

Tears For Thanksgiving

NOVEMBER 22, 2015 BY ANNE CASTALDO

I woke this morning with tears flowing from my eyes. Thanksgiving is just 5 days away. This heaviness fills my heart as I struggle to remain grateful for all the blessings in my life.

I am blessed. I have a loving husband, two amazing, surviving sons, family, friends, love, hope, peace and so much more. I try my best to live in gratitude, knowing first hand that life can be taken and changed in a split second. The holidays are a challenging time to hold on to this thought. Facts are shoved in our faces and we shop for one less gift, search the greeting cards and buy one less card, set the holiday table with one less plate. These triggers can bring us to our knees if we let them. Sometimes, we do not even have a choice and find ourselves struggling to stand back up. So the tears flow. Some of us have been here before and found ways to cope. Others will find themselves here without a clue on how to go on. My heart breaks for all of us on this road of loss.

This will be my seventh Thanksgiving without my youngest son Tony. He died suddenly and unexpectedly in July of 2009. There are days when the pain is so intense it feels as if it were yesterday. Then, mostly, it feels as if it has been forever since I heard him laugh or felt his strong arms hugging me. Since his blue eyes sparkled mischievously. This Thanksgiving will also mark 4 years since my Dad died from cancer. These two relationships were very different and I miss them both, but in very different ways. Lately, much has been going on in my life where I just want to talk to my Dad. Even though he and I had different ideologies on most things, I still loved to hear his take on things. He had wisdom that ran deep, craziness that made me laugh and a love for family that I miss terribly.

When the tears come as they do so often this time of year, let them flow. Tears are a cleansing process. They actually remove toxins from our system. Be grateful for all the love you feel, all the love shared that makes this pain so intense. Let the tears flow as you miss and cherish them. Life can be so hard, to deny ourselves the natural process of grieving is something that just makes life even harder. I have found, that for me, the act of helping others is a gift that helps heal my heart. It helps me understand at a humane level that my pain, although it is the greatest pain for me, is not the only pain in the world. To understand, others are suffering and going through their own grief and we are not alone. Our empathy can help someone else with his or her grief this holiday season. As you struggle with that one less present, buy one for a child in need. You may buy something you think your loved one may have wanted and donate it to a hospital, homeless centers, toys for tots and many other charities. When you are missing buying a card for your loved one, buy one anyway. Write them a message and put somewhere safe. You can also send a card to our troops overseas. For me, the hardest is not seeing them around the table. There are so many options for this. Many set a place and put a photo there, some will light a candle in their memory. Making their favorite food is a wonderful way to incorporate their memory into the holiday. For me, I have a place mat made out of Tony's clothing that sits on my table under the centerpiece. The awkward silence is very loud, everyone is afraid to talk about or mention his or her name for fear of making us sad. We are sad and it is ok. However, it is up to us to keep their memory alive. If you are comfortable doing so, bring up a story or memory. "Remember how much Tony loved the salad, we never had to worry about having any left over." This gives everyone permission to talk and share. As time goes on and your family understands that the tears are going to come, they will also understand that it is a sign of love. So my wish for you this holiday is that when the tears flow, you will remember the love, the good and sit as long as you need to in the puddle of your grief. More importantly, I wish that you discover the loves shared will one day be able to live side by side with the tears and pain of grief.

