

## HOLIDAY ACHES

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After the first few holiday seasons after my daughter's death, I thought I had licked the holiday doldrums. After all, two, three, four years had passed. I was unprepared for the dull ache I battled throughout the holidays in 1993; however, it didn't dawn on me until the middle of January why.

December 1993 was the first time since 1989 that both my surviving sons and their families, my step-daughter and her family had been all together during the holidays. I had been looking forward to having them all home at the same time once again. The cousins (all my grandchildren) would be able to renew acquaintances, and I could watch their interaction with interest and glee.

Yet all during the season, I was plagued with a longing, an all too familiar ache. I missed my daughter's presence. Her widowed husband had remarried in May that year, and he and his new wife were also included in our family gathering. I liked his new wife very much. But I suppose subconsciously, I was reminded even more of my daughter's absence. As I wrote my Christmas letter to my daughter Teri and put it into her Christmas stocking, unbidden tears chased themselves down my cheeks. I pushed my thoughts away from sadness; I reminded myself how lucky we were to have known and loved her, and to know and love her still.

Later I realized what should have been obvious to me during the holidays. Although our family was altogether, it wasn't the same as it used to be. Teri was missing from the scene. It's one thing to hold her spirit in our hearts and minds, and quite another to have her sitting in her usual place at the table or leading us in Christmas carols.

We all missed her, even after nearly eight years; and we talked about her often. We had a wonderful holiday together that I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I hope we will have many more such reunions. Next time, though, I'll be wiser. I'll know why the ache is there, why the joy is tempered slightly and why as long as I live my life and our family's life together, will be forever altered. The difference will always be noticeable, I imagine. But then, the difference Teri has made in each of our lives is and always will be obvious too.

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