

Excerpts from ...

Handling the Holiday Hurts ©

By Diana Sundwall

The holidays are often difficult for anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one. This statement is especially true for parents who have had child die. For some parents the holiday with all of its rich traditions bring extra stress and pressure. Instead of being a time of comfort, togetherness, and joy, the sights, sounds, smells and holiday gatherings can bring feelings of defeat, unhappiness, meaninglessness, and worthlessness. For others Holiday Traditions and Rituals offer a way to remember their child and offers them permission to comfortably express their emotions.

Parents often talk about the expectations others have for them; the requirements placed on them, and the demands to “be back to normal” before the holidays. One mother stated, “It’s like everyone ‘needs’ me to be ok. How can I be? My daughter died on Christmas Day, I’m going to be spending my holiday thinking of her and visiting the cemetery. How can that be normal? Why would I want to go to a party that day?”

Another mother tearfully said, “The holidays are intended for children. Toy commercials and ads are everywhere. People are talking about the gifts they are going to give to their children and others. One even went so far as to ask me to find a play gym for her new baby! I find it surprising that everyone expects me to smile and never cry. They expect me to help them, and to be understanding of their wants and needs and now both families expect me to make Christmas cookies and take my turn hosting the Thanksgiving and Christmas meals. How can I be kind when they don’t even say our son’s name, they don’t talk about him, they don’t ask how we are doing, and they don’t take our feelings into consideration.”

Overcoming these types of frustrations is not easy. Parents often have difficulty making decisions regarding the holidays. Everything from holiday baking to family gatherings have changed. Be gentle with yourself, and allow yourself to do what feels right, even if others disapprove.

Give Yourself Permission to Express Your Feelings: If you feel the urge to cry, let the tears flow. Tears are healing. Scientists have proven it, tears are natural pain relievers. By giving yourself permission to grieve you are taking charge of your life and acknowledging the pain while still remember your child.

Talk About Your Feeling and Grief: Talking is the best way to work through your grief and will help to eliminate some of your pain.

Talk About Your Child: The more you say your child’s name and talk about him/her the more comfortable others will be.

Spend Time Looking At Your Pictures and Other Keepsakes: The more that you touch keepsakes and pictures the easier it is for you and others to remember your child. Don’t be afraid to look at the keepsakes and share your memories, it will help others to understand.

Play Music That You Find Comfort In: Close your eyes and take it in. Give your self a chance to rest

Participate in Carefully Selected Functions: Choose the gatherings you truly want to attend and are manageable for you. If you find it too difficult to attend for any reason, decline the invitation or limit the time that you will be attending. (Go late and/or leave early.) When declining an invitation simply state that you are not up to attending this year. Make your decisions early. Common reasons for declining or limiting an invitation include:

1. Pregnant people in attendance
2. Children of the same age in attendance
3. Anniversary dates (due dates, birthday, date of death)
4. Non-supportive people attending
5. Number of people attending
6. Simply do not want to be with those in attendance

Tailor Your Activities: Activities should be manageable for you. Be aware of your energy level and time commitment for holiday activities.

Acknowledge Your Feelings

Seek Professional Help:

Change Your Home's Environment: Making slight changes to your home can often add to your personal comfort. Leaving a soft or colored light on, lighting the fireplace, or lighting a candle can warm your home and create an atmosphere of love and may encourage a feeling of safety. The same can be said for having a quilt, afghan or other blanket that you can wrap yourself in. Weather Conditions. Cold, snowy, and rainy weather can bring anyone down. Take a walk in the snow or rain and remember how much fun it was when you were a child. If it's sunny enjoy it. Sit outside in the sunshine without your sunglasses, sit in a sunny window or take a drive. Allow yourself to do nothing but enjoy the weather.

Accept Help: Asking for help is hard to do and can be even harder to accept. If others offer to help, let them. Take a deep breath, drop your shoulders, let the tears fall, and say "okay".

Memorialize Your Child: Parents often state that they feel that others will find it inappropriate or unhealthy if they memorialize their child. Memorializing is natural and has been done for thousands of years. When you put a marker at the cemetery that is what you are doing, memorializing the person who has died. It's a way of showing respect. Below you will find suggestions of ways to memorialize your child.

Attend a remembrance ceremony such as the
IRIS Holiday Service of Remembrance

"Remembering With Love". This remembrance service has been held annually since 1993 on the First Sunday in December at 2 PM in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd on Shattuck Campus, 1000 Sumway Ave in NE Faribault Minnesota

Hang a stocking with your child's name at
home and/or at the cemetery

Light a special candle.

Say a prayer, blessing or toast at the start of the family meal or gathering mentioning your precious child and if appropriate, offering others thanks for their support

Purchase a special flower, plant, tree or wreath for your home, your holiday table, your church/synagogue, memorial service or cemetery

Decorate your child's grave or special area with anything that you would like, a Christmas tree with lights (use battery operated lights), a wreath, a toy, a candle, wind chimes, bird feeder, an ice luminary, etc.

Send holiday cards and include information
about your child

Purchase or make a special ornament

Start a collection

Purchase a precious keepsake such as a ring, necklace, or picture frame, etc. for yourself or your partner

Write a letter, a song or poem to your child telling him/her how much you love and miss them

Keep a journal

Take pictures of everything you do to remember your child. The pictures become a part of your child's keepsakes

Give someone who has helped you a gift or special card

Do for others. Some parents make a cash donation or donation of time or talent to a group that was helpful to them, others will purchase gifts for needy children or family

Create and maintain a new ritual or tradition ~ whatever that feels right

Show your compassion in memory of your child. Volunteer on Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, or Christmas Day at your local homeless shelter, food line, or community meal. Consider going Christmas Caroling in the hospital where your child was at or in a nursing home. (it can be very rewarding)

Understand that there is no right or wrong way to deal with the holidays, anniversary dates, birth dates, etc. You have to do what feels right to you, regardless of others personal feelings

Take Care of Yourself: You may feel emotionally exhausted, stressed, weak, fragile, helpless, or like a failure. Taking care of you physically and emotionally will help. Get plenty of rest, eat properly and go for a walk or some other form of exercise.

Adapting Old Holiday Traditions: Many parents feel that their extended family (your parents, siblings, cousins, etc.) traditions need to be changed or adjusted following the death of their child. Consider some of these changes:

Eating at a different time or location

Opening gifts on a different day

Attending a different worship service

Let others take over decorating the tree, making cookies and shopping, etc.

Buy the cookies and other treats instead of making them

Choose to shop online rather than venturing into the stores

Give everyone the same gift (gift cards, fruit, cookies, etc.)

If you always host the holiday meal, suggest that someone else take a turn or have it catered in a hall or church

Allow yourself the privilege to NOT attend holiday gatherings and/or parties

Follow your heart; do what feels right to you. This year "It needs to be all about you"

Shopping: can be one of the most stressful tasks of the holidays. Many bereaved parents find that they need to find a new way to complete their holiday shopping.

1. If you're comfortable with it, shop online
2. Set spending limits and make a list
3. Consider shopping with a friend, someone who is compassionate & understanding. Someone who will help you do your shopping
4. Shop early in the day or late in the evening, by doing so you will miss the crowds and the holiday music
5. Consider giving gift certificates, cash, books, CD's, DVD's or savings bonds, fruit baskets, flowers, lap blanket, etc
6. As a special surprise for the recipient, you could have the gift shipped to, or delivered to the them

Wrapping Gifts can be a stress reliever for some parents and a dreaded chore for others. If wrapping gifts is too much to handle ask for help. You may wish to consider

1. Having the store wrap the gifts
2. Asking friends to help you
3. Using gift bags
4. Look for gift wrapping tables in your local mall. These tables are often a fundraiser for youth group and churches

Holiday Cards: are nice to receive but a lot of work to send out. If you should decide to send cards consider explaining how the death of your child has affected you and how important their support is to you. Consider sending the same letter to everyone and asking for help sending them out if you need it

Baking: is another holiday tradition that maybe difficult to enjoy or can be a stress reliever. If it's too much, consider purchasing bake goods from the bakery, your local cake decorator, church group, etc. If it is a stress reliever for you, consider baking your gifts this year. Who doesn't love home made treats

The Christmas Tree: can be a heartbreaking reminder that your child is no longer with you. If you decide to put one up, consider putting up a smaller one, and/or using an artificial tree. With the artificial tree you do not have to remember to take care of it or worry about taking it down right away. If you do put up a tree consider decorating it differently.

Memorial Candles: can add to your holiday season. Many parents feel that burning a candle is a great way for them to remember their child. You may wish to purchase a special candle or use a candle that already

has a special meaning to you. Candles can be burned during your holiday meals and gatherings with or without others knowing their significance.

Anticipation: As with many things, anticipation is worse than the actual day or event. Take your time and be gentle with yourself.

Balloon Release

The Annual IRIS Balloon Release was held on Sunday October 2, 2005 at 2 pm. There were over 125 people in attendance with over 200 balloons being released. When the balloons were released they went straight north over interstate 35 W. So far we have had reports of 20 balloons found. Most of them have been found in or near the towns of Ellsworth, Bay City, Hager, Rockfalls, Heyworth, Mondovi, Durand, Wausau and Arkansaw in Eastern Wisconsin. If you have had a balloon found please let us know. If you would like to see more picture from the balloon release please visit our website www.irisremembers.com

Generous Donation From ... Creative Memories

Creative Memories Consultant, Laura Schultz has made a wonderful offer to all IRIS parents. She would like to offer a 30% discount on any one Creative Memories Scrapbook. The books come with pages and page protectors. If you would like to order a book please contact Laura by calling (507) 231-5268 and tell her that you are an IRIS parent and would like to place an order. (She will know what that means) If you would like to see a catalog, please visit the IRIS office. Thank You Laura!

IRIS Wish List

- Shipping/postal Scale
- 35 MM Film (400 or 800 speed)
- CD – R (Computer CD's)
- Baby Brush
- Baby Lotions (Sample Size)
- Baby Yarn or Sport Weight yarn in pastel colors
- Scrapbooking supplies of any kind
- Bottled Water
- Stamps
- Baby blankets and cap/bonnet's
- Sizes 4, 5, 6 and crib needed

Thank You For Your Corporate Donation

- Rice County VFW Auxiliary ~ \$25
- Northfield Area United Way ~ \$625
- United Way of Faribault ~ \$750
- Owatonna Hospital Auxiliary ~ \$500

Updated Information Removing Your Name from Mailing and Calling Lists

Beginning in 2006 telemarketers will be able to contact you on your cell phone. To stop this type of solicitation visit www.donotcall.gov You can add your name and phone numbers to the national do not call list at this website.

Having your name removed from mailing and phone lists may help decrease the amount of baby-related mail and calls that you may be receiving. Make sure that you contact all of these addresses and include all

variations that you receive mail in (Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms., full name, nickname, child's name, etc.), your address, phone number and NOW YOUR CELL PHONE NUMBER!

Direct Marketing Association
Mail Preference Service
P.O. Box 9008
Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008

Direct Marketing Association
Phone Preference Service
P.O. Box 9014
Farmingdale, NY 11735-9014

You can contact DMA by Phone: (212) 768-7277 or their website: www.dmaconsumers.org

“Comfort of Heaven”

IRIS has a very limited number of the “Comfort of Heaven” figurines (by Roman) left in the office. If you are interested in purchasing one please stop in or contact us ASAP. These darling figures can be personalized and come in a beautiful display box along with the poem When God Calls Little Children. Each figurine is \$25 plus 6.5% tax. (\$26.62 per figurine)

Support Group Meetings

IRIS Support Group Meetings are held twice each month at the IRIS office (101 Third St. NW in downtown Faribault) Meetings are informal and a wonderful place to vent your frustrations, feelings, and share emotions with other parents who understand.

Midday Meetings are held on the second (2nd) Wednesday of each month from 11 am – 1 pm

Evening Meetings are held on the fourth (4th) Tuesday of each month from 7 – 8:30 pm

Midday Meetings	Evening Meeting
Nov. 9, 2005	Nov. 22, 2005
Dec. 14, 2005	Dec. 27, 2005
Jan. 11, 2006	Jan. 24, 2006
Feb. 8, 2006	Feb. 28, 2006
March 8, 2006	March 28, 2006
April 12, 2006	April 25, 2006
May 10, 2006	May 23, 2006

Thank you for your in kind donation:

Yvonne Jacobson ~ \$20 gift certificate for North Star Seed and nursery

Pam and Jason Hoffman for a DVD Player

Beth and Dominic Dienst in Loving Memory of their daughter Lizzy Sammon Dienst ~ 9 Ty Angel Bears

Laura Schultz/Creative Memories consultant ~ donation of stickers and other scrapbooking supplies.

Anna Kincade, Ricki Danielson, Alice Smuca ~ Baby Blankets

Margaret Walker and Jessie Donahue ~

Volunteering in the IRIS Office

Joni and Tom Trotter ~ volunteering their service to maintain the IRIS website

To everyone who has been collecting Milk Moola from Kwik Trip milk and Juice, please keep up the great job!

To everyone who has been collecting old cell phones, again, please keep up the good job

Christine and Scott Allen ~ Undershirts and thank you cards given in memory of Catherine Rose Allen

Christmas Blue

By Joanne Burkey

My heart is so fragile, and I'm falling apart.
The thought of the holidays is breaking my heart.
There is no cheer to spread this year,
I just want to run away and forget I'm here.

I feel guilty and sad and full of despair.
I'm letting down everyone and it's just not fair.
Do you know the kind of pain that I feel?
I can't do it this year; I just can't deal.

So let me do this in my own way,
And then I'm sure that you will see
That because love is there inside of me,
I must endure what is meant to be.

I pray ever day, "God show me the way.
When I feel alone at night,
There's no one here to hold me tight.
I need Your help to find the path that is right."

It's been over a year, and I still cry.
Sometimes I don't even know why.
The tears, the sorrow, the pain I feel
My aching heart that will not heal.

I wonder if only there could be
One more time for you and me.
A time when God could share a place
For us to meet, face to face.

One last time to say farewell,
And know that you are safe and well.
The comfort I would then feel
Would ease my pain and help me heal.

A little flower lent not given,
to bud on earth and bloom in heaven.

In Loving memory of Alyssa Grace Trotter
Born and entered Heaven on November 14, 2002

Memorials

In Memory of my precious Great Granddaughter Amyah Lambkins
Great Grandma
(Evelyn Wetzel)

In Honor and in Loving Memory of Michael Norman Braun's First Birthday.
Mommy and Daddy ~
Jennifer and Gary Braun

In Memory of Lizzy Sammon Dienst
Love and Kisses to our little Angel Granddaughter
Grandma and Grandpa Sammon
(Linda & Tom)

With love Aunt, Uncle and Cousins
Jill, Marshall, Garrett, Dylan and Brooke Johnson
With Love Aunt and Uncle
Lisa Sammon-Roach & Tom Roach

In Memory of Mara Kolterman
Mark, Jennie, Jonah and Meredith Umbreit
Chuck and Pat Umbreit

In Loving Memory of Joseph Markman on his special birthday.
Grandma Toni & Harold Amundson

In Loving Memory of Sara Murray on her special birthday
Grandma Toni & Harold Amundson

Memorials

In Loving Memory of the precious children of our family
Lois Charbonneau

In Loving Memory of our Sweet Baby Girl who was due to be born today
(October 6, 2005)
We will always cherish her memory.
Love Mommy & Daddy
(Michele & Joe Grose)

In Memory of David Stursa
Diane and Malcolm McCorkel

The Worldwide Candle Lighting

The ninth annual Worldwide Candle Lighting, is held the second Sunday in December around the globe, it is an opportunity for bereaved families everywhere to remember and celebrate the lives of children who have gone too soon.

Cuddled in the Lord's Embrace

Author Unknown
Adapted by Jessie Donahue

Six stockings by the wall,
little footsteps in the hall.
Every year we change and grow,
add a stocking to the row.

But this year our heads are bowed:
one dear smile is missing now.
How can we have Christmas joy
without our laughing, teasing boy?

In Bethlehem, the babe's still born,
the angels sing on Christmas morn.
But just beyond, already stands
the cross: its shadow fills the land.

The cradle's there, and then the cross;
my son's my gain, and then my loss.
We shun the deaths, and love the births--
but Jesus' death gave hope to earth.

That death upon the ancient cross,
the empty tomb, the sense of loss,
turned suddenly to bright sunrise,
eternal hope for one who dies.

And now I try to understand
the wonders he knows in that land.
Does heaven ring with his great laugh?
Does his ball bounce down golden paths?

I know he's looked in Jesus' eyes,
no more his sorrows make him cry.
No more fears for him to face,
he's cuddled in the Lord's embrace.

We just dream, by the Christmas tree
of things that he can really see;
he's home for Christmas; we're away.
His joy is full this Christmas Day.

In Loving Memory of
Kilian Richard Donahue
Born December 22, 2003
Entered Heaven on December 25, 2003

Calendar of Events

November

- 22nd ~ Evening Support Group Meeting
7 – 8:30 PM
- 28th ~ Deadline to register for Holiday Service

December

- 4th ~ Holiday Service of Remembrance ~ Remembering With Love
2 PM Chapel of the Good Shepherd ~ Shattuck Campus 1000 Shumway Ave., Faribault MN
- 11th ~ The Worldwide Candle Lighting – light a candle at 7 pm in your time zone in remembrance of your child
- 14th ~ Midday Support Group Meeting
11 AM – 1 PM
- 27th ~ Evening Support Group Meeting
7 – 8:30 PM

January 2006

- 11th ~ Midday Support Group Meeting
11 AM – 1 PM
- 21st ~ Scrapbooking 9 AM – 4 PM
IRIS Office
- 24th ~ Evening Support Group Meeting
7 – 8:30 PM

February 2006

- 8th ~ Midday Support Group Meeting 11 AM – 1AM
- 18th ~ Scrapbooking 9 AM – 4 PM
IRIS Office
- 28th ~ Evening Support Group Meeting 7 – 8:30 PM
- 12th ~ IRIS Pancake Breakfast at the
American Legion in Faribault

March 2006

- 8th ~ Midday Support Group Meeting 11AM– 1PM
- 28th ~ Evening Support Group Meeting 7 – 8:30PM
- 18th ~ Scrapbooking 9 AM – 4 PM
IRIS Office

Gift from God

An angel was sent from heaven above,
A special one that would bring much love,
God knew that this precious life would be short
So he looked around for a tender heart.

He made his choice and the gift was sent
In what seemed like a moment the angel went,
Leaving treasured memories, & a heart full of pain,
A void, an abyss, tears flowed like rain.
But.....
Wait just a moment, I wish you could see,

The wonderful thing that's happened to me.
Jesus was waiting, His arms opened wide,
And he and his angels bought me inside
Such a beautiful place that I cannot describe,
A new home for me from the moment I died.

I'll wait here for you, so dry up your tears,
And go bravely on with your life free from fears.
Know that God's near you to help and to guide,
He'll never desert you, He's there by your side.
So speak to him daily from inside your heart,
And let him assure you, we're not really apart

A Christmas Card for Robbie

by Kathleen Paley Smith

It's the night before Christmas, we're all filled with joy,
Except when we think of you, little boy.

The stockings are hung by the chimney with care,
And in our hearts it's as if you were here.

My children are sleeping, in their bedrooms they lie,
But we're still filled with grief for our baby that died.

You see, this Christmas you would have been two,
But every Christmas I know we'll miss you.

As I wrap up the presents my thought are on you,
And what we'd have bought if you were here, too.

A car, a ball, a red fire truck?

Or maybe a rabbit's foot to bring you good luck.

The tree is all trimmed with bright colored balls,
And decorations hang on all of the walls.

It looks so pretty - - I wonder if you see
Your Christmas ball we've hung on the tree.

I made it for you before you were here,
Not knowing I'd hang it with eyes filled with tears.

Tomorrow is Christmas, I'll try not to be sad;
I'll count all my blessings and try to be glad,

You've not a part of our future - -
you were a part of our past

And someday I know we'll be together at last.

On the day of your child's birth

You are full of great mirth,

Your life is full of dreams

Or so it seems.

Before you have thought,

Your child has been taught,

You have seen their first day at school,

You've seen ballet shoes and tutus,

Bridesmaid's dresses and gymkhana rosettes.

You have their life all planned;,

The A level exams

Then off to university, graduation and mortarboards

Then not just one job offer, but hoards.

Then comes the wedding, the long flowing dress,

She chooses a husband who'll be just the best.

You've planned the flowers, the marquee, and the food,

You've pre-ordered the weather and the mood.

She has left you now but you are the best of friends,
And you know in your heart that relationship won't ever end.
You're a grand mother having the best of fun.
It's her all over again but double the fun
Then you look down into your lap at your very first child,
That baby just born so meek, so mild.
Just moments old don't wish her life away,
Babies are precious, take it day by day.
All parents do it they can't help what they feel.
They have hope in their hearts, a future life suddenly real.
So now I hope you will understand
The life of a baby is more than it seems,
It is their little life, plus your thoughts,
Your hopes, all your dreams.
So when that life is taken away
And other people don't know what to say,
Or when they say you'll have another,
Maybe two, a sister and brother.
Inside you want to shout out loud,
I had a child of which I am proud
God took that child away from me
And left me with a hurt no one can see.
But you stay quiet and nod so as not to offend
Then everyone thinks your hurt is at an end.
So forgive me when years later on
To family or friends a new babe is born,
If I find it emotional and hard to cope
With the new Mothers future that's full of hope.
Its because I am happy but that makes me sad
For life is unfair and things can go bad.
I know more than most,
For my little girl is now just a ghost
Of what should have been,
Of all my hopes, my future, my dream.
And forgive if when Christmas is hard,
When the milestones I've set come and go,
I want to be able to say my Childs name,
To shout it out loud and feel no shame.
I want others to know my child, my descendant
Had a life which was important
Not to be little to say "get over it"
Her memory should be respected
Her name spoken with happiness, with glee
For she gave something very special to me
A great love, a great memory and most importantly
The appreciation of my little family

By Rachel Halling

In loving memory of my daughter Louise Bethan Halling who died of sudden infant death on
February 5th 1991 at just 2 weeks old

