

LIFTS TO THE HEART

PREPARING FOR THANKSGIVING

By: Elaine Stillwell
Bereaved mother
Rockville Centre, NY

Many of us who are grieving feel that Thanksgiving is a useless and painful holiday because we do not feel very thankful with our terribly hurting hearts.

Maybe we could prepare our hearts for Thanksgiving by peeking into them to find at least one and maybe even more blessings that we could count at this special time of the year.

After I lost my two oldest children, 19 year old Peggy and 21 year old Denis, in the same car accident, I learned that the tiniest thing that could ease my heart's burden was indeed a blessing! Discovering these "lifts to the heart" may help you prepare your heart for Thanksgiving. Sometimes amid all the pain, we forget what we could be grateful for. Take an "inventory" of your heart. Perhaps you could be thankful for:

THE STRENGTH TO GET UP EACH DAY

--even if it is not fun. Grieving takes 10 times the energy to get through a day. Exhaustion can be one of the hardest parts of grieving.

THE LOVE OF ONE SPECIAL PERSON

--whether it be spouse, child or friend giving us encouragement and support. I call my husband "my blotter" because he picks up all my tears and says, "It's okay."

SOMEONE NEEDING OUR LOVE

--a person giving us reason to live, to nurture, to plan for, to hug.

A SPECIAL HOBBY OR INTEREST

--an activity that consumes our time and keeps our mind busy. It could be reading "grief" books to survive, writing our thoughts in a journal, making crafts, playing the piano, listening to music, planting a garden, walking along the beach.

A JOB

--that keeps our attention and makes hours, days, weeks, and month pass by quickly.

PICTURES

--that make special moments treasures and keep our happy memories very much alive.

THE YEARS

--we had with our loved one.

SOMEONE REACHING OUT TO US

--in a special way. It could be a new friend, a fellow employee, a support group.

MUSIC OR POETRY

--that soothes our soul.

A PET

--that makes us laugh, listens to our troubles and never tells anybody, who allows us to cry and needs us. I could never “repay” my 15 year old Labrador retriever for his untiring devotion!

CLERGY AND DOCTORS

--who try to help heal us.

A LINKING OBJECT

--something that belonged to our loved one and brings joy to our hearts, such as a ring, bracelet, watch, jacket, book, golf clubs, garden.

FAVORITE RECIPES

--of our loved one that brings smiles to our faces. It's French Toast for my Denis and Angel Food Cake for my Peggy!

THOUGHTFUL RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

--who have tried to understand our needs and not frustrated us with a “time and schedule.”

TRADITIONS OR RITUALS

--that bring a moment's peace to our hearts. Going to the beach, watching a football game, lighting a candle, hanging a Christmas stocking, coloring Easter eggs, attending church services—whatever touches your heart.

NATURE

--a pretty flower, a sunset, a gorgeous mountain or ocean view- to stir the love of beauty in our hearts.

CARDS

--with just the right message-to let us know someone cares about us or remembers our loved one in a special way.

THE PHONE

--to heal us when we're feeling low and need to talk to someone else.

BOOKS

--to bring a soothing message to our weary hearts and to give us a “thought” to carry us for the moment.

PRAYER

--to our loved one or to our God or both to send us strength to keep us going through the "Valley of the Shadow." Talking to our loved one helps our hearts. Including them in our plans makes them a part of the occasion. I always put Peggy and Denis "in charge" of the weather for our special events like weddings and parties. They do such a good job that friends ask for their help too. In addition to the weather, Peggy and Denis are great at finding parking places.

TIME

--that gives back to us what we lose through wisdom and memories.

May your Thanksgiving be filled with reasons to be thankful! Having loved and having been loved is perhaps the most wonderful reason of all.