

Continuing reminders of your loss:
Coping with The Holidays

by Helen Fitzgerald.

NO matter what religion you are, Christmas is the biggest holiday of the year and certainly the one that is most advertised, as this is when stores make their biggest sales for the year. This holiday is so commercialised that it is impossible to ignore it. There are reminders of Christmas everywhere 'you turn; advertisements in the newspapers and magazines, on the radio and television, on the greeting card shelf, in the store and restaurant decorations and displays, and in the way your friends and casual acquaintances greet you. It is the holiday that requires the most preparation for most people. Here are some things for you to consider that may help to make this holiday more bearable.

- ◆ Decide on how much of the holiday you can or want to handle and modify your traditions. Writing out greeting cards, for example, may be too much. In that case, pass them up this-year or at least trim your list down. If decorations are more than you can handle, put up what you can or ask for help from family members.
- ◆ If shopping is too difficult, try giving cash or ordering your gifts from a magazine.
- ◆ Once you have thought the holiday through, have a conference with family members and or friends to let them know your plans and to hear theirs. Be prepared to compromise a bit to reach a plan that everyone can accept.
- ◆ You may decide to honour your loved one by having a photo of her/him in a special place decorated with evergreens and brightly coloured balls. Or perhaps a miniature tree could be purchased and tiny decorations added every year in her/his memory. Let your family know your idea and get their input.
- ◆ Know that there still may be friends who have not heard of your loved ones death and you may receive a Christmas card addressed to both of you or asking about her/him.
- ◆ Allow yourself time to think about and acknowledge your grief and realise your holiday may have both happy and sad moments.
- ◆ If others in your family are willing, take time out to talk about your loved one who has died.
- ◆ Set limits on yourself. Grief is exhausting work and you need to quiet time to rest and reflect.
- ◆ Be careful with excessive use of alcohol and overeating--they can make you depressed.
- ◆ Some people elect to do something very different on the first Christmas without their loved one--something so different that the absence of the loved one wont be so obvious, maybe even going to a totally different place. People then often return to old traditions the following year perhaps developing some new traditions to add to the old.

- ◆ You may decide to work on Christmas if you have this option, giving a coworker a chance to spend the holiday with his or her family.
- ◆ You may decide to do some volunteer work on this day such as working in a hospital or with the homeless.
- ◆ Think of a response you can use to the greeting "Merry Christmas" or "Happy New Year."
- ◆ The religious services of Christmas can be reassuring, or they can be upsetting. Think of how they would affect you and then decide what would be best for you as far as attending or not attending them.
- ◆ Plan something you can look forward to after the holiday in January or February to lessen the post holiday letdown and a reward for getting through them. Look for a lecture or workshop on how to cope with the holidays.
- ◆ Remember the anticipation off holiday is often harder than the actual day.
- ◆ If you find the stress, anxiety and loneliness too overwhelming, it is always O.K. to reach out for help. Contact your clergy, a good friend or a professional.

"CHRISTMAS AND GRIEF"

As Christmas approaches, we are surrounded by reminders of this joyful season.
 The sights, sounds, smells and music trigger memories of the one for whom we grieve
 This is the time of the year when we experience memories of warm and happy times
 with those we love.

Christmas time is family time, family togetherness.

A time of celebration of life and new beginning.

For all those reasons this time of the year is a most difficult time for all of us who are
 grieving for the loss of someone we love dearly.

They will not be with us to share in the family festivities.

But in our hearts and thoughts they share everything Always