

WAYS TO HONOR OUR LOVED ONES **(From the book 8:28 Hope in the Darkness)**

The first year is often the most difficult because we have to work through all the “firsts.” The day of the loss becomes the first day of the new year of firsts. From that point forward, the first Christmas, Valentine’s Day, birthday, Easter, graduation, anniversary, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Thanksgiving, family portrait, vacation, or any special occasion or tradition missed throughout that year because of the loss may be difficult.

Each person has the right to handle these firsts in their own distinctive way. Just as our personalities are unique and individually complex, so are our grieving styles. We should never punish ourselves for not grieving how others want or expect us to. It is essential to respect and love yourself enough to recognize that you are dealing with your emotions as best you can.

Once again, it is important to think ahead and have a plan for the day or event. Plan how you will spend the day. Take a walk on the beach, get out of town, go to a movie, or hold a ceremony to honor the baby you’ve lost.

Special times, events, and holiday seasons that once brought joy may now cause a further realization of loss. Because the holiday season and significant dates can bring intense pain, here are some ways to start new traditions to get through these special days. Hopefully, some of these will not only honor your loved one but also heal your heart and strengthen you as you adapt to your new normal.

- ❖ Write a special letter, poem, song or prayer about your loved one.
- ❖ Help someone in need. It is always a blessing to bless others. When we can help others through similar experiences, we always heal a little more.
- ❖ Visit a place that is especially meaningful to you and your loved one.
- ❖ Plant a tree or flower in memory of your loved one.
- ❖ Buy a Christmas ornament that reminds you of your loved one in some way and place it on the tree in their memory.
- ❖ Give a significant book, framed photo, piece of jewelry, or article of clothing of your loved one to someone special who would appreciate the memorable gift.
- ❖ Light a candle to include the loved one in the holiday activities.
- ❖ Have the family work on a keepsake collage together (or create one yourself!)
 - o Step #1 – Draw a shape (cross, square, circle, triangle) or use the entire piece of paper.
 - o Step #2 – Add pictures or words in the four corner spaces of the cross or within the outline.
 - o Step #3 – Be creative! The collage can include whatever you like and is an excellent activity for all ages, using any medium you have on hand (old magazines, photographs, construction or printer paper, colored pencils, pens, paint, markers, scissors, ribbon, glitter). Think about including the following:
 - Meaningful words that describe things the loved one taught you, unique characteristics they possessed, or a name or significant place.
 - Memorable pictures (a visual reminder of times spent with the person and activities you enjoyed together).
- ❖ Make a digital photo collage or video of special times.
- ❖ Create a memory book with pictures, mementos, meaningful cards, drawings, anecdotes, or poems.
- ❖ Donate a CuddleCot to a hospital to help grieving parents of babies or a CuddleBlanket or Angel Wrap to a hospice for grieving families of older individuals.

- ❖ Order personalized memorial items online, such as a weighted plush animal, jewelry made of flowers or your loved one's ashes, or an engraved locket. (There are always new or local artisans to discover on Etsy or at your local Farmers' Market who can also offer these items).
- ❖ Create a family Christmas photo using a meaningful object such as a balloon, rose, jewelry, or teddy bear to honor and subtly include the deceased family member.
- ❖ Donate money to a charity or cause that had special meaning to your loved one or is related to a diagnosis or cause of death for which you'd like to raise awareness. www.828HOPE.com
- ❖ Visit the cemetery or place where you scattered ashes, whether alone or with family and friends, to place flowers, pray, journal, reminisce, and honor your loved one.
- ❖ Go to the beach and watch the sunset or sunrise, reflecting on God's beauty and how this loss has positively impacted your life.
- ❖ Have a birthday celebration with cake. Surviving children often want to have a party on their sibling's birthday, which can be a great way to get them involved in honoring the brother or sister they lost, and it often becomes an annual tradition. When our kids were old enough to understand that they had an older brother in heaven, they requested a party for Matthew's birthday. We ended up getting a cake and sang Happy Birthday to Matthew. It was a sweet activity that meant something special for all of us.
- ❖ Balloon release. A balloon release ceremony is one of our favorite activities to share with the Empty Arms groups we lead. During our last group session, we provide white helium-filled balloons representing each baby that has died. We use white balloons to represent purity and innocence. We supply black felt-tip pens for each to write names, meaningful words, poems, Bible verses, or special notes to their baby. Once everybody is ready to release their balloon, we stand in a circle, read a poem, and ask if anyone would like to say anything, pray, or simply speak their baby's name. We then raise our balloons in the center and release them together. The white balloons typically stay in a cluster, creating a beautiful luminescent sight against the night sky. It is a lovely visual image of our loved ones being carried up to heaven. *(Note: check with local ordinances in your area before doing this, as this activity may not be allowed for environmental protection reasons.)*
- ❖ Buy paper lanterns and light up the night sky, similar to the balloon release. *(Note: check with local ordinances in your area before doing this, as this activity may not be allowed for environmental protection reasons.)*
- ❖ Use a favorite T-shirt or clothes to make a quilt or stuffed animal.
- ❖ Have a canvas painting created or a photo enlargement made from a favorite picture.
- ❖ Ask friends and family to write a card to your loved one for a birthday or Christmas (if the latter, you can put up a stocking for them and put the cards you receive in it to be read on Christmas morning as everyone takes turns opening their presents).
- ❖ Create a social media page to honor loved ones with pictures, memories, and space for others to share. Schedule events for special dates and holidays, where others can light candles or find a unique way to honor your loved one and share. A dear friend gave beautiful shells and rocks to everyone attending her brother's memorial service and asked everyone to leave the shell or rock at a place that was special to them or a place they thought her brother would enjoy. She then asked them to take a picture and share it with others on a Facebook page created in the brother's honor. It was amazing to see all the photos and hear many beautiful stories about where the shells and rocks were placed worldwide in honor of my friend's brother. It was healing for all involved and provided much comfort for my friend.

- ❖ Luminaries - In many towns, churches, garden clubs, and other organizations distribute luminaries (white bags anchored by a layer of sand, in which a white candle is lit to create a beautiful light display lining the curbside) at Christmastime. This still happens in Pennsylvania, and I remember driving through my sister's neighborhood during a visit with her the year before she died. It was one of the most beautiful sights our family had ever seen. For miles, street after street was lined with white candlelit bags (or sometimes milk jugs, if a family had wanted to DIY their luminaries). After my sister passed away, Rick vowed to light luminaries every Christmas to honor my sister and all the loved ones we had lost over the years. It has become a special tradition for Rick to place and light each luminary in front of our house. Once they are all lit, he gathers our family to see the beautiful luminaries lining our part of the street. It is a lovely way to remember those no longer here. We plan to get the entire neighborhood to join in and line all our streets with luminaries each Christmas Eve.
- ❖ Kintsugi – the Japanese art of putting broken pottery pieces back together with gold – a metaphor for healing and creating something of beauty from the broken pieces of life.
- ❖ Painted Rocks - I recently began painting “Hope” rocks. Each rock has a Bible verse written on the back of it. Hope Rocks are intended to provide healing as a therapeutic activity or to be given to someone who might be going through a difficult time to provide some added hope. We are always blessed by being a blessing to others.



These are all ways to honor those we have loved and lost over the years, and as we now have a new normal, it may be the time to start some new traditions as you adjust to your new life. With every ending, there is a new beginning.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)



Karen@828Hope.com
 8:28 Hope in the Darkness
www.828HOPE.com