

# Comforting Friends

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

2022  
DECEMBER



## CONNECTIONS

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

*"Everyone must leave something behind when he dies, my grandfather said. A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you're there."*

—Ray Bradbury

Our loved ones who died devoted time and energy to various passions. They made, collected, or nurtured things – objects, hobbies, places, relationships with pets and people. Wherever they laid their hands with love, those places are sacred.

After my father died, I placed photos of him in a place where I would see them often. I surrounded the photos with things that connected me to him, such

as his tennis racket and a favorite baseball cap. This became a sacred place where I could stop and mourn, remember, share my memories with others, and heal.

The concept of psychometry holds that people leave behind vibrational imprints on objects they've touched or places they've lived. Followers believe that touching or holding these objects or spending time in these places allows us to connect with those who have died not just through memory but in a more physical, literal way. I know that when I wear my father's watch, I feel his presence.

Today I will touch something my loved one cherished or spend time in a place where part of his soul still resides.

Source: *Grief One Day At A Time – 365 Meditations to Help You Heal After Loss* (December 5)

**December:** There are many challenges we face during the year, but December may be the most challenging month. I hear it from many of you in our support group meetings – the holidays are hard. Emotions are bittersweet, sad and happy, all at the same time.

During this holiday season, I have been thinking about "firsts" and "lasts." It has been one year since my family gathered for our last holiday season with my daughter Angela, who died of bladder cancer in March of this year. This will be our first holiday season with our newest family additions, my four great-grandchildren born this Fall. I will be part of the choir in the Singing Christmas Tree for the first time this year since performances were cancelled in 2019 due to the pandemic. This is something that brings me profound joy. Make room for things that matter to you; that bring you comfort, peacefulness and calm. I encourage you to try at least one thing

new, just for you. Honor and remember your loved ones that are no longer here, honor those who are and honor yourself.



Gratefully,

Marilyn Koenig  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Support

## GROUP MEETINGS

Go to our website, click on **Upcoming > Meetings**. Find your virtual meeting date and time, click on **"Register."** On this same page, you can also check for updates regarding in-person meetings.

## VIRTUAL MEETINGS:

### Second Monday

December 12 @ 3pm PT / 6pm ET

### Third Wednesday

December 21 @ 4pm PT / 7pm ET

### Fourth Wednesday

December 28 @ 7pm PT / 10pm ET

### Grieving Moms Groups (2)

#1 Thursday, Dec. 1 @ 6:30pm PT / 9:30pm ET

#2 Thursday, Dec. 22 @ 3pm PT / 6pm ET

### Grieving Spouse & Partner

Thursday, December 8 @ 6pm PT / 9pm ET

## IN-PERSON MEETINGS:

Due to health protocol, please call to confirm meetings. (916) 392-0664 or (800) 646-7322

### Cameron Park, CA

Tuesday, December 13 @ 6:30pm

Faith Episcopal Church

2200 Country Club Dr., Cameron Park CA

### Carmichael, CA

Tuesday, December 20 @ 7pm

Carmichael Presbyterian Church

5645 Marconi Ave., Sacramento, CA

### Jackson, CA

Tuesday, December 6 @ 3:30pm

Sierra Wind Wellness & Recovery Center

10354 Argonaut Lane, Jackson CA

### Lincoln, CA

Thursday, December 8 @ 6pm

Lincoln Public Library

485 Twelve Bridges Drive, Lincoln, CA

### Modesto, CA

Monday, December 19 @ 7pm

The Bridge Covenant Church (Riverbank)

2201 Morrill Road, Riverbank CA

### Legacy Survivors, UT

Wednesday, December 14 @ 6pm MST

Weber State University - Ogden Campus

Merrill Allied Health Building, Room 327



## first-evers

by Ivan Maisel, Author

from *I Keep Trying to Catch His Eye: A Memoir of Loss, Grief, and Love*

Passing the one-year anniversary of Max's death made me understand -- again -- the permanence of the loss. The presence of his absence, the absence of his presence, continued to be with me, sitting on my shoulder as I had pictured it in the previous spring in the grocery store parking lot.

The one-year anniversary arrived in the form of Jewish tradition. It is customary not to put up a tombstone for as long as eleven months after the death. At that time, family members participate in an "unveiling" ceremony. The mourners recite memorial prayers and reveal the tombstone for all to see. Meg and I own a two-person plot in our temple cemetery; with the congregation's permission, we had buried some of Max's ashes there and bought a tombstone large enough to hold the names of all three of us. The unveiling caught me at a low moment. The poet Edward Hirsch wrote a memorial ode to his son Gabriel in which he compared the work of grieving to carrying a bag of cement up an unending mountain. I knew that I had to continue to put one foot in front of the other. I knew that I had to continue to disgorge my feelings in a healthy way, either into my laptop or to a counselor, instead of pretending those feelings didn't exist.

As I emerge from the first year without Max, I began to see the perspective necessary to understand the permanence and nature of grief. Carrying that bag of cement every day exhausted me. But I began to understand that the pain wouldn't be acute every day. I began to see that when the pain grew acute, the next day, or maybe the day after that, wouldn't be as bad. I just had to lean into the pain, accept it, and wait for it to recede. I had learned enough to see that the grief would be endless, that it surged from the same fount as the love I had for Max. Making that connection between grief and love made it easier to withstand the pain of loss. I'm not a fan of advice worthy of greeting cards, but after Max died, one of our neighbors, whose husband had died suddenly and unexpectedly a few years earlier, repeated this to me: a griever is like a beachcomber at the shore. Sometimes the waves wash over your ankles. Sometimes they wash over your head. Either way, the waves recede.

The first year of mourning ended. The waves had washed over our heads quite a few times. We dried ourselves off and continued walking along the shore.

From *"I Keep Trying to Catch His Eye"* by Ivan Maisel, copyright © 2021. Reprinted by permission of Hachette Books, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc.



# I HONOR... by Friends for Survival Members

## Honoring and Remembering My Brother, Thomas DiPietro

*from sister, Susan (DiPietro) Morris*

October is always especially difficult because this is the month of Tom's birthday, and also the month that I lost him to suicide, coming up on two years ago (which feels like it just happened yesterday). I will be honoring him by going to a special Mass being said for him, going to his grave, and visiting his old neighborhood where he grew up in and lived. In fact, he lived his entire life in the same house - the house that my parents bought back in 1950. We had the normal brother/sister relationship for the most part, but in the past 15-20 years, we became especially close. We did a lot of activities together (especially going to the Phillies baseball games which is/was his favorite team/sport); going to concerts; going to movies and/or shows; and going out for lunch/dinners - we had similar interests so it was easy to plan something with him.



There are some days when the pain is unbearable because I miss him such much. He was a great brother, a great son to my parents, a respected worker and friend. He had such a positive outlook and could easily mingle with just about anyone.

## Honoring and Remembering My Mother, Becky Davis-May

*from daughter, Amanda May-Kulesa*

Only now do I realize how much you must have been suffering. I've finally come to the conclusion that I was not responsible for your decision in that moment, let alone anyone else.

I'm still not sure after 26 years which pain is worse: the pain of what happened, or the pain of what never will. I envy everyone who knew and got to know you. I've heard I'm just like you and that's all I strive to be. Just know I am proud of how hard you fought and the strength that you sought, and in a way, I want to say thank you. Thank you for making me a survivor.

It's taught me to be more patient, compassionate, understanding, loving and optimistic. It's taught me to be more open about mental health and feelings, that it's ok to not be ok or have bad days. It's taught me that it's ok to seek help and that it's ok to share without fear. It's taught me how to process and understand my emotions. It's taught me to be vulnerable and courageous. Lastly it's taught me how to deal with the dreaded grief. I welcome grief now with open arms, it walks beside me now ever since I've learned to find solitude in floating in the riptides of it until the waves bring me back to shore. Wherever there is love there is grief and boy do I have a lot of both for you.

But remembering you always inspires me to face my tomorrow. So, thank you Momma for teaching me not only to survive without you, but to live with the love you left behind.





# changing holiday traditions; keeping holiday values

Holidays and special days occupy such a unique space in our minds and memories. I don't remember what I did last Wednesday, but I remember the feelings of Thanksgiving three decades ago. I remember who was there, where we were, sights and smells, feelings of comfort, family and love. Holiday traditions of the past stick with us.

Whether we are looking back or forward to holidays in the future, we often go straight to the details. We remember the who, when, AND where of holidays. We think back to the homes we were in, the people around our holiday tables, and the things we shared. When we look to holidays coming up, the plans we make focus on the same – who we will gather with, where we will go, what we will do.

It makes sense that we find comfort in these details, rituals, and traditions. Traditions and rituals bring us connection to the past. They give us a sense of predictability. Traditions situate us in our families and our histories. They give us a sense of belonging and stability.

After a loss, traditions big and small sometimes have to change. Part of coping with the holidays as we grieve is planning for the traditions we will keep, those we will change, and those we will leave behind.

**A Refocus on the “Why.”** In those moments when all we can see is how much things have changed, of the traditions that we can't carry forward, it can be hard to see anything else. We often think that, if the holidays can't be the way they always were, they can't be meaningful.

Let's get one thing straight: No matter what happens, the holidays are always going to be hard and bitter-sweet. Losing traditions will never be easy, even when we adapt. This year is making that more apparent than ever. Separated from family, many of us can't go to the places we would have gone. The who, where, and how have disappeared and we are left trying to figure out what that means for our holidays. This is where the “why” becomes crucial. When we ask ‘why’ and look at our holiday values, we can shift from things that have to change to things that we can retain.

**Values.** Values underpin countless areas of our lives, giving us a sense of meaning and purpose. Sometimes we are very conscious of our values. Other times we get so caught up in what we're doing that we forget why. Taking a step back to connect with our values can shift this focus. It can remind us of the meaning and purpose

behind those traditions and rituals that mean so much, but that have to shift.

Values can serve as a compass. When the path we were on disappears, our values can serve as a north star. The specific path still might not be clear. We might take some twists and turns. But by keeping connection with our values, we can still move in a direction that feels consistent with the meaning and purpose in our lives.

**Holiday Values.** The thing about values is that they are different for each of us. The values that guide your holidays are unique to you and your family. The process is simple enough – sit down, either alone or with the family with whom you would normally be spending the holiday, and start listing the values that are an important part of your holidays.

Next, get creative. Start listing ways, big and small, that you can connect with those values. Keep in mind that it may look totally different than years past! There are no rules and the holiday may take a very different shape. But with values at the core, the what, where, when, and how become far less familiar. The values are the continuity. They can begin to provide a sense of meaning and belonging, even as we shift our traditions.

Not quite getting this whole values thing? Though values are different for everyone, some common holiday values are: family, generosity, giving, faith, spirituality, remembrances, home, reconnection, food, tradition, legacy, comfort, friendship, service/volunteerism.

**Keep a Wide Open Mind.** If it's a taco bar for Christmas because that was your loved one's favorite meal... then do it! Maybe movies and board games are what bring comfort... then movies and board games it is! If in-person volunteer service was always part of your holidays in the past but the places you volunteered aren't allowing in person service, it can be easy to think “Oh well, I can just wait until next year.” But if that value was important, get creative. Find online volunteer possibilities, or find a way to informally serve and support people you know.

Just remember, there is no one way, there is no right way. Though at the holidays we often focus on family traditions, personal rituals in grief can be just as meaningful. If you keep your values at the center, no matter what, where, when, and how you spend your holidays, you will have that “why” at the center.

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/holiday-grief-values/>



# starlight and a stranger

by *Therese Baader Gump*

A stranger appeared on my street today dressed in green and red robes, a holly leaf stuck in his lapel and tinsel billowed from his white furry hat.

He played a tune upon his flute and children gathered round to sing his happy songs.

I tried to hear their words and hum along, but only hollow sounds came from my throat, dry and raspy.

I looked into the stranger's eyes and asked from whence he came and had he a name?

He responded in a kindly way but I cringed when I heard him say, "I'm the Joyous Holiday!"

Oh, God, I did not recognize the twinkle that was in his eyes. I saw no joy, felt no lightness in my old usual manner. The shimmer of the tinsel on his hat did not reflect the lights on the trees or in the stores.

I wondered why.

With a sigh, I said, "I do not know you, Joyous Holiday." He did not smile as he replied, "I did not expect you to."

I felt sorry that I might have offended him, and so I asked,

"Will you come back again?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Perhaps next time you will remember me."

As he departed down the snow-filled street leaving me in the silent twilight of the winter evening, I looked up. The sky's tone was just ebbing from blue to deep purple, and in that never-ending darkness, the stars began to appear, one by one.

First, there was a tiny glimmer, then a stronger glow, and finally, a sparkling brilliance in their lofty setting.

I could see them even though they were light years away, pushing out through the blackness surrounding them, and somehow I knew...

They were shining for me.

*Marilyn's Note: I wish to honor and remember a great lady, Therese Baader Gump. She worked with the LOSS program in Chicago. Therese passed away peacefully in September of this year. I met Therese at an AAS Conference in the 1980's. She had lost her son Joey just three years after I lost my son Steven.*

# Support

## RESOURCES

**Friends for Survival**  
[www.friendsforsurvival.org](http://www.friendsforsurvival.org)

Phone: (916) 392-0664

Toll Free: (800) 646-7322

If you are in crisis and need immediate help, call the 24-hour National Crisis Line:

"988"

**Alliance of Hope**

Survivor services including a 24/7 on-line community forum  
[www.allianceofhope.org](http://www.allianceofhope.org)

**American Foundation for  
Suicide Prevention (AFSP)**

Extensive lists of available meeting support [www.afsp.org/find-support](http://www.afsp.org/find-support)

**Bereaved Parents of the  
USA**

[www.bereavedparentsusa.org](http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org)

**Suicide Awareness Voices  
of Education**

[www.save.org](http://www.save.org)

**Tragedy Assistance  
Program for Survivors  
(TAPS)**

For service members, veterans, and their families: [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)

**The Compassionate Friends**

For bereaved parents of a deceased child: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

**The Nat'l Center for  
Grieving Children &  
Families**

The Dougy Center  
[www.dougy.org/grief-resources](http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources)

**SACRAMENTO  
COUNTY**

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