

COMMENTS FROM YOUR NOTES TO US:

“Had our own FFS Garage sale” sent \$100.00, *DG*

“Enclosed is \$75 to cover my newsletter and five more people for the next year. Thank you.” *AP*

“Thanks for all you do for the survivors of such Pain.” *DS*

“Please use this to fund someone else’s newsletters too. Thank you for your newsletter and for working so hard to keep the group going! It really has helped.” *SL*

“I wish I could send more. Thanks for all the inspiration.” *BK*

“I appreciate all your group does to help survivors. Can you please offer more info on children of lost ones to suicide.” *AW*

“I look forward to your newsletter every month. I have kept copies of my favorites for 19 years now.” *CN*

“My first born son meant everything to me. My heart still hurts after 13 years. Now his son needs help and we are helping him find his way. He’s 14 years old.” *BC*

“With the economy going crazy, I only have Social Security to rely upon. I will do my best to send you \$10 month.” *JO*

“Thank you for your continued support to those of us who are grieving and growing! Your words of comfort are always so supportive and caring! I appreciate all that you do!” *JM*

“Thank you to each person that has a part in these newsletters & articles.” *A*

FROM MIKE MCKENNA, BOARD MEMBER AND SECRETARY

This November 15, 2009, will be 20 years to the day that we lost our first born, Jason, to suicide. Jason decided, impulsively we believe, to hang himself in his bedroom closet in our home. He was two weeks from his 19th birthday and was in his first semester of college. The painful, anguished scream from my wife upon discovering Jason is something I will never forget.

In the weeks and months right afterward, our family and friends showed us great love, sympathy and support, and helped us begin our painful journey through the grieving process. Later one of our concerned friends recommended that we contact Friends for Survival. Marilyn Koenig and Friends for Survival were so helpful and knew what we had experienced and where we had to go to begin to heal.

My wife and I and our two remaining children grew closer after losing Jason, and have remained close over the years. We celebrated 40 years of marriage earlier this year, so losing a child to suicide doesn’t have to break up a family. Friends for Survival has been an important part of our survival.

I have been a board member for only two years. I believe in the uniquely valuable help being provided by Friends for Survival. I encourage all of you who can, to make a contribution to the mission of this wonderful group by sending a donation of any amount you can, to help keep Friends for Survival going. Your consistent financial support is always very much appreciated.

MAIL TO FRIENDS FOR SURVIVAL, P O BOX 214463, SACRAMENTO, CA 95821

\$12 _____ \$25 _____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ other \$ _____

LOVE GIFT IN MEMORY OF _____

FROM _____

Special designation: \$ _____ Web site \$ _____ Office staff \$ _____ Cherished Inspirations (book) \$ _____ other, please specify _____

_____ I am committed to sending at least \$1 a month for the next twelve months

Comments. _____

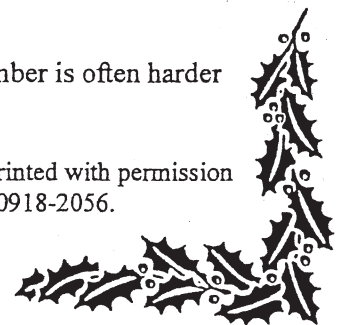
Please consider remembering Friends for Survival, Inc. in your will.
_____ I have remembered Friends for Survival in my will.

Coping with Holiday Grief: <http://www.suttervnaandhospice.org>

At holiday time, many people are dealing with loss and are often caught in a dilemma between the need to grieve and the pressure to get into the spirit of the season. Holidays or not, it is important for the bereaved to find ways to take care of themselves. The following guidelines may be helpful:

1. Plan ahead as to where and how you will spend your time during the holidays. Let yourself scale back on activities if you want to. Redefine your holiday expectations. This can be a transition year to begin new traditions and let others go.
2. Select a candle in your loved one's favorite color and scent. Place it in a special area of your home and light it at a significant time throughout the holidays, signifying the light of the love that lives on in your heart.
3. Give yourself permission to express your feelings. If you feel an urge to cry, let the tears flow. Tears are healing. Scientists have found that certain brain chemicals in our tears are natural pain relievers.
4. Shakespeare once said, "Give sorrow words..." Write an "un-sent letter" to your loved one, expressing what you are honestly feeling toward him or her at this moment. After you compose the letter, you may decide to place it in a book, album or drawer in your home, leave it at a memorial site, throw it away, or even burn it and let the ashes rise symbolically.
5. When you are especially missing your loved one, call family members or dear friends and share your feelings. If they knew him or her, consider asking them to share some memories of times they shared with your loved one.
6. If you live within driving distance of the cemetery, decorate the memorial site with a holiday theme. This could include flowers, garlands, ribbons, bows, evergreen-branches, packages, pinecones or a miniature Christmas tree. Decorating the site yourself can be helpful in remembering and celebrating your loved one's life during the holidays, and may free you to cherish the present holiday with your remaining family.
7. Play music that is comforting and meaningful to you. Take a few moments to close your eyes and feel the music within the center of your being.
8. Give money you would have spent for gifts for your absent loved one to a charity in your family member's name. Consider donating money to the public library to buy a particular book. Have the book dedicated to your loved one's memory. Buy a present for a child who would not otherwise have a gift during the holiday season.
9. Read a book or article on grief. Some suggestions are: *Don't Take My Grief Away From Me* by Doug Manning; *The Comfort Book For Those Who Mourn* compiled by Anna Trimiew; and *A Grief Observed* by C. S. Lewis.
10. Remember the reality that the anticipation of the holidays without your family member is often harder than the actual holidays themselves.

Adapted from "Ten Ways to Cope with Holiday Grief" By L. B. Schultz, Carmel, Indiana. Reprinted with permission from Bereavement Magazine 5125 North Union Blvd., Suite #4, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80918-2056.



A Camel in the Garage

In the fall of 1991, I was preparing to present our “Handling the Holidays” program in November when I met my first personal holiday challenge. October 13th marked a year since my father’s death. Thus, I had managed all of the “firsts” of the year; first birthday, first anniversary, first holidays and some of the other more personal firsts. I had always heard it said that the first year was not the end of firsts, and I believed it, but I had never really experienced it – until now.

That first year the weeks and months passed so rapidly into the holidays I wonder now how much I really was ABLE to feel. This year would be a different story. Recently, one of my cousins and I were reminiscing about our boyhood years when our families would gather for Christmas. We recalled the enormous dinner table, presents and all the things that exhaust parents and exhilarate children. He remembered, in particular, a manger scene my father built every year on the front lawn of the funeral home. It was a large structure, made of straw, about 70 bales. The half life-size figures had been cut from masonite and Dad had carefully glued paper murals over them to create Mary, Joseph, the Wisemen, two shepherds, several lambs, a donkey and a great big camel. The actual manger was a rough hewn cradle that held a life size baby doll, wrapped in swaddling cloths. As a little boy, however, I was impressed by the camel. Building that manger scene was one of those special projects that Dad and I did together. I got to ride the tractor, lift the bales, move the lumber; I’m sure I was a big help to my dad. He made me feel very grown up.

When I finished, I always thought the manger scene was a work of art. It had a magic all its own. When dad turned on the night lights, and the first good snow covered the ground, I could envision the manger scene really coming to life! To add to the mood and the magic, Dad hooked up the funeral home stereo to some little speakers, which he encased in miniature churches. That was the final touch, the chimes and the choir. Any other time I was apt to become bored with the “old music”, but when Dad put the red plastic records on the turntable and set the stack to run all evening, I became enchanted with all of it.

That memory pursued me and one morning I decided to look in the attic of my father’s garage to see if the manger characters might be stored there. Although I was dressed in my suit, I climbed up the ladder and peered through the skuttle hole into the attic. The attic was dark except for a westerly window. The makeshift wooden ladder led the way to the loft. Peering into the dusty darkness, I saw mostly the shadows of old storm windows and assorted treasures. Then, as my eyes became better adjusted to the light, I was sure I saw the shadow of a camel! Smaller than my boyhood memories but, unmistakably, a camel. Certainly, if that huge dromedary was parked in this garage, so too were the rest of the characters.

I knew there was only one thing to do. Those characters had to be taken down and restored if possible. All of them could be maneuvered through the skuttle hole except the camel. It took a saw, a little time and much determination, but the camel did come down from the attic. We loaded the menagerie into my van and took them to the funeral home garage for cleaning and repair.

That was thirteen years ago. We built the manger scene that year and every year since then. Each year my cousins and their families come to spend a day and together we erect the manger, hook up the sound system and place the characters in the stable. On the first Monday evening after the beginning of Advent, bereaved families and local townspeople, gather for the “Blessing of the Manger”. It is a service that was begun to honor Dad’s memory and now is held in memory of all those who have “gone home” for Christmas. We gather there, shoulder to shoulder, friends, neighbors and strangers sharing a moment of remembrance and the quiet beauty of “Silent Night”.

I have learned to better appreciate the trials and tribulations of every bereaved person who faces putting up holiday decorations. At holiday time, they may be wrapped in the memories of Christmases long ago. Memories that may seem difficult to unwrap, perhaps even painful to share. Yet, when we do so, we relieve ourselves of the energy it took to hide them and keep them. When we face again some of our darkest hours in the present light of day, we are enabled to see things we never could see before.

This year, next year, and the year after when you go to the attic, be not afraid, but let the true Spirit of Christmas be your guide. And if you find a camel there, who came through a doorway that was grown smaller through the years, don’t give up. Examine your heart, enlarge the door, and bring that camel into the light once more. Like the camel of my childhood memories, you may find him smaller at first than you remember; however, the lesson you learn in the process may be larger than life.

Even funeral directors, though we work with death everyday, must face our own grief when a loved one dies.

*I wrote, “A Camel in the Garage”, the year after my father died of cancer © 1991.....Bruce H. Conley, Elburn Illinois
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