

## Gifts You Can't Buy with Money.

Some holiday traditions are too difficult to continue. Plan to only do the holiday traditions of years past only if they remain meaningful or you wish to memorialize your loved one. Often new traditions are developed in honor and memory of the deceased. Consider adapting old traditions into new ones. Here are some ideas, some of which are particularly meaningful for children.

1) Consider maintaining the tradition of the Christmas Tree, but adapt it to your current situation. Decorate the tree with ornaments that were special to the deceased, perhaps a tractor ornament for a farmer, a baseball-themed ornament for a true fan, a ballerina bauble for your dancer, a camping ornament for your nature lover. There are thousands of possibilities. There are many specialty ornaments, you can find something for everyone. If you wish, spread the word and have anyone that wants join in the ornament sharing, do so.

When my grandmother died, we hung a cardinal on the boughs as she loved their splash of red color in the winter white. For my dentist father-in-law his grandchildren were each given a dental tool and they spent an entire afternoon decorating their tool ornament for Grandpa. Creativity certainly helps. These projects inject a bit of fun into a stressful situation.

2) Another family had a different take on tree decorations. They used their traditional ornaments, but added a special ornament for their deceased daughter. Every year as a family, they chose an ornament that could be engraved. Then they had their daughter's name and the year engraved on it. Each Christmas thereafter, it became traditional to search for the memory ornaments amidst the branches. Everyone always made sure they accounted for every ornament and it turned into an exciting event.

3) Stockings. A family with four children always had each child hang their stockings on the mantle. The Christmas after the youngest died, the other siblings each hung their own stocking. The parents had chosen not to hang the fourth stocking since it would be a painful reminder of death. But the children had different ideas. All the children, aged 5 to 13, wanted their brother's stocking hung with their own. (As the youngest child said with authority, "So we never forget him.")

4) The wreath is a symbol of 'eternal hope'. Hang a fresh wreath upon your door to symbolize you and your loved ones feelings for each other. The wreath is a circle, a remembrance of your love which will never end, even in death.

## Options for the Holidays

Here are a few more ideas to consider:

- 1) Make a memorial donation to a favorite charity. Perhaps donate the money that would have been spent on gifts to a not-for-profit which you support.
  
- 2) Light candles in memory of your loved one. Small children (or children of any age for that matter) seem attracted to the idea of lighting a virtual candle on the Internet. (See the link below.)
  
- 3) If the grieving spouse or family wishes to have a verbal tribute to their loved one it is very appropriate. Whenever and wherever all are gathered, have a designated friend or family member begin by reminiscing about your missing loved one. Anyone who wishes may participate, but if there are some who do not want to speak or even stay in the same room, that is fine too.
  
- 4) Look at old photographs of past Christmases, the older the better. Also dig up those Christmas videos and make them available to those that want to see Christmas in the past.
  
- 5) Listen to holiday music that was especially loved by the deceased. (My first grief-filled Christmas, one of the children found an old Muppet's Christmas record. "Hey" she said. "Grandpa loved the Muppets." Then and there we dug out the old phonograph and the kids kept the music going half the day.) This project might be more suitable if you can find a lovely classical or blues album. At least it would be more pleasant to adult ears.
  
- 6) If it has been several months or longer since the death of your loved one, you may feel up to a trip, especially if there are older teens in the house. A ski trip to nearby slopes, a few nights in a cheery lodge, or possibly a visit to a relative a few hours away.