Giving Thanks

It may not seem that there is much to be grateful for this year, but remaining thankful is part of your journey toward healing. Try making a list of the things you are thankful for; having had the privilege of knowing and loving the one who died is a good place to start. If you have already planned ahead for your own funeral services, you can be grateful that your loved ones won't have to worry after you are gone. When things get tough this holiday season, read over your list and remind yourself of the things you are grateful for.

Sincerely,

Lunn Funeral Home

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NOVEMBER

GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

MARTHA M. TOUSLEY, CNS-BC, FT

When our loved one dies, we grieve not only for that individual, but also for the life we used to have, the love that special someone gave us and all the memorable times we spent together. Perhaps there is no time of the year when we're more aware of the empty space our dear one has left behind than during the holiday season.

Holidays can create feelings of dread and anxiety in those who are bereaved. The clichéd images of family togetherness and the often unrealistic expectations of a season filled with picture-perfect, joyful gatherings can cause tremendous stress for those who are *not* grieving, let alone for those in the midst of the painful, isolating experience of loss. Holidays by nature are filled with nostalgia and tradition, but in grief, even the happiest memories can hurt. When we're in the midst of pain, and the rest of the world wants to give thanks and celebrate, we need to find ways to manage our pain and get through the season with a minimum of stress.

Here are some useful suggestions for coping with the holidays:

- Have a family meeting. List all the things you ordinarily do for the holidays (sending greeting cards, decorating the house, stringing outdoor lights, putting up a tree, holiday baking, entertaining business associates, buying something special to wear, going to parties, visiting friends, exchanging gifts, preparing a big meal, etc.) Decide together what's important to each of you, what you want to do this year, what

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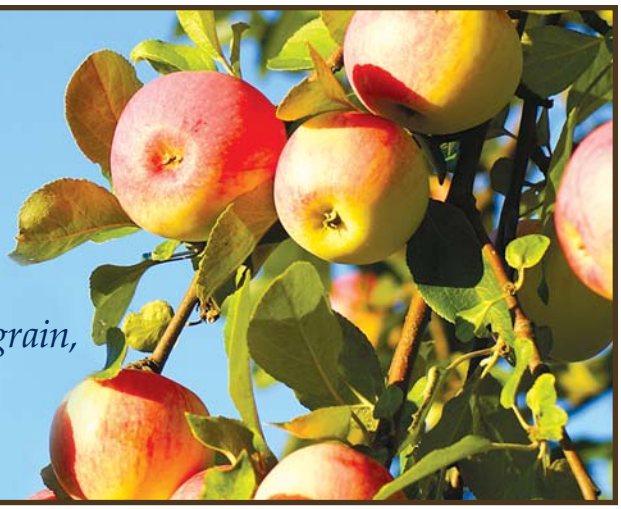
Thanksgiving

The year has turned its circle, the seasons come and go.
The harvest all is gathered in and chilly north winds blow.
Orchards have shared their treasures, the fields, their yellow grain,
So open wide the doorway -- Thanksgiving comes again!

~ Old Rhyme



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you can let go of, and what you can do differently. For each task on the list, ask yourself these questions: *Would the holidays be the holidays without doing this? Is this something I really want to do? Do I do it freely, or out of habit or tradition? Is it a one-person job, or can it be a group effort? Who's responsible for getting it done? Do I really like doing it?*

- Do some things differently this year. Trying to recreate the past may remind you all the more that your loved one is missing. This year, try celebrating the holidays in a totally different way. Nothing is the same as it used to be anyway. Go to a restaurant. Visit relatives or friends. Travel somewhere you've never gone before. If you decide to put up a tree, put it in a different location and make or buy different decorations for it. Hang a stocking in your loved one's memory, and ask each family member to express their thoughts and feelings by writing a note to, from or about your loved one, and place the notes in that special stocking for everyone to read. Buy a poinsettia for your home as a living memorial to your loved one for the holiday season.

- Do other things more simply. You don't have to discard all your old traditions forevermore, but you can choose to observe the holidays on a smaller scale this year.

- Take good care of yourself. Build time in your day to relax, even if you're having trouble sleeping. Eat nourishing, healthy meals, and if you've lost your appetite, eat smaller portions more frequently throughout the day. (Remember, sweet, sugary foods are everywhere, from Halloween until Valentine's Day, but be aware that too much sugar will deplete what little energy you have.) Get some daily exercise, even if it's just a walk around the block. Avoid drinking alcohol, which intensifies depression and disrupts normal sleep.

- Pay attention to yourself. Notice what you're feeling and what it is you need. Feelings demand expression, and when we acknowledge them and let them out, they go away. Feelings that are "stuffed" don't go anywhere; they just fester and get worse. If you need help from others, don't expect them to read your mind. It's okay to ask for what you need. Besides, doing a favor for you during the holidays may make them feel better, too. Be patient and gentle with yourself, and with others as well.

- Expect to feel some pain. Plan on feeling sad at certain moments throughout the season, and let the feelings come. Experience the pain and tears, deal with them, then let them go. Have faith that you'll get through this and that you will survive.

- Seek support from others. Grieving is hard work, and it shouldn't be done alone. You need to share your experience with someone who understands the pain of your loss. If your spouse, relative or friend cannot be the source of that support, you can find it elsewhere. Contact your local library, hospice, church or synagogue and ask what bereavement support services are available in your community. Look for programs aimed at helping you cope with the holidays.

- Give something of yourself to others. As alone as you may feel in your grief, one of the most healing things you can do for yourself is to be with other people, especially during the holidays. Caring for and giving to others will nourish and sustain you, and help you to feel better about yourself. If you can bring yourself to do so, visit someone in a nursing home, or volunteer your time at your church, synagogue or animal shelter. Do whatever you can, and let it be enough.

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Holiday Memories & Timeless Traditions

On Thanksgiving Day, the house where Mama and Daddy, Ruby and Bud Lett, lived for more than 55 years featured a different family gathering. The kitchen stove and cabinet tops that once displayed a big turkey, cornbread dressing, ham, mashed potatoes, candied yams, green beans, peas, cranberry salad, and biscuits prepared by Mama were not so full. Instead, several family members baked goodies at home and contributed various offerings similar to the ones usually served in what we called "Ruby's Restaurant." As usual, the enticing aroma of many traditional foods permeated the air.

This is our family's first Thanksgiving without Mama, and while her culinary creations were missed, it was her welcoming smile and giving spirit that we longed for the most. Last year we had celebrated the holidays for the first time without Daddy, and it was gut-wrenching, but we bravely hid our sorrow for the sake of Mama. We laughed until we cried as we told funny stories about our parents and also allowed the tears to flow as we shared tender memories about Mama and Daddy. We have discovered that healing from loss is an ongoing process that must be honored.

Meanwhile, on Thanksgiving Day, family members observed the usual custom of picking up pecans from the big tree in the backyard of my parents' farmhouse. However, we did not see the delight in Daddy's eyes when he proudly gazed at buckets of pecans placed on the back porch just waiting for him to empty through the winter months.

Daddy loved sitting at the kitchen table day after day and carefully separating the core from the shell with a knife. Mama did her share of pickin' out, and placed the best pecans in plastic bags for sharing with others. Small pieces were frozen for use in her recipes. A neighbor, Jerry Carter, delivered the pecans to his eager coworkers and friends who couldn't do their Christmas baking without Mama and Daddy's nuts. Folks say they were the best pecans they had ever eaten -- after all, Mama and Daddy had poured love in every single nut.

Mama and Daddy appreciated home, family, the land -- they knew that money can not buy happiness... that material things do not provide peace of mind. If Mama had lived a little longer, we would have celebrated her 86th birthday on November 26. She always welcomed the extra hugs and caring companionship much more than any presents.

When I think of Thanksgiving I am most grateful for the love I saw Mama and Daddy experience with each other, how they held hands every day and found magic in the simple life. On Thanksgiving Day I felt that same caring spirit in their farmhouse. As Christmas approaches I will laugh and cry a lot as I recall memories of Mama and Daddy and as I reflect on timeless traditions passed down from their generation to ours.

Throughout the holidays and for the rest of my life, I know that whenever love wells up in my heart Mama and Daddy are near.

AlexSandra Lett is a professional speaker and writes a column, "Lett's Set a Spell," for various publications and Web sites. Her new nostalgic book, *Timeless Recipes and Remedies, Country Cooking, Customs, and Cures*, was released in November. She is the author of *Timeless Moons, Seasons of the Fields and Matters of the Heart*, and *A Timeless Place, Lett's Set a Spell at the Country Store*. Her Web site is www.atimelessplace.com.

To Those Whom I Love & Those Who Love Me

When I am gone, release me, let me go
I have so many things to see and do
You must not tie yourself to me with tears
Be happy that I have had so many years
I gave you my love, you can only guess
How much you gave me in happiness
I thank you for the love each have shown
But now it is time I traveled on alone
So grieve a while for me, if grieve you must
Then let your grief be comforted by trust
It is only for a while that we must part
So bless the memories in your heart
I will not be far away, for life goes on
So if you need me, call and I will come
Though you can not see or touch me, I will be near
And if you listen with your heart, you will hear
All of my love around you soft and clear
Then, when you must come this way alone
I will greet you with a smile and a
"Welcome Home"

~ Mary Alice Ramish

We are pleased to continue our tradition of caring through these complimentary issues of *Stepping Stones Newsletter* and our professional staff.

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If you have enjoyed this reading, please let us know! We'd love to provide you with additional grief materials and resources to help you cope during this difficult time. If you would like more information, or if you would like to speak to someone who can assist you with filing for veterans' benefits, Social Security and insurance benefits, or who can help you prepare your own or a loved one's funeral plans in advance, please reply to this email, and a funeral home representative will contact you shortly. We sincerely hope that we have been able to brighten your day with this edition of *Stepping Stones*. Please don't hesitate to let us know if there is anything we can do to assist you.

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