

# *My Thoughts*

*by Kristi Strawser*

We have experienced three years of holidays since our sweet daughter Corynna passed away at the age of 16 from Mitochondrial Disease. I wish I could tell you I have mastered how to merge the holidays and grief together successfully. In 2013 when Corynna passed away we knew she was not going to live until Christmas. We moved Christmas up almost a month and celebrated as if it was truly Christmas Day. That was our last Christmas with her. Corynna was our only child and my husband and I couldn't imagine celebrating the holidays without her. Many of the holidays have changed since she has been gone. Some are especially difficult such as Mother's Day, her Angelversary, and our birthdays. On her birthday and Angelversary we find a way to focus our energy in a positive way and find a way to spread kindness in her memory. We decorate her headstone for many holidays. On Thanksgiving, we buy a special candle and light it in memory of her. We decorate a Christmas tree with her at the cemetery. She loved Christmas. The next year we bought a house and remodeled the house through the holidays. We worked day and night and pretended it wasn't Christmas. I believe last year was a perfect example of what it's like going through the holidays without your loved one. I had a new niece and it was her first Christmas. We went to my brother's home and opened gifts and had breakfast. I realized I am part of a family who misses their daughter, sister, and aunt. After that we left to go to my other brother's family Christmas and celebrated with them. On the way home it sunk in that we had nothing left to do and our Christmas was not what it should be. I began to feel sorry for myself sobbing the whole way home. I climbed into bed sobbing some more. My husband grabbed my hand and said I could lay in bed or watch tv with him. I forced myself back

out of bed. That evening we searched for something to eat noting that most places were not open on Christmas Night. We found a Japanese Steakhouse about a half hour away. The food was so good and we designated this our new tradition. To cope with grief, I had to accept it is part of our holiday. I often say you have to learn that grief one way or another will be a continued part of your life. I accepted I will feel a variety of emotions throughout that day. Of course, I cry and feel sad however, I also have moments of laughter and joy. I feel sorry for myself and wish it was different and our family could be normal again. We all need different things when we grieve. Sometimes old traditions feel good and other times creating new ones in the new normal is what we need. We have to allow ourselves to feel and allow ourselves time to grieve but realize we can't stay in that deep sadness all day every day. Be kind and gentle to yourself this holiday season.