

# The Empty Chair

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As the holidays approach, I am faced with the task of deciding what to do with our empty chair. Should we put it away for the season? Should we decorate it? Or should we just ignore it?

One holiday season, we did decide to put it away. Even though it was an empty chair, it left an even bigger empty space when we did move. How can that be? How can something that is empty leave a bigger empty space when it's gone?!

We've tried to ignore it, but its emptiness is very loud and it is hard to miss an empty chair in a room filled with people sitting in all the other chairs. And even when we could manage to ignore it, others could not and they always commented on it. An empty chair is not invisible.

It took us many years of living with that empty chair, day in and day out, to finally figure out what to do with it. Our empty chair is pulled up to the table and a single rose is placed on the plate, a symbol of everlasting love. The empty chair represents all of those who are not with us for this occasion, but who live within our hearts forever. It is not a sad sight because we know that empty chair represents a love we have known and shared and with that gift, our family is forever blessed.

We join hands in thanksgiving, completing the circle with the empty chair within our family circle, for even though death may have come, love never goes away.

So, if your holiday table will have an empty chair this year, remember that it is not truly an empty space. That place is still occupied by the love and joy of the one(s) who sat in it. Don't hide that chair away. You may not wish to bring it to the table as we do, but take time this holiday season to remember the laughter, the joy, the love, the light of those who are no longer within hug's reach, but whose love still fills us with gratitude.

Join hands around your table, however small, and say a prayer of thanksgiving...for the love you have known and still hold deep within your heart. You are rich beyond measure for having had a chair filled. Don't let death rob you of the heart space that love keeps.

We are a family circle, some chairs filled and others not, broken by death, but mended by love and the peace and comfort our faith brings.