

THE MISSING GIFTS UNDER MY TREE

It's joy to the world, people are singing, children are excited, the stores are full of decorations and gift ideas. 'They' don't see the empty chair at my house again this Christmas, or the missing wrapped gifts that once had tags attached, saying his name, or said to 'dad' or 'Bampa'. This is the season where grief, pain, and loss seem to come out of the corner of my heart where I have tried to keep it, it's a season where I struggle with do I put up a Christmas tree, or do I just crawl back in bed and cry this year?

Maybe it's your first Christmas without your husband, your love, your partner, the one who was there beside you, making each Christmas special. This could be your second or maybe it's been even longer that you've had to confront Christmas with loneliness. It doesn't matter because grief, sorrow, and loss doesn't take a holiday away or ever leave your heart completely. It's another place on my grief journey that makes me feel like I don't want this day to come without you, my love.

Again, I'll take out the tree. We always had a real tree, we went together to pick it out, he cut the bottom, put it in the stand and we stood together admiring it, or laughing and trying to put it's 'best side' forward! Now it's just a 'fake' tree but it's still a place where I carefully take out an ornament that I knew was special to him, and the ones we picked up on our vacations, choosing them together. I hang them on my tree and wipe away my tears. Christmas was his favorite and he made it special for all of us. I often think about his silly tradition I'll never forget. He would buy a gift he really wanted for himself, wrap it up, then write a gift tag "to dad" from 'Diesel' (or the name of the golden retriever dog we had at that time).

It's silly memories that make me cry, or the sweet ones, like when I looked up at his face as I opened the gift, he bought for me and he'd see my joy and often my tears. It's nice to have the memories, but I'd rather have him next to me on the couch, sitting in his chair at the table, and still here making new memories with me. Laughing with the family, bringing life and joy into our hearts, and sitting next to me by the Christmas tree as it's lights sparkled in our eyes.

As widows, we understand, we all have an extra deep pain in our hearts, the one that the people in the stores cannot see, the glittering lights don't reflect. We sometimes might see a lady alone looking rather sad, and we might wonder if she is alone this Christmas too? A broken grieving heart is hard to see, yet comfort is found in knowing that the sweetest gift is that our loved one is in the arms of Jesus, the son of God, at Christmas. It's the reason for Christmas and the place where we can find joy, and comfort in our grief and loss. We're strong knowing that we carry their love in our grieving hearts and they've never left our hearts. They have left us with memories that give us warmth and smiles, day after day and year after year, Christmas after Christmas. (Missing you honey, missing you still so much) Renée/2023 