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We struggled and debated about our Christmas traditions after Lindsay died. Should we keep them the same? Should we add a few? Create some new ones?

One question we particularly struggled with was the idea of hanging stockings. In the beginning, we didn't hang any.

Our other children were too young to know anything of stockings and the treats and goodies they were supposed to hold, so it was easy to ignore the stocking question for a few years.

Everything changed when Melissa asked why her friends found stockings on Christmas morning, but she and Katie Rose did not. I bought a couple of kits, made them each one and hung them by the chimney. But on the days leading up to Christmas that year, it was more than I could manage to see two stockings and none for Lindsay.

So the Christmas of 1993, I made another personalised stocking. It brought me great comfort to sew on the beads and sequins, while dreaming of hanging it in its proper place between the other two.

On Christmas Eve we hung the special ornaments we had collected for the kids, set the nativity up in its usual place of honour and hung the three stockings across the mantle. The house was filled with the smells of Christmas, lit only by candlelight and the twinkling lights of the tree. Phil and I stayed up frantically assembling the bicycles and doll houses, filling the stockings, wrapping the last minute gifts, and then fell into a deep slumber. Early next morning I was awakened by Melissa's urgent whisper.

"Mom! Wake-up! I have something to show you."

Assuming she was going to exclaim over the red bike parked in the living room, I woke Phil to join the celebration. But when we walked into the living room my eyes were immediately drawn, not to the bike, but to the three stockings hanging on the mantle. "Don't you see, mom!" Melissa's voice was quivering. "Santa forgot to put anything in Lindsay's stocking!", and sure enough between the two stockings which were bulging with prizes and treats, hung another one, forlorn and achingly empty. "Do you think Santa sneaked in our rooms to see who lives here?" she asked. I was weeping now. The fact that Lindsay's stocking looked so starkly different from the others was MY fault, not Santa's. I was the one who bought the treats to fill them, but I just didn't realise. I suppose I thought that simply having it there was enough.

I was sitting down lost in thought and grief, blaming myself for this incredible blunder, when Melissa very matter of factly dumped the contents of her stocking in my lap and said, "Here, mom, Lindsay can have some of mine." And Katie Rose very quickly dropped an orange and two root beer barrels in the other stocking "These are for you Lindsay" she said. It just so happens that sometimes we think we are not going to be okay with certain things, only to discover this is not so.

And we eventually learn that it is okay to try new and different rituals every year until we know what feels right for us. We learn to live with our grief in different ways and we learn what we need to do in order to find a little comfort and peace.

If this is your first (second or fifth) Christmas since your child died, you may be struggling with the stocking question or other holiday issues. There is no "Grievers Book of Christmas Etiquette", because this is something we must discover on our own, in our own time and in our own way. Only you know what gives you that "feeling good" feeling. Give yourself permission to do what you need to do. May your Christmas be gentle and touched by an angel's love.

Written by Dana Gensler,
TCP Kentucky USA

WISH

I wish you gentle days And quiet nights.
I wish you memories To keep you strong.
I wish you time to smile And time for song.
And then I wish you friends To give you love,
When you are hurt and lost And life is blind.
I wish you friends and love And peace of mind.

Sascha

A Mothers Gift

'I love you, Son; I whisper, 'Merry Christmas
and God bless you.'

Away from me in body, but your spirit still remains,
In my even' waking moment, the sorrow and the pain.

Christmas, a time for giving and I'll not succumb to grief,
For if I do. then surely, I'll whither like a leaf.
With emptiness inside me what can I give to others?
Store-bought gifts are meaningless.

I'm asking, my dear son, Dylan,
Be with me today.
Help me give the gift of love
To those who've walked my way.

First there is your sister,
I love her very much.
She'll be happy with a kiss and hug
and time we spend together.

My family, so many of them,
I love them very much.
They'll be happy with a laugh and chat
And time we spend together.
My work colleagues, from classrooms,
I love them very much.
They'll be happy with a garden plant,
And time we spend together.

My dear friends, from TCF,
I love them very much.
They'll be happy with a cake and tea
And time we spend together.
Thank-you Dylan for showing me
The way to open my heart
And share the true spirit of Christmas,
I love you very much

Mariette
Mother of Dylan
18.7.74-12.01.97 and Alison TCF Vic. Au.

Well, its that time of the year again and the group is still going strong. We all know that this time of the year holds no excitement for us. Out come the masks that we need to wear so as to not spoil the rest of the family's day.

I wonder if I am the only one still grieving in my family; Johnny's name is hardly spoken by my family any more.

Maybe they think it will upset me if they mention his name but it upsets me more because they don't.

I need to be able to talk about my child, otherwise as time goes on will I start to wonder if he was only in my imagination. Where is he? I want to know is some one looking after him, will they love him as much as I do.

There must be a God of some sort out there somewhere because a multitude of bereaved parents have questions to ask answers to find.

But whatever the answers may be, not one of us will be happy again until we stand face to face in front of our lost children. That will be the day when we find complete happiness and joy again.

Written by Ruth
TCF, Vic. Au.

