A Year to Remember

As 2020 comes to a close the cumulative stress of this year is inescapable. As a nation we have encountered deep division amongst ourselves, a record number of natural disasters, a pandemic whose infection rates continue to rise, and for many of us, the very personal and devastating death of someone deeply important.

On a personal level, as the holidays approach against the backdrop of COVID, grief and uncertainty, this year’s challenges while having merit, also beg us to consider how to best navigate through Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, and New Year’s. Below are ideas to consider as guideposts to finding your path to a holiday you want to remember.

* **Plan ahead:** Anticipate that you are likely to be tender and vulnerable as the holidays approach. Even though most holidays are steeped in tradition, this year, much of what’s “normal” has changed so allow yourself to consider other changes. Make a list of what really matters to you now during each holiday and think how you might tend to those values. One widow determined that erecting a Christmas tree without her husband was untenable but chose a few favorite decorations instead to be displayed in her home.
* **Be realistic:** Yearning, sadness, longing and loneliness are likely to rise and recede during this season. Remember that feelings are transitory by their very nature. Soothe yourself during the swells as you would a child, remind yourself that you are finding your way through this grief. Say no when you need to and yes when you can. Help yourself by positively distracting yourself, take a walk, pet an animal, watch a comedy or loose yourself temporarily in a book. Above all, be kind to yourself and give yourself grace.
* **Acknowledge and honor:** After death, we retain a bond with the deceased and can continue to recognize their influence in our lives. Say their name, include them in your thoughts and actions. Consider participating in a group ritual if you can gather with others via video conferencing, in person (socially distanced) or within your own household. A ritual may include lighting candles, telling stories, eating food the deceased loved, reciting poems, and playing or listening to music.
* **Receive and give help:** One widower delivers food to shut ins, a mother whose baby died has offered to sit on a patient advocacy board at the hospital. Our grieving experience can be helped when we notice others, their need and how our actions can help them. Altruism enhances our connection to others and enlarges our sense of suffering that occurs. On the flip side, you may benefit from another’s good deeds and friends may be baffled by how to help. Make others aware of your needs and accept the help that is offered.

If we at The Elizabeth Hospice, Grief Services can be of additional support during this time, please call **760-737-2050**. Counseling and group support to California residents is available via video conferencing for individuals, families, couples and children.