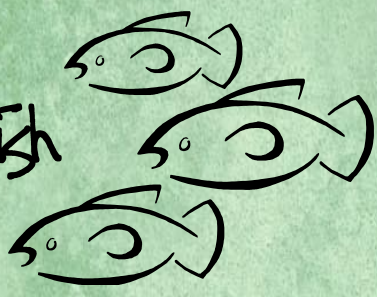




The Forward Fish



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Thanksgiving Blessings

For many of us, including me, memories of Thanksgiving include the drive the grandma's house to enjoy food, family, and a little football. For me, it also includes the memory of announcing my engagement to my now late husband. So, with every turkey day, I can't help but recall that memory and the reality that he has now passed. Not necessarily the happiest way to start the holiday season, but even so, it offers a special reflection of the good times we shared.

I guess that is the sentiment I have resigned to accept during the holidays ~ be thankful for the times you have shared with those you have lost, for what you have now, and for the future blessings you are to receive. For every blessing I have been given, I know there are others that have less and there are others who may have more. However, being thankful for the gifts in your life is what Thanks-

giving is all about.

Realizing that precious gifts may be lost is what helps one appreciate having them. Unfortunately, sometimes it takes a great loss to understand this principle. Having lost my spouse, Thanksgiving has taken on a whole new meaning. Although I was always grateful during this time, I now feel a more humble sense of thanks and an inner appreciation of what I have in my life.

As you prepare for this season, do not shut out the memories of your loved ones. Let their role in your life be celebrated for the gifts they have given to you ~ a smile or laugh when you needed it, a helping hand, a soul mate for a part of your journey, or the best friend you turned to for advice. These are all gifts for which anyone would be thankful to receive.

What Not to Say

During this holiday season, if you happen to be near someone experiencing the pains of loss, there are certain phrases you should avoid. Holidays are difficult enough for a grieving person, so understanding how what you say may affect their emotions, may help both of you endure this time.

Don't Say ~

- It was God's will.
- I know he/she is in a better place.
- It's time to get over it.
- I know how you feel.
- Don't be so bitter.
- You need to be strong.

Do Say ~

- I'm thinking of you a lot during this holiday time.
- I'm sorry you are dealing with this now.
- I understand you need some time.
- I can only imagine how hard this is for you.
- This isn't fair.
- If you'd like, I will help you.





Holiday Survival Guide

If you have lost a loved one, getting through the holidays can be a truly daunting experience. Everywhere you go, there is holiday music, shoppers gleefully getting gifts for the special people in their lives, and don't forget, all the parties and greeting cards with wishes of happiness and good cheer. Amidst all the trouble in everyone's lives, Christmas seems to be the holiday when happiness survives and coping with the happiness of others and a personal loss can be quite painful for one who is grieving.

If you are grieving during this season or are remembering a loved one, there are several items to remember in order to help you survive the time. The following continue to help me and I hope will help you as well.

It's OK To Be Sad ~

You've been through a traumatic experience and it is ok to vent, cry, and even scream. Don't feel that you need to put on a show for others to be normal. This IS your normal right now and allowing yourself to feel it will help relieve the pressure you are dealing with.

It's OK To Be Alone ~

Everyone is different. Some may need to be around others as a comfort during loss, but others prefer to deal with this pain more privately. Know that it is ok to spend this time alone if you like. Although many won't understand, they should respect your wishes and allow you this space and time to heal.

Relaxation Strategies for the Holidays

Don't forget to take care of yourself during the holidays! Here are a few thoughts to help you do just that:

- Purchase an easy listening holiday CD and listen to it while driving or just before going to bed.
- Avoid the crowds, cheerful music and all ~ purchase gifts online. You may even choose to have the company wrap and deliver your gifts so you won't have to worry about that!
- Only accept party invitations you want to attend. Avoid those that make you feel like you are obligated to attend.
- Treat yourself to a manicure, pedicure, spa day, or a day at home for you. Focus on you and what you like to do. Maybe even eat a pint of your favorite ice cream while watching that movie you've been wanting to see all year.
- Help someone else ~ send a greeting card to others you know who may be suffering, volunteer at a community center, or participate in a Christmas drive to help the homeless.
- Donate goodies to the local animal shelter. These furry friends love attention and you can offer so much to them. Maybe even adopt one!

Honor Your Loved One ~

Here are a few ideas to celebrate the loss of someone close:

- Buy a special candle for your home and light it through the holidays in memory of your loved one. To you, it will be a special sign of that person and their special presence in your life now.
- Place a special ornament on your tree in their honor. Whether it be homemade or purchased, you can use this as a way to have your loved one participate in your current holiday.
- Donate to a cause your loved one felt strongly about. My husband and I enjoyed the outdoors and I continue to donate to Ducks Unlimited in his honor. It makes me feel good and allows me to promote something my late husband supported.
- If you are religious, visit a church and light a candle in memory of your loved one during the holidays. Stop and say a few prayers for them and for guidance on your continuing journey.

Focus On What You Have ~

Holiday commercials, shows, cards, and other marketing for the season equate the time with happiness and good tidings. It is important to realize that the holidays are not always that picture perfect image in our minds. Many people struggle through this time due to family tensions, financial problems, depression, and yes, the loss of a loved one. During this time, focus on what you have ~ health, home, friends, pets, employment, etc. Avoid looking at others and being envious of their lives. Your life is wonderful and you have many gifts.



Easy Christmas Gifts

- Gift Cards
- Candles
- Holiday CD's
- Home Baked Goodies ~ Place in a Christmas tin!
 - Ornaments ~ Homemade or Purchased
 - Flavored Coffee or Cocoa
- Tasteful Alcohol ~ Wine, Bailey's Irish Cream, etc.
 - Holiday Pins, Socks, Towels, Soaps
 - Lunch with you!

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