God. Try the words of Jesus from the cross: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." At Christmas we celebrate that God's love came to earth in the flesh to bring peace to all humankind.

Whether you are a believer or not, reach out, that love is there. The day will come when your unburdened heart heals, and you too will put the star on your Christmas tree!

Kindred Spirits: Consider joining a grief group

Hermey the Elf and Misfit Toys faced misunderstanding and rejection. Holidays are loving and joyful, right? Not when you're suffering from a broken heart and feel that you just "don't fit in." Often griever tell me they have their friends and family to help them. They do. But along the way they discover that in the wake of death, they need a safe place to deal with the issues that arise with family and friends! There are others like you, beautiful, and viable but struggling with their grief-filled challenges. There is power, relief, and healing when we join with those who can truly understand. It is empowering to find a place where you are with people who accept your feelings and truly listen. People who "get it." ***Know this: it's not a cry-fest. Often there is laughter as we share stories. Some even make life-long friendships!***

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WRITTEN IN THE HOSPITAL

We may have seen this poem elsewhere, often just bits of it. But do you know the story behind it? A grieving mother Wanda Bencke shares: "Lysandra Kay Bencke was my thirteen-year-old handicapped daughter. On Christmas day 1997, Lysandra had a seizure and was in a coma for five days before she died. During those five days I wrote the poem "Christmas in Heaven."



CHRISTMAS IN HEAVEN

*I see the countless Christmas trees
Around the world below,
With tiny lights,
like heaven's stars,
Reflecting on the snow.*

*The sight is so spectacular,
Please wipe away that tear.
For I'm spending Christmas
With Jesus Christ this year.*

*I hear the many Christmas songs,
That people hold so dear,
But the sounds of music can't compare,
With the Christmas choir up here.*

*For I have no words to tell you,
The joy their voices bring.
For it is beyond description,
To hear an angel sing.*

*I can't tell you of the splendor,
Or the peace here in this place.
Can you just imagine Christmas,
With our Savior, face to face?*

*I'll ask Him to light your spirit,
As I tell Him of your love.
So then pray for one another,
As you lift your eyes above.*

*Please let your heart be joyful,
And let your spirit sing.
For I'm spending Christmas in Heaven,
And I'm walking with the King!*

*I know how much you miss me;
I see the pain inside your heart.
But I'm not so far away,
We really aren't apart.*

*So be happy for me, dear ones,
You know I hold you dear,
And be glad I'm spending Christmas
With Jesus Christ this year.*

*I send you each a special gift
From my heavenly home above.
I send you each a memory
Of my undying love.*

*After all, "love" is the gift,
More precious than pure gold.
It was always most important
In the stories Jesus told.*

*Please love and keep each other
As my Father said to do,
For I can't count the blessings
Or the love He has for you.*

*So have a Merry Christmas and
Wipe away that tear.
Remember I'm spending Christmas
With Jesus Christ this year!*

© 1999 by Wanda Bencke

SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays will never be the same, accepting you can't recreate the past. But you can prepare for the future. By being proactive you can protect your heart, prevent being blindsided, while preserving meaningful traditions and the values that underlie all the festivities. Take some time alone and with those who share the holiday to consider personal energy and expectations.

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION

Grief taps your physical and emotional energy. What can you truly handle this season? Be honest with yourself and others. Whether that is traveling, organizing, shopping, cooking meals decorating, baking or serving others, you have permission to revamp the usual. Remember, it's just for this year, next year you can reassess. To avoid misunderstandings and create unity, ask your family to join you weeks ahead so you can coordinate roles and responsibilities.

RECOGNIZE YOUR VALUES

Yes, everything will be different but consider the values you cherish that undergird your traditions. Family, Comfort, Friendship, Laughter, Togetherness, Home, Faith, Service, Remembrance, Legacy, Giving, Generosity, or Feasting? What else? Let each person share, even the children to understand that these things are never lost in the midst of the revamping you may choose in the wake of the death.

MAKE A LIST

List all the tasks done in November and December. From sending cards, hanging lights, to carving the roast beast like the Grinch, be specific. What extra events did you enjoy? Christmas pageant, drive around and look at decorations, concerts, parties? What traditions in opening presents, or sharing the meal, who says the prayer?

WHO DOES WHAT?

As you look at the list, write next to it who has been responsible for it. Circle anything your loved one did. If your husband always said the prayer, roasted the turkey on the grill, or did the drove the grandkids to see the lights, If you wish for that tradition to continue, who will step in? Ensure that one person doesn't take on the burden.

CLARIFY, SIMPLIFY, RELEASE

Recognizing that you can hold onto the values while simplifying will let you clarify which events are most important to continue this year. Highlight traditions that are absolutely necessary and that you will enjoy. Put a line through anything that stresses you. You don't have to do it all. Let go of expectations, don't allow anyone to guilt you into things yet all may need to compromise. Talk about what you can and cannot do this year. It's okay if you order pizza and do activities with the kids. It will be both happy and sad. It's okay.

MAKE A FINAL PLAN

Write or print, send copies or emails once everyone's agreed. Well done!

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- **“Failure will never overtake me if my determination to succeed is strong enough.”**
- **“Things work out best for those who make the best of how things work out.”**
- **“It hurt because it mattered.”**
- **“Positive thinking will let you do everything better than negative thinking will.”**

COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS

Others care about you. Your clarity helps them respect your boundaries and understand your needs.

WRITE A LETTER

Everyone will ask how you are doing, why not let them know ahead of time? Let them know your feelings and experiences. It is helpful for them to know what to expect when they see you. Share what they can do or say that fosters comfort. Share what does not comfort. Offer specific things they can do if they wish to help. Be yourself, keep it simple, there's no right or wrong way to do this. Send a letter or email, even bring some copies with you.

H. Norman Wright offers this sample letter in the GriefShare.org workbook *Surviving the Holidays*:

"As you know, I'm going into this holiday without my _____. I don't want to ruin the holidays for everyone else, but to be honest, I have no holiday cheer. I won't isolate myself this holiday, but I will probably excuse myself early from get-togethers or spend time alone in a different room. I don't feel like talking much.

I'm going to cry. A lot. And probably in the middle of your party. My tears are necessary for my healing and recovery, so don't be embarrassed by them. Pat my shoulder, give me a brief hug, and let me know you are praying for me, and you are there. Words are not necessary.

Please talk about my loved one. It would hurt me so much if you avoid speaking his/her name. I like to hear stories and memories about him/her.



My energy level is going to be low this season. I can't do everything I used to do. If someone is available to help me with some home and holiday tasks, that would be appreciated. Specifically, I need someone to help me put up and take down a small tree. I could stand help with some housework too (I can't seem to keep up with it). While I would appreciate help with some specific tasks, please don't try to take over my healing or offer advice.

Thank you for caring about me and praying for me. Your love and concern is a comfort." (page 16-17)

If you wish to be more social, you can include a request to help you to get out of the house and attend a show, concert, Christmas pageant, craft show, or join forces to make cookies, or help you decorate. What would you like to do with a friend this holiday? Be sure to share you don't want to be alone and would like company. Offer your home, but also let them know not to hesitate to invite you if they are so inclined.

Let them know you'd appreciate a listening ear, and their comfort, but to not offer advice, but to keep their words few at this time. Make sure they know you care about them and want to listen to them too.

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"Christmas will always be as long as we stand heart to heart and hand in hand."

—Dr. Seuss

"Remembrance, like a candle, burns brightest at Christmastime."

— Charles Dickens

PRAY FOR PEACE ON EARTH

This Christmas, national and global grief permeates the world. Let us pray for true peace in a world full of divisiveness, violence, and unrest.

Let us pray for our military, first responders, and all who are called to protect and provide in times of devastation. Let us pray for their families who are missing them this Christmas.

And let us pray for all the families, globally, who are mourning for the innocent who get caught in the crossfire. I offer you one of my favorite hymns. I hope it comes true and that someday the entire world will have a Silent Night.



THIS IS MY SONG

*This is my song
O God of all the nations,
A song of peace for lands afar and mine.
This is my home, the country where my heart is.
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine.*

*But other hearts in other lands are beating
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.
My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,
And sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine.
But other lands and sunlight too and clover.
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
Oh hear my song, O God of all the nations.
A song of peace for their land and for mine.*

(Lyrics: Lloyd Stone, Melody: Finlandia)

WINTER IS COMING...BE PREPARED

It's Iowa, and that means snow, freezing temperatures, and the threat of power outages, even grid interference. Often our loved one took care of the following. Make a plan with family and check your list twice! The camping section in stores has helpful items to heat food. Be sure to add comforting and indulgent treats to eat during the long winter's night!

- Water – one gallon/person/day
- Food – several days of nonperishable (nut butters, canned food (soup)
- Paper dishes, Plastic utensils
- Paper towels
- Toilet paper
- Battery powered, solar or hand crank radio
- Flashlights, Lantern and Batteries
- Sleeping bag and warm blankets
- First Aid Kit
- Whistle to Signal for help
- Dust Mask
- Moist toiles, garbage bags for sanitation
- Wrench, pliers to turn off utilities
- Portable Power Bank to charge phone etc.
- Cell phone charger
- Cash, small bills and large bills
- Keep prescriptions filled
- Keep gas tank filled
- Eyeglasses and solution
- Pet food and treats
- Soap and Hand Sanitizer
- Personal Hygiene products, adult and child
- Books, Games, Art Supplies....

Pay It Forward: *Let your light shine*

While you may feel like isolating, or recuperating, consider who can use the gifts that you have. Do you enjoy baking? Perhaps you know another who could use a little company along with your gingerbread cookies. Are you good at outside decorating? Who could use your help putting up their decorations. Are you handy? Don't hesitate to offer to put things together, fix things! Are you techy? You can be someone's hero or heroine. Pay attention to opportunities. Who needs volunteers? Giving and sharing with others is very powerful, and it gives you a chance to put aside your own troubles for a while making a difference in the lives of others. You may think it's a small thing, but to the receiver its a huge thing! Christmas may be asking you to be a gift to others. ***Even in the midst of grief, you may even find yourself consoling others, leading them through their fog, just like Rudolph, your shiny nose may save the day!***

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SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS IS A 2-PART WORKSHOP

Session One: November 7

Session Two: November 14

At Either

1:00-2:30 PM Cabin Coffee at 2040 Kimball Ave in Waterloo

5:00-6:30 PM Locke at Tower Park at 4140 Kimball Ave in Waterloo

Or Both!

Thanksgiving and Christmas will never be the same without your loved one. This two week workshop will truly help you sort through expectations, understanding what you need and make a plan with family and friends. You will receive a workbook to take home.



Holiday Humor

What do you call an obnoxious reindeer? *-Rude-olph*

Why don't we see Santa in the hospital? *Because he has private elf-care*

What do you call an elf who can dance and sing? *Elfis*

What do snowmen eat for breakfast? *Frosted Flake or Ice Crispies*

Why don't crabs celebrate Christmas? *Because they are shell-fish*

What do reindeer say before they tell a joke? *This one is gonna sleigh you!*

How did Mary and Joseph know baby Jesus weight? *He was weighed in a manger*

What Christmas dessert shouldn't you trust? *Mince spy*

How do sheep greet each other during the holiday? *Fleece Navidad*

What kind of linens do gingerbread men put on their beds? *Cookie sheets*

What should you do if your car stalls on Christmas Eve? *You get a mistletow*

What did the wisemen say after they offered up gifts of gold and frankincense? *Wait, there's myrhh*

Want to be on our mailing list? Give us a call, to join our quarterly newsletter list.

JOIN US every week!

2024 Continuous Care Support



Grief Support Daytime Meetings

TIME: 1:00—2:30 p.m.
LOCATION: Cabin Coffee, 2040 Kimball, Waterloo

Grief Support Evening Meetings

TIME: 5:00-6:30 p.m.
LOCATION: Locke at Tower Park, 4140 Kimball, Waterloo

Thursday Dates:

November 7*, 14*, 21
December 5, 12, 19
January 9, 16, 23, 30

Please feel free to bring a friend. All groups are free & open to the public. Call with questions 319-233-6138.
WEATHER ALERT: If schools are closed due to weather, the meeting is canceled.

Suicide Grief Support Meetings

TIME: 5:00-6:30 p.m.
LOCATION: Locke at Tower Park, 4140 Kimball, Waterloo

Biweekly Wednesday Dates:

November 6, 20
December 4, 18
January 8, 22

*Surviving the Holiday Workshops

- Grieving with Rudolph and his Shiny Nose
- Christmas in Heaven
- Surviving the Holidays
- Communicate Your Needs
- Pray for Peace on Earth
- This is My Song
- Winter is Coming...Be Prepared
- Dates of Continuous Care meetings

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