

# Solace

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A Newsletter for Organ and Tissue Donor Families

## *Coping with Grief* DURING THE HOLIDAYS

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the original publisher of the article.

For most people, the sights, sounds and smells of the holiday season bring warm reminders of family, gift giving and the comfort of long held and cherished traditions. But for anyone who is mourning the loss of a loved one – whether recent or long ago - the season can trigger thoughts of sadness and a desire to withdraw from holiday-themed activities and reminders. As a result, many people look at this time of year as something to endure when in reality it can be a time for evolution into a new chapter of life.

“The holidays are especially hard in grief because they are occasions of great sentiment,” says Dr. Bill Hoy, a counsellor with more than 25 years’ experience in the field of bereavement. “Everywhere we go, we are reminded that someone very special has died and that the world is forever changed. But the holidays can also be a time of healing based on the choices you make this season,” he adds.

Dr. Hoy offers the following seven suggestions so that you can grow through the holidays rather than merely survive them:

**Admit the pain of grieving:** Allow yourself space and to cry when you need to. Coming to the realization that your holidays cannot be the same as before is painful but should be experienced.

**Do only as much celebrating as you feel like doing:** Don’t be tempted to participate in any and every activity that comes your way. Instead remember that grief is very tiring and, combined with normal holiday stress, can leave you exhausted. Give yourself permission to say no.

**Evaluate your traditions and create at least one new one:** You may not be able to keep all of your traditions as they were before your loss, so decide which family traditions you want to preserve, but take the

time to insert something new. Perhaps lighting a special candle or purchasing a unique holiday decoration in memory of your loved one will comfort you.

**Consider doing something for others:** Nothing feels as good as helping others in need. Whether you are giving gifts to a deserving family or volunteering time to a local charity, your spirits will be lifted when you start a new tradition of serving others during the holidays.

**Take care of yourself:** This includes adequate rest, nutrition and moderate exercise based on your abilities and with permission from your physician. Also monitor your consumption of substances that hinder the body’s ability to deal with stress, including caffeine, alcohol and processed foods.

**Consider the spiritual dimension of your life:** Many people are drawn to explore their spiritual well-being and beliefs during the holidays, especially after the loss of a loved one. Worshipping with a community of like-minded believers or talking to your family or clergy about your thoughts can help with healing and growth.

**Embrace your memories of past holidays:** While this time of year may never be the same, it’s good to hold on to happy memories from previous years. Consider gathering your recollections into a book or journal or simply taking time to reminisce over photos or other belongings. Although it may be painful at first, embracing these memories or sharing them with others can be transformative in the healing process.

Dr. William (Bill) Hoy, FT, is a counsellor, author, teacher and speaker, specializing in grief and end-of-life care. He lectures across Canada and the United States.

## *Holiday Wishes*

May the blessings of the holiday season be with you and your family.

THE  
gift  
OF life

# Stories of Encouragement FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

For this edition of Solace we thought it might be helpful to share special ways some MTS Donor Families have remembered their loved ones, or things they have done to survive the season. We hope these stories will be of encouragement to you and possibly give you some ideas as we enter into the holiday season.

Enduring the holidays without our dear loved ones is indescribable. Each holiday and anniversary that passes, each of us has to find a way to cope with the pain and sadness. Rather than blocking out the pain, I choose to do something in memory of my cousin during these times. I have made a scrapbook, shared memories to comfort one another at gatherings and each year a butterfly ornament is bought for our tree. Last year I wrote a poem about my cousin and placed this in a frame with her picture. This not only helps my grieving during these difficult times, but I use these for gifts for her family. This helps keep our minds busy while still doing something sentimental in memory of our dear loved ones.

– Allison Vazquez, in memory of Dana Ezell

When going through my husband's office, I found a folder where he had listed his favorite foods, childhood memories, teachers and holidays. He had listed Thanksgiving as the holiday he enjoyed the most. Not surprising, Paul loved to cook, and being able to have the family together always brought a huge smile on his face. He had the timer set on the oven at 4 am, knew when the turkey was cooked to perfection and made sure that we had prepared enough food to send the moms home with leftovers. Also on the menu was his delicious homemade turkey and rice soup; he just had to get all the meat off of those bones. Paul died in April of 2004 and our two oldest children, Dawn and Jeffrey, have taken over the duties of preparing Thanksgiving and keeping the tradition alive. Jeffrey is also making the soup, just like his Dad. I have to admit, those first couple years were tough, but the hole in your heart does get smaller as time goes. You never get over the loss, you learn to live with it.

– Carol Ann Trauth, in memory of Paul Trauth

We lost our son, Jacob, on August 16, 2008 at 22 years old. The holidays are always a challenge for us. It doesn't seem to be the season itself that affects our spirit, but rather the gathering of family. When everyone is in the house except Jacob, we always get emotional. About two weeks before Christmas, my husband and I go out to the cemetery and erect Jacob's Christmas tree. It has a stocking hat that he used to wear for a topper and the ornaments all remind us of him. Our family and Jacob's friends add things to the tree that were special between them and Jacob. This is a pretty "unorthodox" tree as far as traditional trees are concerned. There are always surprises for us as we return to the tree and see the special additions those who loved and miss him add. Grieving parents will never tell you that they look forward to the holidays, but as each one passes, we can pat ourselves on the back as survivors.

– Rita Hagen, in memory of Jacob Hagen

I always do something special on the anniversary of Don's last day. He loved life and left so quickly. I was lucky that Don was in the media and had lots of friends and fans. This year I made a photo album with Shutterfly on their website. The album contained pictures of Don's fun adventures. I shared it on my Facebook for all to remember him, which helps me get through these difficult times. I had so many kind responses about what a wonderful person he was.

– Kathy Corey, in memory of Don Corey

If you would like to read more stories of encouragement please visit the MTS website at [www.mts-stl.org/support/bereavement-resources/holiday-memories/](http://www.mts-stl.org/support/bereavement-resources/holiday-memories/).

## Online Community OF SUPPORT A Place of Healing and Encouragement

**Do you feel all alone? Do you feel like you are going crazy?  
Do you need support from people who understand what it is like to lose a loved one?**

**Consider joining the Mid-America Transplant Services (MTS) online support group!**

*"I think this group is the best thing in the world. They have helped me out in my time of need."*

*"Reading the posts of other members going through the same thing really helps me realize I am not alone during this time."*

The MTS Donor Families Facebook Group is a private closed group; application for membership can be found at [www.mts-stl.org/support/donor-family-facebook/](http://www.mts-stl.org/support/donor-family-facebook/). If you have any questions regarding the group, please contact Sandra Cushing at 800-925-3666 or [scushing@mts-stl.org](mailto:scushing@mts-stl.org).



## *The Never Ending* STORY

This holiday season, share your loved one's unique story in Memories & Miracles on the MTS website.

Nancy Mehochko shared her story about her son Greg last year after losing him due to a terrible accident on January 23, 2013:

*"I am so glad I wrote Greg's Story, even through a million or more tears, by writing all the wonderful things down so I could share his story and let everyone get to know my precious son. Since posting Greg's story on the MTS website, I know I can go to Memories & Miracles and view his story and read over and over how much he was loved by so many. My son and daughter-in-law checked it out and I showed my granddaughter who loves her Uncle Greg and misses him so much. My friends and relatives also checked it out and read the story from Illinois to Florida. I am so thankful and blessed to be able to share Greg's story. I printed a copy and have it in a frame. I also read other stories about loved ones and their families. I know there are other families hurting from a bittersweet loss, my heart goes out to them, and I am not alone. This gives me a sense of peace if only for a little while."*

Would you like to share your loved one's story? Go to the MTS website at [www.mts-stl.org/support/memory-landing/](http://www.mts-stl.org/support/memory-landing/) to submit a story and photo. Once your loved one's story has been posted, MTS will provide you with a direct link to the story, which may be shared on Facebook, Twitter, and email. If you have any questions or need help writing your loved one's story, please contact Sandra Cushing at **800-925-3666** or by email at [scushing@mts-stl.org](mailto:scushing@mts-stl.org).

## *In Memoriam*

From June 1, 2014 – September 30, 2014, Mid-America Transplant Services has received memorial contributions in honor of the following organ, tissue and eye donors:

*A. Grace | D. Parker Jr. | D. Way*

*A. Mlynarczyk | S. Novak | M. Crociata*

*M. Gillies | G. Quinton | B. Bell*

*B. Nobles | J. Miller | C. McCauley*

## *Special* HOLIDAY GIFTS

If you are interested in making a donation this holiday season to honor your loved one, you can do so by visiting [www.mts-stl.org/foundation/online-donations/](http://www.mts-stl.org/foundation/online-donations/) or by scanning the code below. These special gifts are utilized by the MTS Foundation to support bereavement programs for Donor Families and to help remove obstacles to transplant for patients in need. If you have any questions, please contact Sandra Cushing at **800-925-3666**.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR GIFT!**







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**Comments or article ideas?**

Email us at [donorfamily@mts-stl.org](mailto:donorfamily@mts-stl.org)

**Address correction?**

To change your address or to be removed from the active MTS Mailing List, please contact us at **800-925-3666** or email [donorfamily@mts-stl.org](mailto:donorfamily@mts-stl.org).



MID-AMERICA TRANSPLANT SERVICES

# Solace



## *Donate Life* DEDICATION GARDEN

On January 1, 2015, the Donate Life Rose Parade Float will be participating for the 12th year in the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California. A highlight of the float is the Family Dedication Garden, a living memorial with more than 1,000 Donor Families dedicating roses in memory of their loved one. Any family or individual who has been touched by organ and tissue donation and transplantation can dedicate a Donate Life Rose that will bear their message and will be placed on the float to be part of the Family Dedication Garden. Visit [www.donatelifefloat.org](http://www.donatelifefloat.org) and click on the **"Dedicate Roses"** section to place an order or learn more about the program. Please feel free to contact the MTS Aftercare Department at **800-925-3666** if you have any questions.