

Survivor Outreach Services Wisconsin National Guard

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Gifts, Garlands, and Grief By Sandy Goodman

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I remember our first Christmas after. It began the first week of November in 1997, three short months into our worst nightmare, but a lifetime into missing our child of eighteen years. He had died suddenly, one of those "in the wrong place at the wrong time" things, and he took our hearts with him when he left. Summer screeched to a halt and autumn came and went without our participation. Still standing in confusion at the threshold of grief, we were stunned when the stores replaced the gloomy ghosts and goblins with sparkling ornaments and cheerful decorations. Neighbors strung lights on their houses, friends sent cards wishing us joy filled holidays, and not one person mentioned Jason's name. Closing our drapes, we huddled in our cocoon, waiting for his return. Thanksgiving passed. I recall the empty chair, the unbroken wishbone, and more turkey than three of us could eat. There was an unwatched football game and a failed attempt at gratitude. That was our day, and it was good enough. It was inconceivable that we would ever enjoy another holiday, much less be thankful for it. Snow fell. Carols rang out, lights twinkled, church bells pealed. Our thoughts were of Jason, fixed more acutely on his departure than on his arrival eighteen years before. Memories of prior Decembers pervaded our present. Jason ice fishing. Jason sledding. Jason's birthday. Jason opening gifts. Jason throwing tinsel on the tree, on his brothers, and on the dog. Every memory brought tears but every tear brought Jason closer to us. We found him in the pain, the only place we knew how to get to. I believe that first Christmas had to be that way. Showing up was the best we could do. But now it is six trees, six silent nights, and six collectable ornaments later. Continued on pg 3



Above, you will see that the Army has developed a new logo for SOS!

SOS is committed to assisting all Families of the Fallen regardless of military branch or status.

Websites:

- www.TAPS.org
- www.webhealing.com/articles/xmas.html
- wisconsinmilitary.org/survivor-outreach-services
- www.goldstarwives.org/index.htm
- www.actsofkindness.org/

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From Arlington to Across America

Wreaths Across America™, a non profit 501-c3 organization, was formed as an extension of the Arlington Wreath Project. The Arlington Wreath program was started by Morrill Worcester in 1992 with the donation and laying of 5000 Christmas wreaths to Arlington National Cemetery. This became an annual journey for Mr. Worcester.

It was relatively obscure until 2005 when a photo of the stones adorned with wreaths and covered in snow circulated around the internet. The project received National attention. Thousands of requests poured in from all over the country from people wanting to emulate the Arlington project at their National and State cemeteries spurred the creation of “Wreaths Across America™”. Unable to donate thousands of wreaths to each state, Mr. Worcester conceived the idea of sending 7 wreaths (one for each branch of the military as well as POW/MIA). In 2006 with the help of the CAP and other civic organizations, over 150 locations held wreath laying ceremonies simultaneously.

The Patriot Guard Riders volunteered as escort for the wreaths going to Arlington. This began the annual “Veterans Honor Parade” that travels the east coast in early December.

By 2007 the requests for more wreaths grew. The Worcester family established the non-profit group Wreaths Across America™ to further promote Veterans remembrance. The mission Remember, Honor and Teach characterized the projects goals perfectly.

By 2008 over 300 locations held wreath laying ceremonies in every state, Puerto Rico and 24 overseas cemeteries. Over 100,000 wreaths were placed on veterans graves. Over 60,000 volunteers participated.

WAA reached out to thousands of children with the message of **Remember, Honor and Teach**.

The importance of honoring each fallen serviceman as an individual is stressed.

The wreath laying is now held annually on the second Saturday of December. We collectively thank our military and their families for “Our Freedom”!



Moving Forward into the New Year

Moving into the next year we often reflect upon the year prior. We think about the good things, the bad things, the accomplishments we have made, and the goals we have yet to achieve. For some, it may surface the hurt and loss you have suffered from losing your Loved One. The holidays are a difficult time and Survivors need to be surrounded by support; whether it be with family, friends or other Survivors. While reflecting on this past year, realize you took another step when maybe you didn't think you could. When we look at a tree that has a branch cut off, you see the scar of where the branch use to be, but the tree continues to grow. The tree never can forget there was a branch there, but it will continue to grow and bloom flowers and leaves. It adapts.

Taking a look forward into the New Year, think about what you would like to accomplish and write those goals down. If you don't know how you could possibly accomplish those goals, support is there for you. You can receive support from family and friends. An SOS Coordinator can also assist you with resources that may pertain to some of your goals for the new year. The important message here: support is available through the holidays and all year round. Survivors are resilient when given the resources and opportunity to be so. I wish for this holiday season that you know you're not alone, and I hope the magic and sparkle of the holidays touches you and your families in a way that you know your Loved One is still with you. I hope that you may all find a sense of peace and love in your hearts. — Kori Williams, SOSC

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I've learned a few things about this path I'm on and found a few crutches for when the road gets too rough. Holidays can be disabling for those who grieve.

I'd like to share some things that might help:

1. Believe that your loved one is with you. Include them in your celebrations and in your sadness. Include them when you talk with others about old times and holidays past. If you don't mention them, no one else will.
2. Talk to THEM. They hear your thoughts...and if you listen, you can hear their replies.
3. Light candles. For six years now I have lit a special candle for my son. This year I will light five, one for each of us, living or not. Why perpetuate the myth of separation? Jason is still a part of this family.
4. Do good things in celebration of your loved one's life. [Random Acts of Kindness](#) bring smiles to everyone involved. Buy anonymous gifts, scoop snow from a stranger's sidewalk, or light candles at unmarked graves.
5. Connect with your loved one who has died. Buy yourself a holiday reading with a reputable medium, take a meditation class, create a special place to go to where you can feel their presence.
6. Call a newly bereaved friend or neighbor and invite them to reminisce with you. Cry with them, listen to them, share your journey.
7. Give to an organization that your loved one supported. Make a memory tree. Buy a small tree and decorate it with tokens of their life. Don't worry about what others will think. You are solely in charge of this journey. It's all yours.

Love someone who is grieving? Lost as far as how to help them through this upcoming season? Any of the above suggestions can be adapted (i.e. give money in celebration of their loved one's life and tell them about it, make them a memory tree, buy them a reading with a medium) to fit your needs. However, there are two gifts that you can give to a person deep in the pit of grief that will mean more than anything else:

1. Undivided attention
 2. Unconditional acceptance of their journey, wherever it leads them
- I won't end this article with a wish that you have your merriest Christmas ever. I know that for some of you that is not possible or even desirable. Instead, my wish for you is this: That you find a quiet moment during the sometimes magical but often horrendous season upon us and relax. That you take a few deep breaths, close your eyes, and envision your friend, child, parent, sibling, spouse, grandparent, or partner. That you accept that dead doesn't mean GONE. That you send out a "Merry Christmas" and "I love you" and then BELIEVE when you hear his or her whispered reply of "I love you, too. Merry Christmas."

Gold Star Wives Day

Washington, D.C. –Legislation marking **December 18, 2010** as “**Gold Star Wives Day.**”

This day provides an opportunity to honor the members of Gold Star Wives of America, a volunteer organization that has assisted widows and survivors of fallen military members since it was founded in 1945, and thank them for their untiring efforts and support.

“The qualities of Gold Star Wives – their strength, selflessness and kindness towards others – reflect those of one of the organization’s founders, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.” Burr said.

“Out of love and duty to their country, members of Gold Star Wives have volunteered to take on responsibilities that consume significant amounts of time and energy. By marking this day, we can offer a small token of appreciation for their patriotism and sacrifice.”

Protecting Your Loved One's Good Name After They've Passed Away

Protecting your personal information from identity thieves doesn't stop after your loved one has passed away. Here are some steps to protect the deceased:

1. Don't include full personal information such as exact date of birth, or specific addresses in an obituary notice.
2. Notify the Social Security Administration of the death at (800)772-1213.
3. Mail copies of the death certificate, certified return receipt, to all 3 credit reporting bureaus, asking that a "deceased alert" be placed on the credit history. Equifax, P.O. Box 105069, Atlanta, GA 30348; Experian, P.O. Box 9530, Allen, TX 75013; TransUnion, P.O. Box 6790, Fullerton, CA 92834. EACH bureau should receive a copy of the death certificate and proof you are the spouse or executor of the estate with the directive to post on the Decedent's credit report: "Deceased Do Not Issue Credit" and "Please forward a current copy of the Decedent's credit report." Info is at www.idtheftcenter.org and [Fact Sheet](#).
4. Other agencies to notify: Motor Vehicles Bureau (so no duplicate drivers license are issued); insurance companies such as the auto, health, life; current and former employer benefits departments; if the person was a member of the military, the VA; any professional licensing associations such as the Bar Association (lawyers), or the Medical License Bureaus; local membership companies such as video stores, libraries and health clubs; and accounts with automatic withdrawals. Remember to never just throw the documents with personal information in the trash. Be sure to shred it before disposing. —Mark Dunlop, SOS Financial Coordinator

Mark has his license as the following: MSFS, CEBS®, CFP®, ChFC®, AFC®, AEP®, RFC®

