

Creating New Traditions

By Dana Gensler, Lindsay's Mom

We struggled and debated for three years after Lindsay died. Should we keep them the same? Should we add a few? Delete a few? Create some new ones? One questions we particularly struggled with was the idea of hanging stockings—we didn't hang any the first three years. Our other children were babies and therefore knew nothing of stockings and the treats they are supposed to hold on Christmas morning. So it was easy for us to ignore them a few years.

That changed the third Christmas when Melissa, then four years old, asked why her friends found stockings on Christmas morning, and she didn't. So I bought a couple of kits and made them each a personalized stocking. But seeing the two stockings on Christmas morning, and none for Lindsay, was very sad for me. I made a deal with myself that we would never again celebrate Christmas without a stocking for Lindsay too.

So the next Christmas, I made another personalized stocking. It brought me comfort to think of it hanging in its proper place between Melissa's and Katie Rose's. I felt I was finally coming to some sort of peace about Lindsay's death, and while we had struggled a few years about what we should and shouldn't do, one thing I was sure of: as long as the things we did in her memory did not hurt ourselves or anyone else, then it is okay for us to do them.

That Christmas, we hung the special ornaments we have collected for our children, set the nativity up in its usual place of honor, and hung the three stockings on the mantel. The house was dark, lit only by candlelight and the twinkling lights of the Christmas tree, a true cedar. We stayed up late on Christmas Eve frantically assembling the bicycles, trikes and dollhouses, filling the stockings, wrapping the last-minute gifts, and then fell into a deep slumber.

The next morning the girls tiptoed into our room and Melissa put a hand on my back and urgently whispered, "Mom, Mom, wake up! I have to show you something."

Assuming she was going to exclaim over her beautiful, shiny blue bike parked in the living, I woke Phil to join in the celebration. Together we walked into the living room and my eyes were immediately drawn, not to the bike, but to the three stockings on the mantle.

"Don't you see, Mom?" Melissa said tearfully, pointing to the three stockings. "Santa forgot to put anything in Lindsay's stocking!"

And Lindsay's stocking looked so forlorn and empty hanging there between the other two, which were bulging with prizes and treats and goodies.

"Do you think Santa sneaked in our rooms to see who was here?" she asked.

I was softly weeping now. It was MY fault that Lindsay's stocking looked so starkly different from the others, not Santa's. I was the one who bought the treats and filled them, but I did not think about putting anything in the middle stocking. I thought simply having it there was enough.