

Air Force Family Support Network

December 2013, Issue 14

Winter 2013 Newsletter



*Handling Grief During
the Holidays
Wreaths Across
America
Family Circle
Angelversaries*

*Seasons Greetings Air Force Family and
Friends,*

*This edition finds me thinking especially
tender thoughts of you as you cope with the
holidays without your loved one. Whether it's
your first or your fourth or your fifteenth, this
time of year can make their absence
particularly poignant, so this newsletter will
focus on managing the holidays. We also
feature some wonderful family submissions
that are sure to tug at your heart-strings.
Finally, we have our Angelversary section that
pays tribute to your loved ones when they
became angels. As always, we very much
appreciate your personal submissions and great
ideas. ~ Thank you and have a warm and
safe winter.*

Air Force Families Forever
***“Ensuring that the families of our fallen Airmen are never
forgotten by providing immediate and long-term
compassionate support.”***

Please know that we are not attempting to endorse any company, service or product, nor are we attempting to impose any beliefs on you. We are simply giving you options to explore as you desire.



By Therese Rando, Ph.D.
**HANDLING THE
HOLIDAYS AFTER
LOSING A LOVED ONE**

One of the most painful issues for you to deal with is how to survive the holidays after the death of the person you love. Because holidays are supposed to be family times, and because of the extraordinary (although unrealistic) expectation that you should feel close to everyone, this time of year can underscore the absence of your deceased loved one more than any other time. The important thing to remember is that you and your family do have options about how to cope with the holidays. These are a few things to keep in mind:

As much as you'd like to skip from November to January 2nd, this is impossible. Therefore, it will be wise for you to take control of the situation by facing it squarely, planning for what you do and do not want to do to get through this time.

~ Realize that the anticipation of pain at the holidays is always worse than the actual day.

~ Recognize that what you decide for this year can be changed next year; you can move to something new or back to the old way. Decide what is right for, you and your family now. Don't worry about all the other holidays to come in years ahead. You will be at different places in your mourning and in your life then.

~ Recognize that the holidays are filled with unrealistic expectations for intimacy, closeness, relaxation, and joy for all people—not just for the bereaved. Try not to buy into this for yourself—you already have enough to contend with.

~ Be aware of the pressures, demands, depression, increased alcohol intake, and fatigue that comes with holidays. As a bereaved person you may feel these more than others. Take time out to take care for yourself during this time. You will need it even more.

~ Do something symbolic. Think about including rituals that can appropriately symbolize your memory of your loved one. For example, a candle burning at Thanksgiving dinner, the hanging of a special Christmas ornament, or the planting of a tree on New Years Day may help you to mark the continued abstract presence of your deceased loved one while still celebrating the holiday with those you love who still survive. Remembering your deceased loved one in this fashion can make an important statement to yourself and others.

~ Re-evaluate family traditions. Ask yourself and your surviving loved ones whether you need to carry them on this year or whether you should begin to develop some new ones. Perhaps you can alter your traditions slightly so that you can still have them to a certain extent but don't have to highlight your loved one's absence more than it already is. For example, you may want to have Thanksgiving dinner at your children's house instead of yours. Or you might open presents on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas morning.

~ Recognize that your loved one's absence will cause pain no matter what you do. This is only natural and right. After all, you are mourning because you love and miss this person. Try to mix this with your love for those you still have and your positive memories of the past. "Bittersweet" is a good word to describe this. You can feel the sweetness of the holiday but also the bitterness of your loved one's absence. Together they can give you a full, rich feeling, marked with love for those present and those gone whom you will never forget.

ROSE'S TRIBUTE TREE

I've attached a picture of a tree that I did the first year without my son, Jamie. I remember him calling me from Mountain Home AFB before Christmas of 2010. He told me he needed ornaments for a tree, I suggested he go to the local discount store and buy those large packages of plastic colored ornaments since other's are expensive. I told him once he put lights on the tree it would be beautiful. He was so proud of that first tree...he sent me pictures and it was wonderful.

Jamie died on January 22nd, 2011. He was home two days after that Christmas, he was to be deployed in March so I scraped every penny to get him for even part of the holiday. I thank God every for that time with him. When the Air Force sent me all of Jamie's belongings I came across his box of ornaments. I didn't want to throw them out, so many memories of our conversations and planning of his first tree.

That first Thanksgiving without Jamie my heart was just broken. I didn't want to celebrate anything and the thought of our first Christmas without him literally put me into such a depression. I have a huge Italian family and every holiday is huge and loud and full of laughter and closeness. We all anticipated this holiday was not going to be good. I saw it in my kids' eyes, my parents and my siblings. I have three siblings with younger children. And these children looked up to their older cousins. My nephews used to call their superhero dolls, Jamie. All cousins are close, they are best friends.

So I got up that first Thanksgiving morning, I prayed hard in Jamie's room and the box of ornaments came to my head. I searched for them, put them in a huge wicker basket. I found whatever arts and crafts items I had and included that in it as well and brought them to my Mom and Dad's. The entire family was present. And even though we were happy to be together, you could just feel the sadness in the air. And the little kids weren't themselves. They were quiet, they didn't know how to act in front of Aunt Rose. We couldn't even get through "grace" without every adult crying.

After dinner, I waited a while and when dessert was about to come out, I told everyone I had a job for them to do. I gave everyone in my family one of Jamie's ornaments.



I told them that this year we are still celebrating And that we can't just sit and be sad because that would make Jamie sad. He is in the most marvelous place there is and he needs to enjoy his time in Heaven, not be sad watching us depressed. No one loved the holidays more than Jamie and this wouldn't be what he wanted for us.

I told them they needed to decorate the ornaments and that I am going to have a special "Jamie Tree" in my foyer for all to see. You could feel the mood in the room change. Of course, the adults were crying but I believe it was happy tears. But the absolute joy was in the kids' faces. They were relieved. They felt like they could enjoy the holiday once again and not feel guilty for doing so. They've added to the tree tradition by writing Jamie letters to go into his stocking telling him everything they did that year....in school, sports, or whatever. These kids poured their hearts out in these letters and it makes them feel they are part of Jamie and makes them feel they still have their cousin with them.

I've attached a photo of that tree. The children's ages at the time ranged from 3 to 24. It is my most favorite holiday thing to do since Jamie passed. I didn't even want a big tree this year but knew I should for the sake of my other children. I could care less about any other decoration but I love this tree. It reminds me that even though Jamie isn't physically with us, he is still here. He is still part of us.

I pray for all of my "family" – my "family" of grieved parents, wives, husbands, children, siblings, grandparents....My heart is with you. Things like this will not take away our loss or our painful grief, but for a minute we smile and find peace. I pray for a moment of peace for everyone.

With warmest best wishes for a blessed holiday,

Rose Burroughs

SNOPES SAYS THIS ABOUT TEARS:

There was a study done where a control group of 100 people were divided into two. 50 people watched a very funny, tears-of-laughter type movie. 50 watched a very sad and tears-of-compassion type movie. At the end of the sessions researchers collected the "happy tears" and the "sad tears" with eye droppers. They found that "happy tears" are made up of brine...salt water and not a great deal else.

However the "sad tears" were found to contain the very same chemicals and enzymes that are found in tumors, ulcers and other such lumps and bumps and sicknesses through out the body.

This test concluded that the body, when crying in sadness etc. is literally flushing out all of the toxic-chemicals that accumulate and are a part of the sadness/heart ache experience.

Therefore if one holds back those tears, those toxic-waters will find somewhere else to deposit themselves..... and prolonged lack-of-crying-release will guarantee that the body will accumulate a huge amount of internal pollution and toxicity that should have been released through the tears.....is it any wonder that the eyes sting so much when we hold back our tears?"

See also: <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/08/31/science/biological-role-of-emotional-tears-emerges-through-recent-studies.html>

Wreaths Across America



~ Karen Brisendine

"I purchased 4 wreaths for a Tucson cemetery, one for my daughter, Melissa, and the other 3 for other vets. I just saw that I could also purchase a wreath for my residence with an Air Force flag on it."

~ Liz DosReis

"Thank you and JD for the explanation of Wreaths Across America. It has to be a beautiful site, unfortunately there was no availability in the National Cemeteries near us, so my son is buried in a Catholic Cemetery. I will be laying a wreath myself. It's been 4 1/2 years since my son left this Earth and I still suffer his loss greatly. Maybe one day I will be able to volunteer to give back to these brave young men and women, but not now. Thank you so much for all those who do. I pray for JD and others, that it [Wreaths Across America] will be a remembrance of a life time. God Bless all who participated in helping to remember our loved ones."

Wreaths Across America

~ John "JD" DiDicco

The ceremony was very emotional to say the least. It was a lot of hard work but I made some wonderful friends. I even joined their organization ALNCSC. We had plenty of volunteers and support. I hope we have as much help around the country on 1/16/14 as that is when all the wreaths will be removed. I wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and a very safe holiday season...



ANGELVERSARIES

"WHEN OUR LOVED ONES BECAME ANGELS"

Marianne V. , Wiance & legacy holder of Capt Ryan P Hall, USAF, KIA 2012-02-18 Djibouti, Africa: "December 10 was my beloved Captain Ryan Hall's birthday. As was his fellow Airman and co-pilot, Captain Nick Whitlock who also perished in the same plane upon returning from a mission on February 18, 2012."

Our important dates are as follows:

December 10, Capt Ryan Hall & Capt Nick Whitlock's birthday February 18, 2012 Ratchet 33 crew's Angelversary honoring Captain Ryan Hall, Captain Nicholas Whitlock, 2nd Lt Justin Wilkens and Sr Airman Julian Scholten.

In memory of Captain Ryan Hall, R.I.P. 2/18/12



“Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night”

*By
Linda Ambard*



“Do not go gentle into that good night...” one of my favorite lines ever, but it is only in the rage I felt in the unfairness of Phil’s assassination that that line became etched into the brokenness of my beating heart. I wanted to quit and I asked God why not me and why my Phil who was smart and had so much left to do. You see, I saw myself as average and I felt that I had accomplished my mission in life—that of raising five children. In the days, weeks, and months that followed, beyond the painful revelation of Phil’s death, I felt numb. I wanted to give up. But then something began to rage in me. How could I give the assassin me too? If I give up and I stop growing the girl that Phil always believed in and loved, then in essence that vile monster got two of us. I would just be the walking corpse.

I made a decision to step out of my comfort zone and I began to speak and write about the man Phil was, my brothers and sisters who bear the invisible scars of the walking wounded, and my brothers and sisters walking the same walk as I am. As I focused my time and energy on something beyond my own pain, I began to grow and I began to feel this blazing fire that compels me with a sense of urgency and purpose. While this is not the life I expected, and while there are some incredibly difficult moments like my 25th wedding anniversary two weeks ago and my son’s graduation from USAFA this past spring, I began to find humor and happiness again in this drive I have.

While my journey is not everyone’s journey, and while I still have problems with the holidays, by looking at other people and the pain they feel, I have been able to find a sense of purpose that goes far beyond the act that took my Phil from me. The pink bubbles of joy come in knowing that something positive can come from my very darkest hours. A simple challenge to myself and to others hurting this holiday season is to look, *really look* for the hurting people walking amongst us. Hurting people recognize aching hearts. Reach out and do random acts of kindness. Show up and be fully present, for in doing so, you and I will find our own bubbles of happiness.

TAGS OF HONOR

IN MEMORY OF GEOFFRY L. CULLEN, JR.

DEC. 7, 1989 – JUN. 29, 2012

“After my son died and all of his belongings were shipped to me I couldn't bear the thought of going through everything it was just too painful. My therapist encouraged me to go through one box at a time and look for something that I could wear of his on a daily basis if I wanted to. In an envelope in one of the boxes were four sets of his dog tags. A dear friend of mine who has her own beading company designed a bracelet for me. Her website is www.fatkatbeads.com. She has a picture of it posted and it is just amazing. There may be someone else out there that might want to make something of their loved one into something they can wear always.”

~Deb Cullen, Mother of Geoffry Cullen, Jr.

**For more information
about Tags Of Honor,
email or go to:**

**info@tagofhonor.com
www.tagofhonor.com**



TAPS WINTER EVENTS:

JANUARY 20-24 SEATTLE WIDOWS RETREAT, SEATTLE, WA
(REGISTRATION IS FULL, BUT OFTEN SURVIVORS ON THE WAITLIST ARE OFFERED SPACES, SO PLEASE SIGN UP FOR THE WAITLIST IF INTERESTED)

FEBRUARY 5-9 SIBLINGS RETREAT, BEND, OR

**FEBRUARY 26 - MARCH 2 ALASKA PARENTS RETREAT,
GIRDWOOD, AK**

[HTTP://WWW.TAPS.ORG/EVENTS/LIST.ASPX?ID=89252](http://www.taps.org/events/list.aspx?id=89252)



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For more info & past newsletters go to:

<http://www.mortuary.af.mil/library/familiesofthefallensupportbranch/index.asp>