

# GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS



David W. Smith/Daily News

Ben and Brenda Matlock, shown in their late daughter Jessica's room, are encouraging motorists to buckle up. Their daughter was killed in a crash while not wearing a seat belt. The Matlocks will attend a grief seminar — open to the public — this weekend at Holy Spirit Catholic Church.

## Seminar to help those in pain

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While many are planning holiday shopping trips and thinking about what kind of Christmas tree they'll buy, Brenda and Ben Matlock of Bowling Green are dreading the festive time of year.

"We don't hardly celebrate Christmas," Ben Matlock said. "We don't put up a Christmas tree or anything. It's just too hard for us."

A little more than two years ago — on June 20, 2005 — the Matlocks lost their 17-year-old daughter Jessica to a car crash. She wasn't wearing a seat belt.

Now, the Matlock home is not the same.

With the couple's grown son, Chris, living on his own, "we don't have the laughter and smiles" Jessica used to bring in daily, Ben



Matlock said. "She came in happy."

And the holidays that used to be joyful and fun are now filled with unspeakable pain.

"If you ever met her, she had a great personality and loved life," Ben Matlock said of his daughter, who he called "a daddy's girl. You wouldn't think it would've ever happened to her."

The Matlocks have daily tried to get through their grief with help from family and friends and a Compassionate Friends support group, through their Christian faith, through handing out bumper stickers that say "Buckle

"If you ever met her, she had a great personality and loved life."

**Ben Matlock**

Daughter died in car accident

Up for Jessica Matlock," through working to have a billboard with the same message put up near Warren Central High School, where Jessica was a student and by advocating for the primary seat belt law that went into effect on April 24, 2006.

Because of the Matlocks' advocacy for the issue, they were by Gov. Ernie Fletcher's side when he signed the legislation.

But none of it has taken away their pain.

"There's days when I don't want to go to

See HOLIDAY, 3A

# PLEASE Buckle-Up

In Memory Of

*Jessica Matlock*



David W. Smith/Daily News

Ben and Brenda Matlock lost their daughter, Jessica, two years ago in a car crash in which she wasn't wearing a seat belt. They have since tried working through their grief in a support group, through their faith, through working with lawmakers on the state seat belt law and through working to get young drivers to buckle up. They give out bumper stickers that say "Buckle Up for Jessica Matlock" and have recently worked to get a billboard put up near Warren Central High School, where Jessica was set to enter her senior year before she was killed.

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## Holiday grief program helps those coping with the loss of loved ones

work, or I want to give up," Ben Matlock said.

The thing that keeps Ben Matlock going is his belief that he'll see Jessica in heaven.

"At first I was mad at God when I lost her," Ben Matlock said, "but I think it changed my life because after that I started reading the Bible" and became a Christian who believes that families will be reunited in heaven.

Now, the Matlocks are planning on going Saturday to a special event at Holy Spirit Catholic Church Parish Hall for those who are grieving this holiday season.

"Getting Through the Holidays," which is sponsored by J.C. Kirby & Son Funeral Chapel, will be from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and is open, at no charge, to everyone.

Phyllis McElwain, who has a private practice for marriage and family counseling in Henderson, where she is also a counselor and director of New Choices at Methodist Hospital, will be the event's guest speaker.

"She did it last year and did an excellent job," said Dwayne Lawrence, who organizes "Getting Through the Holidays" for J.C. Kirby.

Caroline Panchyshyn, who has attended the 14-year-old "Getting Through the Holidays" presentation before, said she thinks the event will help anyone who can't bear the thought of the holidays

without a loved one.

"I think they'll get guidance from this lady," she said of McElwain.

And she thinks people will be helped by knowing they're not alone in their grief.

Though Panchyshyn has recently remarried Bob Panchyshyn, who has also grieved the loss of a spouse, she long felt the pain that came from losing her husband, Bill Baseheart, 13 years ago.

Now, Carolyn Panchyshyn is planning on attending Saturday's "Getting Through the Holidays" to let grieving people know they'll get through the hard times.

Helping others has long helped Carolyn Panchyshyn deal with her grief, she said, as has prayer and depending on family and friends.

"We get so wrapped up in ourselves, which is so natural in the beginning" of the grief process, Carolyn Panchyshyn said. "But we can find out we are not alone. There are so many other people out there struggling as much as you are. There's acceptance. We never walk alone."

"Getting Through the Holidays" can also offer ideas on how to lovingly include a loved one's memory in holiday celebrations, Lawrence said.

"We have to find our own way," Carolyn Panchyshyn said. "What's good for one person might not necessarily be good for

the next."

It's important for those who are struggling to get through the holidays to remember that it's OK to not accept every holiday invitation or to, on the other hand, not feel guilty for accepting invitations, Lawrence said.

It's also important for people in the community to remember to ask those who may be grieving the loss of a loved one — or those who may be alone this holiday season because of divorce, military separation or other reasons — if they'd like to take part in special holiday activities.

If they're not interested, "ask if you can take dinner over," Lawrence said.

Even Western Kentucky University students who can't go home during the holidays should be asked if they'd like to take part in festive activities.

"The suicide rate of college freshmen is high," Lawrence said. Many "of these kids are working and can't go home."

Just letting someone who's having a hard time know you're thinking about them can make a big difference in their life.

"They'll feel more like part of the community," Lawrence said.

— To register for the free "Getting Through the Holidays," call J.C. Kirby & Son through Friday at 843-3111.