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Special Holiday Edition

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JOIN US every Thursday!  
Continuous Care Support Group



\*Grief Support Group\*

**TIMES:** 5:00 PM-6:30 PM

**WHERE:** Locke at Tower Park  
4140 Kimball Avenue, Waterloo

*Please feel free to bring a friend — All groups are free and open to the public!*

**WEATHER ALERT:** If schools or businesses are closed, the meeting is canceled.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS,  
PLEASE CALL 319-233-6138.**

**DATES:**

**November 3:** Grief and Gratitude

**November 10:** Surviving the Holidays

**November 17:** Surviving the Holidays

*November 24: (No Meeting)*

**December 1:** Exploring Feelings of Loss

**December 8:** Exploring Feelings of Loss

**December 15:** Exploring Feelings of Loss

*December 22: (No Meeting)*

*December 29: (No Meeting)*

**January 5, 2023:** Six Needs of Mourning

Want to be on our mailing list? Give us a call, and we can add you to our quarterly newsletter list.

Continuous Care  
1519 West Fourth Street  
Waterloo, IA 50702



# THE CARE COURIER

November 2022– January 2023, Vol 8 Issue 5

## HOLIDAYS ARE COMING TO TOWN

"All I want to do is fast forward to January 2nd," sighed Donna.

"I can't do that. My kids. My grandkids. I can't let them down. I've got my list, I'm already..." Sheila's voice trembled at a high pitch. "I can't ..."

Marla placed her hand over Sheila's. "You can't tell them it's too much this year?"

"They miss him. So many tears. I want us to be happy. I must try to make..." Her voice broke.

"Try to make Christmas be like it's always been?"

Sheila crumpled into Marla's arms, her "yes" barely audible over the muffled sobs.

Howard started singing. "You better not shout, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town. Really? I don't need him looking over my shoulder, judging if I'm good or not. I'm tired of being nice!"

"We need to cry. The baby Jesus didn't cry? I doubt that! Have you ever known a baby not to cry?" Jessica nudged Howard.

Margaret, the group leader, watched as some people in the group reached out to Sheila. Others averted their gaze. Each knew from their own experience the same thing: Holidays would never be the same. But how to help Sheila?

## MAKING A LIST AND CHECKING IT THRICE

"Let's 'flip' 'Santa Claus Is Coming to Town' and instead of letting it manipulate us, let's use it to our advantage," suggested Margaret.

Sheila looked up, curious. "Flip it like an old house? Like DIY shows?"

"Or you can decide to love it, or list it." Margaret chuckled as she handed out some blank pages. "Let's do some brainstorming. List everything you and your loved one usually do to prepare for the holidays. Everything. Baking. Visiting. Travel. Concerts. Church. Decorating. Social events. Shopping. And it's okay to get emotional." For the next fifteen minutes, the group diligently wrote lists. Sometimes a tear dropped on the paper.

Margaret broke in. "The first thing we all must do is accept that holidays will NEVER be the same when we lose a loved one. Our family and we must let go of all expectations of recreating holidays of the past. That's the key to surviving instead of sabotaging.

Check your list and prioritize. **1) What three things must you absolutely experience? Circle only three.** **2) Put a line through anything that will stress you out. Just for this year.**

"What about the kids?" Vivian's voice trembled.

"We'll get to them later," Margaret soothed softly. "First let's deal with you." She stopped and smiled. "I lied. We're making a list, and checking it *thrice*. **3) Put a star on everything your loved one did during the holiday. Two stars if this can't be replaced.**"

"Dan always brined and fried the turkey. Nobody knows how to use that fryer. And nobody knows the recipe. It died with him," said Marla.

"There's an empty chair at the head of the table. Steve always said the blessing." Sheila's brow furrowed. "Who will say it now? Do I keep his chair empty?"

"Jan always had the house smelling so good: pumpkin pie and sugar cookies. We would pull out her great-grandmother's Glogg recipe and make bottles for all our friends," said Howard.

## GONNA FIND OUT WHO'S NAUGHTY AND NICE

"Let's consider boundaries," Margaret continued. "Boundaries protect us by letting us step back and decide when to say 'no' and when to say 'yes.' It's about deciding how we want to be treated.

"The people around us might do or say things that hurt us. Most don't mean to be 'naughty,' they want to focus on 'happy.' Many are uncomfortable with loss. They want us to tuck away all our emotions and be 'nice.' How many of you felt everything was up to you to make the season 'Merry?' Hands went up—mostly women.

"This season it's important to be true to yourself and know your limits. You don't have to live up to anyone's expectations." Margaret paused. "Even your own."

"My brother tells me to suck it up," sighed Ted. "What a guy!"

"So, let's make a list of the people around you. Who is naughty? The toxic ones? Avoid engaging with them. Let them go. Don't play their 'reindeer games.' Who's positive? People you can trust?"

"Like Clarice in Rudolph?" Marla perked up. "My friend Jean is like that. Soothing."

Article continues, next page...

## BE GOOD FOR GOODNESS SAKE

“Consider what’s good for you this season. Have your kids and grandkids write their list. Talk together. Everyone is hurting. Plan ahead. Think through the day. Be flexible, or compromise. Do you have to fry the turkey? Could the kids learn the ancient family recipe? Try some new traditions? Just order pizza? Heretical? But...relaxing. Order out, split up responsibilities. Don’t let your loved one be the elephant in the room. Set a place for your loved one. Share stories. It’s okay to cry and laugh. It’s healing,” Margaret offered with a smile.

## HE SEES YOU WHEN YOU’RE SLEEPING

Margaret lowered her voice, “Whether you believe or not, pour out your heart. I believe God is watching over you. One of my kids once shared, ‘Christmas is about God putting skin on in the form of baby Jesus, to be with people.’ Hanukkah is about God providing light when the oil ran out for 8 days! Kwanzaa is about the people, the struggle, sacrifice, and the possibilities ahead. All ancient traditions and holidays are about the light of hope in the midst of darkness. Choose hope.”

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## COMFORT & JOY

During this season, take time for yourself, ask: “*What will it take for me to survive / enjoy this holiday season?*”

- ◆ Be with positive, understanding people.
- ◆ Drive around and look at the lights.
- ◆ Wrap up in a cozy blanket and drink cocoa.
- ◆ Speak positively to yourself. No self-criticism.
- ◆ “Talk” to your loved one. Laugh and cry. Journal.
- ◆ Light a candle. Get still, take time, talk with God.
- ◆ Search YouTube: Wartburg Choir & Children’s Pageants.
- ◆ Enjoy comforting carbs!
- ◆ Call a long-lost friend, or two...three?
- ◆ Visit or call a shut-in. Ask about their childhood.
- ◆ Imbibe, a little.
- ◆ What gave you joy as a child? Do that.
- ◆ Forgive. Free yourself from a grudge.
- ◆ Dance, sing, move like nobody’s watching.
- ◆ Take a hot shower, get a massage.
- ◆ Eat your favorite foods.
- ◆ Go to a party, leave when needed.
- ◆ Do things that make you laugh.
- ◆ Get outside, take a walk, or drive. Enjoy nature.
- ◆ Read Luke 1-2, Matthew 1-2.
- ◆ In memory of your loved one, give to charity.

## PLAN AHEAD - WHAT TO SAY

*You want to be with friends and family. You can be with people, and avoid an ambush. Communicate clearly, to graciously clarify expectations.*

- I plan on being there. But I might need to leave early or even change my mind at the last minute. I don’t want to be rude; my emotions take me by surprise. Thank you for your invitation and understanding.
- In the middle of the party, I might be sad, but I really do want to talk about \_\_\_\_\_. Please don’t avoid bringing up his/her name. There are so many happy memories to laugh about. And if I cry? It’s ok. I just need a hug and understanding.
- Enough about me, how are you doing? What’s going on in your life?
- I know it’s been over a year, but please don’t line me up with anyone.
- I always love your party. But, can I take a raincheck? I can’t do crowds, but I’d love to see you. Let’s meet for coffee. Wednesday?
- Please excuse me this year, I’m just not ready to be out and about.
- Thank you for your advice. I am working on moving forward with my grief. Oh, there’s a couple friends of mine. I really need to talk to them. Excuse me.
- Surely God doesn’t need another angel in heaven. But thank you for your prayers and encouragement.
- Would you excuse me for a few minutes? I need some time alone.
- Thank you for the wine. So thoughtful. I need a clear head so I’m taking a break from alcohol. Join me for a sparkling cider?

## HOMEWORK: PRACTICE THE ABOVE.

The more you repeat, the more confidence you will exude. Do not apologize or argue for your healthy boundaries. Know your limits. You can relax knowing that you have a game plan if a situation arises. You got this.



## SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

By Zachary L. Smith, Funeral Director

I love flipping the calendar to October. It’s my favorite time of year. Football, huddling around a bonfire, the crisp morning air, the harvest moon, and pumpkin patches. Halloween at the end of the month begins setting the table for the holiday season. However, it also symbolizes something more to me.

The holidays have always been special to me. People seem to treat each other better. A lot of people’s kindness seems genuine. The small gestures of the holidays bring warmth to cold days. The holidays are even more special for me now as the parent of young children.

Two years ago, I wasn’t looking forward to the holidays for the first time in my life. And that’s a profound statement for me to make. I’m the guy that starts listening to Christmas music on November 1. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not skipping the Thanksgiving turkey nap or weekend leftovers, but Christmas is king for me.

No, I wasn’t looking forward to the holidays because it was only going to underscore my dad not being there. He died in June 2020. The first year without him was *really* hard. I remember as October flew by trying to think about our yearly holiday traditions, trying to prepare myself. Every family has those, right? Of course, *our* family does. Many years we cut down a real tree, went to candlelight service at church, or made a bunch of goodies, but not every year. The only constant was opening gifts on Christmas Eve.

My wife’s family *also* gathers on Christmas Eve. We alternated holidays for all the years we’ve been together. We had some discussions about trading that year, before ultimately deciding to keep things the same. I felt terrible guilt about my mom being alone on Christmas Eve. Thankfully, she spent the evening at my sister’s house. That caused a lot of resentment and anger in me that I wasn’t able to express in a healthy way. I was blinded by grief. I felt like my wife wasn’t hearing or seeing me. I said some things I shouldn’t have said. My grief was getting in the way of what was important. So, I swallowed my pride and got ready for Christmas Day. I convinced myself keeping things normal would help ease my sadness.

I remember walking into my parents’ house Christmas morning. I noticed so many little things throughout the day. The absence of his infectious laugh, silly one-liners and dad jokes, the empty chair at the table. I wondered if the rest of my family felt like me. Like I was just there for everyone else, pretending to be okay so I could just get through it. Totally, completely numb. I wondered if they could tell I was going through the motions.

I tried to read my sister, who gets her emotional output from my dad. She’s either stoic or crying. That didn’t help.

I missed some of the things dad and I would argue about. Politics, when to change oil in the car, who should be playing quarterback for the Hawkeyes. Mom smoked brisket and ham for dinner and made dad’s holiday Chex Mix. It was comforting and delicious, but not the same. The familiar tastes and smells afforded me time to reflect.

Christmas 2019 was when I told him it was ok if he didn’t want to keep going with chemo treatments after a nine-year battle with lung cancer. The doctors had already told him it wasn’t prolonging his life, just making him sick. He wanted to exhaust all his options. I was the first one in the family to say anything to him about it. I remember my mom calling me later and telling me how important that was to both of them. “Mom, it needed to be said. No one else has said anything to

him about it. He needs to know it’s okay.” It wasn’t about giving permission. It was an act of love. It was important to me that he knew what was in my heart.

I was fortunate in that way. I was able to have many of the conversations I wanted to have with him before he passed. I know others are not as privileged, which gave me some peace.

Back in reality, I tried to be emotionally available to my son, wife, and mom. I also tried to think of the important things he taught me. Hard work, honesty, integrity. Above all, family first.

*That’s what was important.* That’s how I was going to survive these days I used to love. It was being together that mattered. Sharing those memories of years gone by and making new ones of our own, passing the love of family onto our children. Then, just like that, it was over. Vanished in a flash, like holidays often do.

Last Christmas was better. It’s always going to present a challenge, isn’t it? The wish for that hug that will never come, that meaningful conversation which we’ll never have, seeing his eyes light up when the kids opened a gift he really wanted them to have. It’s never going to be the same, but it can still be special.

My wound isn’t as fresh as it was. I don’t cry every time I visit his grave anymore. Sometimes, but not every time. I’m to the point in my healing journey where I smile or feel good when I think of him. It doesn’t hurt like it used to. I take time to remember. It’s those most difficult moments that I hear him in my mind encouraging me. “You have to keep going. Do your best for your kids.” He prepared me for these moments, and so I go forward.



*Zach has been a funeral director with Locke Funeral Services since 2015. He offers empathy and expertise as he honors your wishes for your loved one.*



Christmas, once merry and bright, can feel overshadowed as we cope with loss. A year ago, while my husband was in hospice, I listened to “*Doesn’t Feel Like Christmas This Year.*”

Please listen to it. I believe it will touch your heart and put your feelings to music. For more information go to [www.musicforthesoul.org](http://www.musicforthesoul.org) where you can find more songs to help you this season.

