

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS

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What can I possibly say to help someone through the holidays? I cannot recall how many times I have wished for magic words to ease someone else's pain. But, of course, there are no magic words. There aren't even any answers. But there are suggestions of ideas tried in the past. As bereaved parents and siblings, it is important to share our experiences with newly bereaved families who look to us for help.

Our first Christmas without our son Jesse, we changed almost all of our normal activities. We traditionally had had dinner in my husband's parents' home. That first year, instead, we had dinner at my daughter's home. We invited friends who did not have family in the area. We shopped very little. The stores and crowds were too much to handle. We hung no decorations or stockings, had no tree - nothing. I stayed busy making candy and baking breads.

We tried to help others less fortunate than ourselves. We donated toys and food to various charities. We participated in a Breakfast with Santa with Project Kind, the wonderful school Jesse had attended. Basically, we did what we had to do to survive. Friends and family seemed to understand or at least accepted our changes. Maybe they just didn't want to discuss it. Whatever! We survived those first holidays, much to our amazement.

The second Christmas season we had a new one-month old granddaughter. She helped a lot. We all know that our children can never be replaced. But if there is someone or something else to focus on, even for awhile, it helps. We had dinner at our home that year. We put up decorations, including Jesse's stocking. We decided that anyone who wished could write Jesse a note and place it in his stocking. Between preparing dinner and loving the new baby, again we survived.

Now this year we intend to return to Jim's parents. I don't dread Christmas nearly as much as before. I'm not really looking forward to it, but I don't panic at the thought.

What I would like to suggest to others is to do what you need to do. Other peoples' expectations don't automatically have to be met. Discuss your feelings with family members. Remember, they hurt too. They will try to understand and respect your feelings. It takes a lot of time and energy to grieve. Allow yourself all the time you need.

I hope that something I mentioned is of help to newly bereaved families. The holidays can be painful, but we shall survive them. Maybe next year will be easier, and the next even easier still.

Maybe before too long, we can enjoy all the memories of Christmases past without so much pain. I wish you all a peaceful Christmas.

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