



THE AFTER A DEATH SERIES

Mourning and Remembering

Grief is the emotions or feelings we experience when someone we love dies. Mourning and Remembering is how we express that grief.

We never forget. The person we loves lives in our hearts for as long as we live. As soon as our person dies, the mourning and remembering begins.

Remembering Through Ritual

There are wonderful public rituals to enrich and comfort us after a death:

The Bringing of Food

In most communities people bring casseroles or snacks to the home following a death. It's a time of talking and remembering and telling the story.

Every time the doorbell rang, a friend was there with everything from my favorite cookies to Kentucky Fried Chicken. Every time they came in I told them what happened.

The Story

"What happened?" may be as caring as, "I love you." When we tell the story of the death, what we did, what others did, what happened – we are both remembering and mourning. We are framing our grief into a remembrance.

At first it was hard to talk about it. I cried, they cried. But by the end of the first day, it felt as if a huge weight had been taken off my shoulders. I WANTED to tell about it.

The Funeral or Memorial Service

This is a major part of our public mourning. Whatever service you plan, you will be creating a ritual. A ritual is a pattern of expressions to share our love and say goodbye. It is a time of gathering and once again, sharing our stories. Today's funeral can be whatever you want it to be. If your loved one's body is present, you can choose whatever clothing you want, whether it's a nice suit or a flannel shirt and jeans, the cheerleading or band uniform, a lovely negligee or bib overalls. Two teenage girls did their mother's makeup and placed her favorite mug in her hands. The cremated remains of a loving grandmother sat in her urn atop her

prize-winning quilt. You can do what you want to do and the caring people at the funeral home will do everything in their power to help.

At RJ's funeral we dressed him in his western shirt, put his boots and some wildflowers beside his casket, and had western music. Our family all wore our cowboy hats.

You can have music you like, a butterfly or balloon release, a tree planting, lunch at your loved one's favorite restaurant. After a cremation you can have bits of ash put into beautiful jewelry. Your funeral home can help you research any need or idea you have. Years ago, we took pictures of the body to send to family who could not travel the long distance by horse and carriage to attend the funeral. You can take pictures today too, and it will not be bizarre or strange.

Making Memories

Mourning and remembering don't stop after the service. There are countless things you can do to remember. At first, especially following a long, difficult or tragic death, the memories may be haunting and uncomfortable. This will gradually change and there will be good memories and bittersweet ones that come. You can:

■ Design a tasteful shrine

While this may seem like a new idea, most griever create a small shrine and sometimes are not even aware of doing so. One young woman set her dad's picture, taken in 1950, on his desk and put his fountain pens in a semi-circle around it.

■ Wear a remembrance wrist band

These are plain black, white or colored bands with one-word or short message. Not only can you think of a gentle memory every time you look at the band, others will ask about it or know you lost someone.

■ Wear something that belonged to your person who died

Whether it's a shirt, a coat, a pin or some other item, you're likely to feel comforted and closer to your loved one. Sisters have claimed all their brother's

shirts, men have put a small pin belonging to their wives on their lapels, and wives have carried their husband's wallet. A famous comedian could not sleep until he moved to his wife's twin bed. Do what feels right for you.

■ Create a memory quilt or teddy bears

There are several people who take a person's clothing and make it into a quilt. One mother used all her son's soccer T-shirts. A man's shirts, a woman's blouses or dresses, children's play clothes and a teenager's jeans turn miraculously into a thing of beauty with the person's name, birth and death date embroidered in a corner. You can also have clothing made into delightful teddy bears or afghans. Some firms will put your person's photo on a lap robe to wrap you in memories and comfort.

■ Keep a journal

This may be the most helpful thing you do. Called a "cheap psychiatrist," you can use a guided journal or an inexpensive notebook. Record your thoughts, feelings and memories. As you look back over time, you'll see how you are healing.

■ Visit the cemetery or other special place

One widow told how she went to her husband's grave every week and talked to him. Other people have a quiet time sitting beside the urn. If you cannot or do not feel a need to do this, a quiet place in your home or outside will be fine.

Families whose loved one died in an auto accident have built the little crosses or descansos that are by the roadside. There are yard stones to be inscribed with your loved one's name and a message. You can do such a simple thing as lighting a candle, or an involved one such as climbing a mountain to write your loved one's name in the book at the top. Remembering in these ways are healing and creative and almost universally, they help you feel better. Think of your own ways to honor and commemorate the person you still love who has died. To do so is loving, heartwarming and can free your spirit.

A Caring Gift to you from: _____