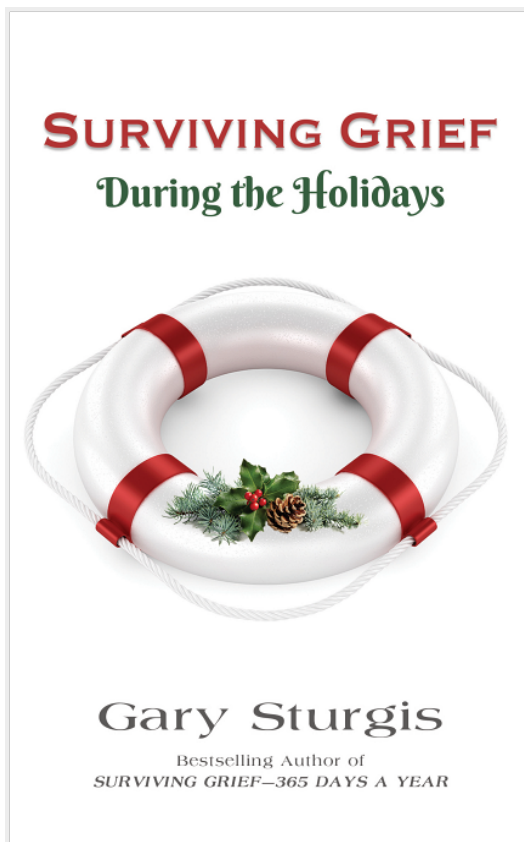




Loss doesn't take a holiday. When the world sparkles with lights and laughter, grief can feel even heavier. SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays is a compassionate companion for those navigating the season after loss.

SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays

By Gary Sturgis

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SURVIVING GRIEF

During the Holidays



Gary Sturgis

Bestselling Author of
SURVIVING GRIEF—365 DAYS A YEAR

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2025

First Edition

Praise for

SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays

“I’ve attended Gary’s in-person SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays Workshop and when it comes to grief, Gary is so compassionate, and his advice for coping with the holidays is very personal and practical. I know that this book is going to help a lot of people who are struggling with the holidays after the loss of a loved one.”

Jen Baxter, Author & Grief Counselor

“Gary has created the perfect resource for those of us who are struggling with the holidays after a loss. If you’ve lost someone you love, or are reaching out to someone else who’s grieving, this book should be something you read. The suggestions Gary offers will not only give you the tools you need to survive the holidays but even help you to heal.”

David Francis, Hospice Professional

“Reading this book was like sitting down and talking to a good friend who’s listening with an open heart and providing gentle advice. Gary offers tips that he’s learned through his own walk through grief and the tactics ring true, not just for the holidays, but also for any time of the year. I highly recommend this book and have already given several copies to friends and family that are dealing with grief.”

Cathy Martin, Professor of Thanatology

“Anyone that’s dealing with grief knows that the holidays are difficult, and SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays is a practical, easy-to-read book for those additional challenges and emotions that arise during special occasions, and for any day without a loved one. Gary writes from the heart and is always so honest and compassionate. He listens to what grieverers have to say and finds the resources they need to help them through the process. And this is another much-needed resource!”

Anthony Pescatore, Social Worker

“I read Gary’s book, SURVIVING GRIEF – 365 DAYS A YEAR every day and it has been the one thing that has comforted me since the loss of my daughter. The thought of the holidays without her has left me feeling hurt, empty, and even more broken-hearted. The thought of spending these special times without her is devastating. But Gary has provided a special little gem of a book to help me feel more empowered and ready to face the holiday season with less stress, anxiety and dread. Gary’s book Surviving Grief During the Holidays has provided me with a beacon of hope. I highly recommend this book to anyone grieving a loss.”

Cheryl Slater, Amy’s Mom

Also by Gary Sturgis

SURVIVING: Finding Your Way from Grief to Healing

GRIEF: Hope in the Aftermath

SURVIVING GRIEF: 365 Days A Year

The SURVIVING GRIEF Workbook

*WHAT FEEDS YOUR SOUL?: Finding Light in the
Shadow of Grief*

Disclaimer

This book is intended to provide general information and support for individuals experiencing loss and bereavement. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The exercises and information contained within are meant to be used as self-help tools and should not be considered as therapy or counseling.

This book details the author's personal experiences with and opinions about grief and loss. The author is not a healthcare provider.

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Preface

After my loss, the holidays were totally different. What used to feel like cozy gatherings and eating too many cookies turned into a marathon of emotions. I remember standing in the middle of twinkling lights and cheerful music, feeling like the only person who just wanted the season to fast-forward.

I searched for resources and support, but everything I found felt too clinical, too impersonal, or just didn't speak to what grief during the holidays *really* feels like. So, I decided to write the book I needed, one that holds space for tears, laughter, and the occasional eye roll when someone tells you time heals.

The holidays can be an incredibly difficult time when you're grieving the loss of someone you love. I've written *SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays* with a deep understanding of the unique challenges this season brings, the bittersweet mix of joy and pain, the moments of loneliness amid celebration, and the heavy weight of absence woven into every tradition.

In these pages, you'll find some of my own personal reflections, coping tools, and gentle exercises designed to ease the emotional stress and help you navigate the holidays with greater compassion for yourself. My hope is that these offerings serve as small lights to guide you through the shadows, providing comfort and practical ways to care for your heart during this tender time.

Gary Sturgis

Grief isn't linear, and there's no "right" way to grieve during the holidays. This book embraces that truth while offering support for the everyday moments, the moments when the pain seems too much, and the moments when you find unexpected peace. It's my sincere wish that you feel held in these words, supported in your journey, and reminded that you're not alone.

Thank you for inviting me to walk alongside you during this challenging season. May this book be a source of solace and strength as you move through the holidays one day at a time.

Introduction

The holidays have a way of magnifying both the beauty and the ache of life. The twinkling lights, the familiar songs, the gatherings filled with laughter are all reminders of how things once were and how much they've changed.

When you're grieving, these moments can stir emotions that feel impossible to manage. Joy and sorrow can sit side by side, and even the smallest tradition can open a floodgate of memories.

SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays was born from that tender place between remembrance and renewal. It's for the hearts that approach the holiday season with hesitation, not knowing how to balance celebration and sorrow.

This book offers a space for reflection, honesty, and compassion, a place where you can sit with your feelings without judgment. Whether you've lost a loved one recently or years ago, the holidays have a way of awakening our deepest emotions. Here, you'll find words meant to help you breathe through those moments, to give your grief room, and to remind you that even in sadness, there can be grace.

This collection stands alongside my earlier work, *SURVIVING GRIEF – 365 DAYS A YEAR*, which I wrote to support those living with grief in the quiet, ordinary days, the mornings when getting out of bed is a victory,

the afternoons filled with unexpected tears, the nights that feel unbearably long. That book walks with you through the daily rhythm of loss and healing.

While *SURVIVING GRIEF – 365 DAYS A YEAR* speaks to the constant presence of grief throughout the year, *SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays* focuses on the particular weight that gathers during this season of light and togetherness. It recognizes that the holidays are not always joyful; for many, they're a bittersweet time of remembering, longing, and learning how to live a life forever changed.

My hope is that these pages help you find moments of peace amid the noise, courage when loneliness visits, and gentle ways to honor both your loved ones and your own resilience.

In grief, there's no right way to move forward.

There's only your way.

Wherever you are in your journey, may this book be a companion, a quiet voice reminding you that sorrow and hope can coexist, and that love, even when it changes form, never truly leaves us.

When Grief Meets the Holidays

For anyone who's lost a loved one, the holidays can feel as if the magic switch has been turned off, and the whole world is celebrating while your heart is breaking.

When I was growing up, and well into adulthood, I always loved the holidays and looked forward to each one, until the year my spouse died, and everything changed.

We had traditions. We'd fight over whether colored or white lights looked better, the annual debate about whether fruitcake is ever edible, the careful negotiation over which in-law's house served the least-dry turkey. I used to count down the days to each ritual, relishing the anticipation, secretly hoping someone else would volunteer to hang the outdoor lights (because gravity and I have never been friends, especially in winter.)

Then came the year when my spouse was gone, and suddenly, the calendar became a list of emotional landmines. The grief during the holidays is a brand of pain so sharp that even twinkling lights seem to glare at you, taunting you for feeling anything but festive.

Grief is like a thief that steals things from you. One of those things is the blissful innocence we all had as a child. It's a lot like waking up one day to realize all those magical childhood beliefs weren't true, and nobody bothered to prepare you for what would fill the space they left.

Like when I learned that Santa was just my parents, tired and whispering curses at tangled lights at two in the morning. Or when the Tooth Fairy's handwriting looked suspiciously like my Dad's.

That's what facing holidays after loss feels like: a curtain pulled back, illusions shattered, and the knowledge that the magic was made by love and presence.

The very thing that's now missing.

The truth is grief during the holidays is unpredictable. You might crave solitude one moment, then find yourself wandering aimlessly around the mall just to hear people's laughter or the world's worst rendition of "Jingle Bell Rock."

And grief makes you do strange things, especially around the holidays.

I once found myself talking to my spouse's old stocking, explaining why I couldn't bring myself to fill it, but also couldn't stand to put it away.

It's okay to let the holidays look different now. Maybe you light a candle in memory, serve your loved one's favorite dessert, or honor them with a story that blends laughter and tears.

Or maybe, this year, surviving is enough, barely making it through the songs, the gatherings, or the echoing quiet.

SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays

Give yourself permission to skip, adapt, opt out, or invent something new entirely. The magic might not look like it used to, but it can be real again, formed from gratitude for what was, and openness for what could still be.

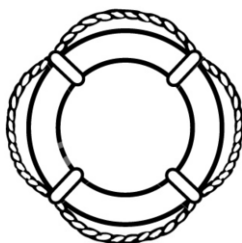
If the holidays feel hollow or even hostile since your loss, know that you're seen and understood.

As you try to make peace with a season that seems determined to shine in your face, give yourself a little grace. Try to find laughter where you can.

I accidentally wore two different shoes to a holiday party and didn't even care. At the time, it seemed to be the least of my problems.

You may not believe in Santa anymore, and the Tooth Fairy is decidedly unreliable, but you can still believe in the hope that broken hearts can mend, and even in grief, a little holiday magic, however small, can find you again.

"Grief doesn't take a holiday, but neither does love. The two travel together, reminding us what it means to truly remember."



My First Valentine's Day Alone

I lost my spouse in January and that changed my life forever. It felt like the ground disappeared beneath me, and I was learning how to breathe in an entirely new world. Just when I thought I might be getting through the haze of the first few weeks, February rolled in, and so did Valentine's Day.

Let me tell you, there's no crueler joke than having your first major holiday alone be the one dedicated entirely to love and couples. Everywhere I looked, there were heart-shaped balloons, romantic ads, and people posting photos captioned "my forever Valentine." I wanted to gently (okay, maybe not so gently) remind them that "forever" sometimes ends much sooner than we expect.

That morning, I woke up and decided I couldn't let grief take every celebration from me. So, I bought myself flowers, beautiful red ones, just like the kind my spouse used to surprise me with. I even grabbed a box of chocolates, because if anyone deserved them, it was me.

(Besides, I didn't have to share this time. A small perk, right?)

I won't pretend it was easy. I cried into my coffee, laughed at how ridiculous I felt eating heart-shaped candy alone, and then cried again looking at old Valentine's Day photos.

But somewhere between the tears and the laughter, I realized I was honoring the love we shared, not erasing it.

That day taught me that love isn't gone; it just changes form. It lives in memories, in the little things we do to take care of ourselves, and in the courage it takes to show up, flowers, candy, and all, even when your heart feels broken.

When the next Valentine's Day arrived, I did the same thing again. I even toasted to how lucky I was to have had a love so deep that losing it hurt so much.

And if that's not real love, I don't know what is.

So Why Are Holidays So Hard When You're Grieving?

The holiday season is often seen as a time of joy, celebration, and togetherness. Yet, for those who are grieving, it can be especially difficult and emotionally complex.

Here are some key reasons why holidays can be so hard when navigating grief:

They Mark The Passage Of Time

Holidays are milestones in the calendar year that highlight the passage of time. Each year's holiday can remind us of the loved one who's no longer with us, accentuating the absence in a way that ordinary days may not. These dates can become markers that deepen the sense of loss, as they underscore the reality of time moving forward without that person.

It's Hard To Be Happy When Someone We Love Is Gone

The spirit of celebration during the holidays can clash painfully with the void left by a lost loved one. Joy feels almost out of reach because the heart is heavy with grief. The emotions of missing someone deeply make it challenging to fully embrace happiness when an essential person is no longer part of the festivities.

They Represent Time Spent With Family And Friends

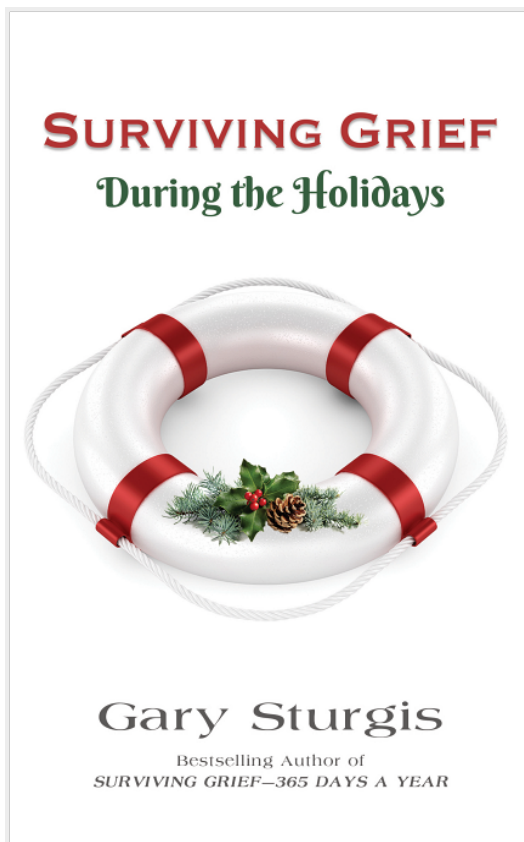
Holidays traditionally revolve around coming together with family and friends, sharing meals, and creating memories. However, when grieving, the absence of a loved one during these gatherings feels stark and isolating. The space they once occupied is painfully empty, and the usual harmony of togetherness can seem out of reach.

It's Hard To Celebrate Togetherness When There Is None

The expectation of togetherness during the holidays contrasts sharply with the experience of loneliness and loss. This can create internal conflict, wanting to honor traditions and also feeling the weight of diminished family or social connections. Grievers often struggle with how to adapt to holiday rituals while feeling the profound absence of their loved one.

Navigating grief during the holidays involves acknowledging these challenges and allowing space for all emotions, whether sadness, longing, or even moments of peace and hope. Embracing memories, finding new ways to honor loved ones, and practicing self-compassion are vital steps toward coping with this uniquely difficult time, because let's face it, even getting out of bed some days deserves a medal.

This perspective can be especially helpful for anyone trying to understand why the holidays feel so different after loss, and for those looking for compassionate ways to support themselves or others who are grieving.



Loss doesn't take a holiday. When the world sparkles with lights and laughter, grief can feel even heavier. SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays is a compassionate companion for those navigating the season after loss.

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