

# Comforting Friends

Published by Friends for Survival, Inc.

A NATIONAL OUTREACH & SUPPORT ORGANIZATION  
FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY A SUICIDE DEATH

2020

NOV & DEC



## REDEFINING “THE HOLIDAYS”

by Deborah Pikul

Thanksgiving was not Thanksgiving for my family in November of 1990. My brother had just taken his own life five days before. We tried to “do” Thanksgiving as we always had - hauling down the fine china from the upper shelves, placing the matching silverware alongside the dishes. The house probably smelled delicious, though I don’t remember it. I do remember the silence.

I remember being sorely aware of covering up the empty spot, easy to do using benches instead of chairs, but impossible to ignore. I remember my mother, hands stuffed in oven mitts, easing the bird out. I remember my brother, Dave, standing at the butcher block with a carving

fork in his left hand and electric knife in his right. Then I remember the door swinging open and my three-year-old nephew bouncing in. He took one glance at that huge bird and exclaimed: **“Holy cow, Dad, that’s a big chicken!”** And we laughed.

I never expected us to laugh that day. What a wonderful, welcome surprise. I hope that you will experience some pleasant surprises this holiday season. You may not be ready to look for them, but I hope that they find you. Then they can become part of how you define “The Holidays”.

Source: *Survivors After Suicide*,  
Oct/Nov/Dec 2002 Newsletter

**Nov & Dec:** The holidays will be challenging this year and even more so for us grieving families. Our lifestyle has changed, but the calendar is the same. I encourage each of you to plan early and perhaps consider the holidays in a new way. What parts are important to you? Can you adjust your usual activities and still find meaning again in the ‘reason for the season’? What are you grateful for? How do we find hope during these times?

Attend our virtual meetings for holiday suggestions. We are available by phone or email. We are grateful for your support and encouraging notes.

It is an honor to journey with you. During this special season, it is our wish that each of you find peace in your heart, joy in your friends and loved ones, and hope for the future.



Gratefully,  
*Marilyn Koenig*  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Support

## SUPPORT GROUPS

Until further notice, all support group meetings are virtual.

Go to our website, click on **Support Resources, Meetings.** Find your meeting date and time, click on **"Register."**

## PUBLIC MEETINGS: Second Monday

Nov 9 & Dec 14 @ 3pm PST

## Third Tuesday

Nov 17 & Dec 15 @ 7pm PST

## Fourth Wednesday

Nov 25 & Dec 23 @ 7pm PST

## PRIVATE CHAPTER MEETINGS:

### Legacy Survivors Utah

Nov 11 & Dec 9 @ 6pm MST

### Modesto

Nov 16 & Dec 21 @ 7pm PST

## WEBINARS:

More information and register at:  
[friendsforsurvival.org/our-webinars](https://www.friendsforsurvival.org/our-webinars)



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# my year of running

*by Maria Koll, Friends for Survival member and Widow Warrior*

If you know me, you know I like to run. If you don't know me, you should know...I like to run. I started running in 2009. My first race was the Bay to Breakers in San Francisco, a 12k which is 7.2 miles. I enjoyed every moment of that day. I was hooked! I continued to run and I began to sign up for more races. It was during this time that my husband Danny was battling depression and anxiety. The man I



married was fun, caring and would do anything to help a person in need. The person he became was withdrawn, unhappy, and unwilling to accept help. Still I tried. I convinced him to seek therapy. We attended sessions as a couple and individually. Danny was prescribed medication. This was ineffectual and Danny began to self-medicate. Helpless, I could only watch my husband spiral downward. On March 19, 2014 I lost my husband to suicide. I was shocked, angry, hurt and sad. All at the same time, I felt guilt. I was unable to deal with all the pain I was feeling. Everything hurt, everything was pain. I stopped running. I stopped everything.

Danny left a daughter and a son behind. And me. He had left me behind and I couldn't stand the pain I was living. I decided I had to do something. I needed to find a way to help myself. I found Friends for Survival, and went to a meeting. It was difficult but I went. It was with their help and support that I was able to deal with all the things that would run over me and flatten me out day after day. I have gained new friendships, my widow warrior friends. Brave and strong in every way. I was able, over time, to gain freedom from all those emotions and get back to doing what I loved. Running.

To give back what I have been given, I dedicated 2020 to be my year of running. It started off great with a 10-mile race in January, and a 32-mile race in February. In March, my 50 mile race was canceled. A group of girls decided to run anyway. I was excited to join them! It was great. Another 50 miles completed! In April, my 62-mile race was canceled. With the help of my amazing friends, I ran a self-supporting 62 miles (100k) on September 26.

In November I plan to run 100 miles! From this day and every day until my race, I am pledging to raise money for Friends for Survival so they may continue to provide services and awareness. I understand we are living in difficult times and I will be pledging my own \$500. It is my hope to have others pledge to add to my goal. Thank you for taking the time to read my story. Donate here: [www.friendsforsurvival.org/make-a-donation](https://www.friendsforsurvival.org/make-a-donation).

# a christmas eve memory

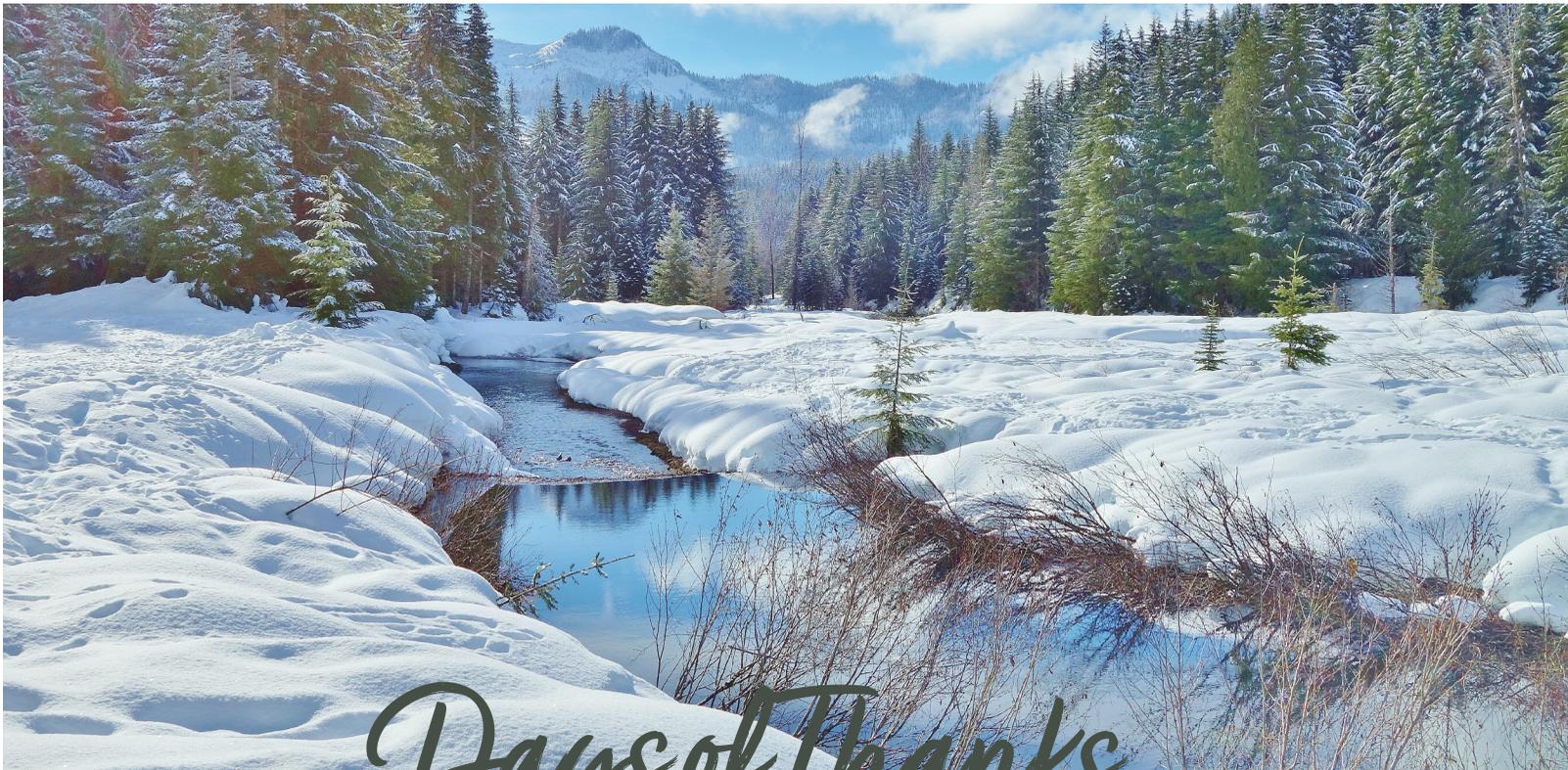
by Claire St. Pierre

As I sit here and look at the Christmas tree, I think to myself of a long ago Christmas Eve. I woke to find you standing outside my bedroom door. You couldn't have been more than three or maybe four years old.

You said you were scared and I asked you, "Why?" You thought you heard Santa up on the roof and you started to cry. I took your little hand in mine and I said, "Shhh, come with me. Let's go see what Santa left under the Christmas tree." We tiptoed past Mom and Dad's room as quiet as we could. And there in front of the tree, the two of us silently stood. I can still see you in your little red pajamas while you held your teddy bear.

Then you smiled at me and said, "I'm not scared anymore, Claire." I think of that early morning when it was just you and me. And I think how much I miss you while silently crying. But I'm glad I have that memory that will be forever in my heart. That way we'll always be together, we will never part.

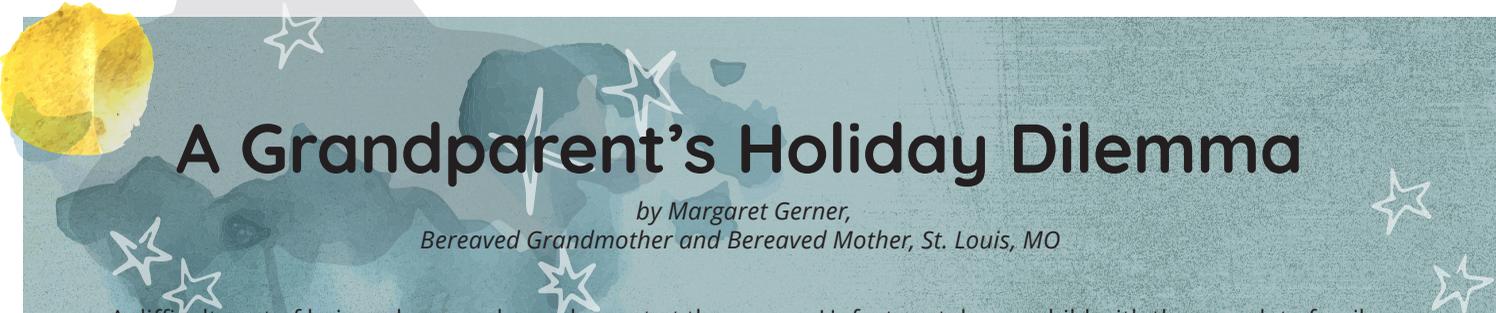
*Source: The Compassionate Friends, Cape Cod and the Island Chapters, Buzzards Bay, MA*



## Days of Thanks

IN A YEAR WHEN MUCH WAS GIVEN,  
MUCH WAS TAKEN TOO.  
SO WE PAUSE AND GIVE THANKS  
FOR WHAT NOW IS.  
THINK, TOO, OF WHAT ONCE WAS,  
AND WE ARE GRATEFUL.  
FOR THE THREADS OF LIVES GONE BY,  
THREADS THAT ENRICH THE FABRIC OF THIS  
THE LIFE WE KNOW.

Author: Lois Wyse. Source: Mayday,  
SOS, Survivors of Suicide



# A Grandparent's Holiday Dilemma

by Margaret Gerner,  
Bereaved Grandmother and Bereaved Mother, St. Louis, MO

A difficult part of being a bereaved grandparent at the holiday time is that we are expected to be all things to all our children. To those who have healthy and complete families we are expected to share in their joy. To our bereaved child we are expected to understand, empathize and, above all, be aware of the special difficulty the holidays bring for them. We are put in the middle between our children, happy families on one side, and a sad one on the other. In addition, we have our own pain to deal with.

It seems to me that this is an impossible situation and frequently we are expected to do the impossible, but I don't think we can, nor do I think we should try. Because I am a bereaved parent myself and I have experienced that special grief, I know my bereaved daughter's second Christmas without her Emily will be a hard one, maybe even harder than the first one. It will be especially hard for her because this year my oldest son and his (complete) family will come from Minneapolis to St. Louis for Christmas. He has three little ones; the oldest is the same age that Emily would be. Seeing Bob's children, especially Robbie, will remind Dorothy even more that Emily will not be physically a part of our holidays.

For weeks I have been tormented with thoughts on how I will handle this situation. Will I act at the holidays in a way that will make my son happy, or in ways that will be supportive of my daughter? Granted, there will be separate times when I can be happy that my son and his family are here and happy to see my grandchildren, whom I don't see often; and there will be a time when I can be totally supportive of my bereaved daughter. But this will not be possible for all the time, especially on Christmas Day.

I have decided that, as hard as it may be to do, I must make a choice between them this year, and I choose to be supportive of my bereaved daughter. This may sound unfair, but is it? When our children were younger, weren't there times, such as when one was sick and needed our special attention, didn't we give it to them, oft times to the neglect of the others? This didn't mean we loved the sick child more than the others. It simply meant that the sick one needed us more than the others at that time. Our bereaved child is experiencing the most pain he/she will ever experience in his/her life and right now, needs us more.

Unfortunately, our child with the complete family may resent our attention to the bereaved child and feel neglected, maybe even hurt, and for that we are sorry, but our child who has not lost a child has not experienced the constant pain and hurt our bereaved child has for a year or longer. We cannot let ourselves be too concerned that he/she may feel neglected or hurt for a few days.

To benefit ourselves as well as our bereaved child, we may consider changing some of our holiday traditions this year. Have a buffet instead of a sit-down dinner. Put the tree in the living room instead of the family room this year. A number of changes are possible. As in my case, my bereaved child lost her only child. I have asked her to come later, after my son's three little ones have opened their presents, so that she won't have to see the joy in their eyes that she will never again see in Emily's.

Even as parents of grown and married children, we never stop being teachers to them. We can take this opportunity to teach our non-bereaved children empathy and concern for others. This too can be a special lesson for our surviving grandchildren that they can learn from us.

We can enlist our non-bereaved children's aid in helping the bereaved child get through the holiday with a little less pain. We can remind them that while it may be somewhat uncomfortable for them to acknowledge or talk about a child who is dead, how much more uncomfortable it is to the parent of a child who is dead. We may suggest some special ways to remember the dead child in our family celebration.

Each person may make some statement about how they miss that child or a certain thing they remember about him/her. Or, we might light a special candle on the dining room table or hang a special ornament. This serves two purposes. It is helpful to the bereaved child because it lets him/her know his/her child has not been forgotten and is still, in a special way, a part of the family. And, it helps the non-bereaved children because it clears the air of unspoken thoughts and feelings.

Source: *Bereaved Parents of the USA*, [www.bereavedparentsusa.org](http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org)



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Friends