

Expressing grief an appropriate response to loss of loved ones

By Pam Mellskog | Longmont Times-Call | November 21, 2008



LONGMONT — Grief, not a mid-life crisis, caused Jeneane Kratky to get a tattoo last year.

“This is the first and only one I’ll have,” she said, grinning as she stooped to pull off her sock.

There, on the outside of her right ankle, a little chipmunk with a card dealer’s green visor, bow tie, striped shirt and cufflinks holds a jack of spades and a queen of hearts.

The work represents her son-in-law’s modification on a doodle her late mother drew during the holidays in the 1960s of a chipmunk in a sweater and stocking cap balancing a teetering

stack of five presents in its arms.

Though Kratky’s mother died of throat cancer in 2003 and her father of a stroke in 2006, the tattoo morphs both of their working worlds — her dad dealt cards and her mom waitressed — into one image.

It reminds her of them and gives her a chuckle.

But years before Kratky, 52, stepped into the tattoo parlor, she started regularly attending the annual Holiday Remembrance Service in Longmont.

“I saw it in the paper, and I told my family, ‘I’ve got to try something to get through the holidays,’” she said.

This year’s service, at 2 p.m. Saturday at The Isaak Walton Center, gives those grieving a forum to honor their loved one by sharing stories, poems, readings and music or by quietly sitting during the informal ceremony. Some also bring a token of the departed person’s life — be it a toy, picture or ornament — to display.

The gathering aims to validate grief as an appropriate response to loss and to help people feel less funny about some of their grief reactions, said Maciel Eaton, the Longmont Police Department’s victim advocate coordinator.

“There, you find out that others find themselves talking to their loved one when (the loved one) is not there, and that it’s normal,” she said.

The service also reminds those grieving that they are not alone on the eve of the emotionally charged holiday season, HospiceCare grief services counselor Julie Thomas said.

“This time of year, that (grieving) person is missing traditions. There’s such a focus on families, and that’s hard when you’re missing someone in your family,” she said.

The event’s half-dozen sponsors include the Victim Assistance Programs of the Longmont Police Department and the Boulder County Sheriff’s Office, HospiceCare of Boulder & Broomfield Counties and the Longmont Suicide Survivors Group.

“It’s a wonderful collaboration based on understanding that people who are grieving have a rough time at the holidays, whether it’s been one year or 10 years (since the loss),” said Sherrie McIntyre, the Longmont Suicide Survivor Group facilitator.

Counting the loss of her parents once forced Kratky to take her lunch hour at home from her bank teller job to “cry my eyes out.”

“But (at the service) I’m always the last one to stand up and talk,” she said.

Like sporting the chipmunk tattoo, sharing stories about her folks reminds her why she misses them.

“My mom, every time she called here, it would be, ‘Hi, sweetheart. How’s my baby girl?’” Kratky said. “And Dad, he would always end his conversations saying, ‘Just know how very, very much I love you.’”

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