

## **When A Father Dies...Preparing For The Holidays**

By Brenda Spina, M.S., LMFT, LPC

As many of you know, my father died this last May, leaving this earthly home for his eternal heavenly home. This Christmas season feels different. As anyone reading this who has said good-bye to a loved one knows, the numerous levels of grief are hard to describe. Wives or husbands face every daily task without the support and reassuring presence of their spouse. Children of any age become acutely aware of the changes in ritual, the changes in their sense of security, and the change that comes from the absence of one who was hopefully a source of strength. Men and women each provide comfort and security to their families in their own way.

Facing the holidays without my father brings to the surface several truths that impart comfort as I face the next few weeks. I would like to share them with you. It is my sincere desire that they will help you find comfort as well.

1. I am not alone. Who my father was lives on within me. Just because my father is gone does not mean he is not with me. Each one of us carries within the imprint (good or bad) of the family member we have laid to rest. Everything he valued, worked hard at and accomplished...good or bad, is written on my internal experience. Many of these memories are precious gifts that I will carry with me until I too, stand face to face with God. My father valued faithfulness – I want to be faithful.
2. I am choosing to remember both the strengths and the weakness of who my father was. To remember only strength idolizes him. To remember only weakness minimizes him. Remembering both humanizes him and encourages me in the face of my humanity. My father believed in God's mercy (not his own) when faced with his humanity or the humanity of others. I want to be merciful – toward myself and toward others.
3. It is okay to move on. The immediacy of his presence, the sound of his voice, and the memory of his touch are already beginning to fade. This is normal. My father would want me to go on living. As a matter of fact, he encouraged it as he drew near to leaving. Moving on is part of the miracle of life and the reality of those of us who remain. As a part of him lives in me so a part of me will live on in those who follow behind me.

To all of you who have lain to rest a loved one, please know that my thoughts and prayers are with you. May God richly bless your Christmas season and fill your hearts with the comfort of His presence.

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