

# THE FIRST HOLIDAY

Mary's mother died in 2010, Mary's 60-year-old husband David died in 2012, and Mary's 8-year-old grandson died in 2013.

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Easter had never been a huge celebration in our house so I thought it might be the easiest holiday to endure without David.

Still, I'd already discovered I couldn't face the candy aisle or even the prospect of moving the pile of stuff blocking the attic door to unearth our Easter baskets. I was grateful my sister Angela offered to let my children decorate Easter eggs at her house Saturday afternoon. We always decorated Easter eggs, and it didn't seem fair to take yet another thing away from 8-year-old Abby, just because of my grieving.

The fact that I hadn't even managed to boil the eggs I brought with me didn't seem to faze Angela. While she put the eggs in a pot to cook, I sat down to watch the hustle and bustle of the familiar activity and even managed to decorate a few myself.

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When Abby showed me the egg she made for her daddy, I felt the ground shift beneath me.

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Suddenly, I couldn't breathe.

David hadn't participated much in the preparations for Easter, but there were two things I could count on—Abby would always make her

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daddy an egg designated just for him, and David would help me hide the eggs outside on Easter morning if weather permitted.

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Now I was alone, and Abby had no daddy.

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I managed to ask Angela if I could leave Abby at her house for a while. The sobs started even before I got to the van.

I drove directly to the cemetery. Blind with tears, I stumbled out, ran to the gravesite, and plopped down onto the wet grass. I didn't sit there long, only long enough to cry out, "Why did you leave me alone? How am I going to do this without you? I love you so much."

I was glad for Abby's youth and resilience. She hadn't expressed any sorrow while she made the egg. I thought, then, of her extreme reaction to a small transgression a couple days before that.

Her wailing had gone way beyond the normal range, even for her. When she stomped up the stairs and slammed the bedroom door, I held my tongue. She was a fatherless child, it had been less than two weeks since she lost her daddy, and I needed to be patient.

Inside her room, she'd bitten her pillowcase and heard a small ripping of the material. As she explained it later, she hadn't meant to continue as she knew it was wrong, but she'd bitten and ripped the pillowcase first with her teeth and then with her hands until it lay in shreds around her pillow.

I eyed the material dispassionately that evening, intimately understanding how we can begin crying about one thing and end up wailing about another.

Emily, Katie and I got up at 5 a.m. on Easter morning to attend a sunrise service in the park. When we got home, Abby was lying on the couch, looking dejected. "Did you see your Easter things?" I asked her, and she shook her head no.

"We aren't doing Easter, are we? There aren't any eggs hidden outside."

I pointed to the small pile of toy animals on the floor beside the couch. I hadn't even bothered to locate an Easter basket. A box of Milk Duds, a little carton of egg-shaped bubble gum, a Sponge-Bob candy kabob, and some sidewalk chalk lay in a pile, looking desolate and pitiful in comparison to the carefully orchestrated Easter baskets I'd done in years past.

Our older children, Dan, Michael, Rachel, Elizabeth, Ben and their children joined us for our Easter meal. By late afternoon, with most of my children off having fun at the park and just two of my grandchildren and young Abby at home, I was feeling weepy again.

My grandson Jacob, who was fighting cancer, was hungry, and nothing sounded good to him, except a Burger King burger. Knowing how little appetite a person can have when they are going through chemotherapy, I wasn't about to miss out on providing the one food Jacob craved.

I grabbed the "Dad" egg out of the refrigerator and loaded the kids in the van. When I turned right instead of left at the stoplight on Franklin Street, Becca piped up that I was going the wrong way.

"Yes, I know. I want to give Grandpa his Easter egg."

My two grandchildren and youngest child didn't seem to think there was anything odd in my behavior—stopping at the cemetery to deliver a colored egg to a gravesite on Easter day.

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Before she fell asleep, Abby expressed a slight disappointment in our dismal holiday, but quickly added, "Maybe next year will be better."

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Yes, maybe next year will be better.