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Hospice is There to Help Those Grieving During Holidays

By Sonia Fernandez

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Losing a loved one is tough, and during the holidays the lights and the cheer and the get-togethers can make it even more painful.

Just ask Jennie Fuentes. She lost one of her daughters to cancer in May. She was 36.

"I lost a part of me," said Fuentes, who remembers her daughter, also named Jennie, as a loving mother who liked simple pleasures like going to the park or watching her nephew play baseball. Jennie Trevino went from a socially active young mother to a bedridden cancer patient in months.

Trevino's decline was heartbreaking, said her mother, who became her caretaker. Not only was it difficult to watch her daughter get progressively worse, Fuentes also had to think about her daughter's four children, ages 18, 16, 12 and 8, who were going through their own ordeals. The children had to be separated from each other to live with other relatives when Trevino came home so her mother could care for her.

Fortunately, said Fuentes, [Hospice of Santa Barbara](#) was there to aid her through her tough time.

"They sent visiting nurses for six months," said Fuentes. They also provided grief counselors and some financial assistance.

For the children, the hospice sent mentors, which was key for Fuentes, who worried over the effects of grief and lack of guidance for them. Fuentes was also given training to help her adapt to her new situation and raise children who have lost a parent.

The eight months after the cancer was found to have metastasized to Trevino's brain was too long a time to see her suffer, too short a time to say goodbye.

"Eight months felt like eight days," said Fuentes, who managed to get all four grandchildren under her roof toward the end of Trevino's life.

Fuentes may have gotten over the hardest part, and she's pleased to see her grandkids fully participating in their young lives. She knows, however, that the holidays could present a challenge to her and her newly reorganized family. The recent illnesses of her husband and daughter Belinda — one from pneumonia, the other from a staph infection — have been a source of anxiety, and the festive social mood of the holidays might serve to highlight the family's recent loss.

"I still feel an emptiness inside me," she said.

But she knows better than to succumb to the grief. Instead, she said, she's making the effort to involve her family in the holidays by decorating the home for the season.

In fact, for Fuentes, maintaining contact is essential for people who are grieving over the loss of a loved one, and the first thing she advises to people who have just lost someone close to them.

"I would tell them to keep their bonds with others," she said. "Hugs are important. Reach out and try to make someone happy."

She also advises keeping the deceased loved one's memory alive, something she does with her daughter.

"I go to the cemetery every week and tell Jennie what her children are up to," she said. She also has pictures around the house to remind her grandchildren about their mother.

"Sometimes we just sit down and talk and try to make sure everyone is all right," she said.

And when it's time to grieve, she's grateful that hospice is still there to help her bear the weight.

The family will be all right, she said. Hospice of Santa Barbara "has been very good" to her, and for her daughter and her grandchildren's sake, she won't be daunted by the grief and loss.

"I think Jennie's given me a lot of strength," she said.

Lighting Up Lives

Hospice of Santa Barbara holds special ceremonies in Santa Barbara, Goleta and Carpinteria each year. Called "Light Up a Life," these gatherings celebrate the lives of loved ones lost. You can participate over the next week:

Dec. 2, 5:30 p.m., Santa Barbara, Lobero Theatre front lawn, 33 E. Canon Perdido

Dec. 8, 5:30 p.m., Carpinteria, Hollyhock Cottage, 789 Linden Ave.