

Preparing for Special Days

by John Kennedy Saynor

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“My daughter’s birthday is next week and I am dreading the day!” This is a comment I hear regularly from bereaved people who are facing, especially for the first time, a special day after the death of a loved one.

The first year of special days is especially difficult. You will face the first wedding anniversary, birthday, and anniversary of the person’s death. You will also encounter the first of any number of special days, Christmas, Hanukkah, Easter, Thanksgiving and New Year’s. Not only that, the changes of seasons will bring memories of the one who has died.

It may help you to know that a certain amount of anxiety before one of these special days is quite normal. You may experience strong feelings of sadness, longing for the one who has died and perhaps even anger that he or she left you. These feelings will be reduced if you plan ahead for these special days.

There are a number of important principles that apply to these special days.

Anticipation of the day is usually worse than the day itself.

I have had many people tell me that they worried about the upcoming day and when it arrived, it was much easier than they thought. That is usually the case!

Make plans for the day.

Don’t let the day control you. Planning is central to making sure that the day isn’t as bad as you anticipate. If you don’t make plans you are likely to be anxious because of the unknown. If you plan, you know in advance what the day will look like.

Involve other family members or friends.

Remember everyone in the family is wondering what is going to happen. If your family is one that has difficulty communicating, it will be worse for everyone. Ask people in advance what they would like to do. Children often come up with something quite creative that actually brings some life and enjoyment to the day.

Recently I sat with a group of people who shared their ideas with a woman who was about to observe her late son’s birthday. Here are some of them.

One woman who recently observed her daughter’s birthday told how she took flowers to her daughter’s house. Her daughter loved flowers. It made more sense to her mother to take them to her daughter’s home rather than to the cemetery where they may not be noticed by anyone. In her daughter’s home, her daughter’s husband and two children would appreciate them.

Another woman told how she and her daughter spent the anniversary of her husband's death shopping! They had dinner together that night and, of course, talked about their husband and father.

On the other side of the circle a young woman whose husband had died suddenly told of how she threw a big party for her husband's birthday. She invited 70 people because this is exactly what her husband would have wanted.

Recently a couple shared with me what they did on their daughter's birthday. Their daughter had three children under 6 years of age! On that day, they had a birthday party for the children's mother and after dinner went out into the garden where the children released helium filled balloons. In the balloons were notes and pictures the children had placed there for their mother. It was very therapeutic for both the grandparents and the children!

The journey through grief is not an easy one as you know. However, with some determination and creativity that involves other people, the journey can be made successfully. Special days can bring the family together and help you to realize you are not alone and that life does indeed go on.

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Resources are available through his website: www.genesis-resources.com.

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