

# **Ceremonies to Celebrate Together From Afar**

## **A Resource for Challenging Times**

*Second Edition*

*Compiled by InSight Institute Certified Celebrants*



Certified  
Celebrants

Life Tribute Professionals

## To our funeral professional community

*July 2020*

*When we first put together this resource book in March, we had no idea what our landscape was going to look like. Would this last a month or two? Now, as we enter the 6th month with a wide variety of restrictions and expectations from state to state, the concern continues to be for those families who cannot hold full services as well as those who postponed a service and now are not sure if or when they wish to reenter the funeral process.*

*This intro was written March 24th and, for many of us, parts of the considerations still hold true today. We continue to learn and grow and stretch into how to serve families.*

These are difficult days. Each of you are called upon to serve families in new and challenging ways. Some of you are completely isolated from those very families who need our presence. Others are trying to navigate having services that are safe and sacred. Truly this is unknown territory for each of us.

But, truly, we were born for this moment. Whether you are a licensed funeral director, a Celebrant, clergy, officiant, chaplain or one of those myriads of other roles who serve families, we have always been prepared to stand in the gap for people on their worst days. Whether that means a sweet little family who lost their baby, a suicide, an overdose, a long life that faded into a haze, the public tragedy of a shooting, bomb or attack or even a pandemic, we've always been those who face the storm and walked along side, providing guidance and safety. Now we are faced with a world-wide experience that no one could prepare for. Again, we are there, to care for the dead and speak for the bereaved. You are the heroes every day, and especially today.

The InSight Certified Celebrant family understand that these extreme times calls for new ways to offer service, words of comfort and ceremonies that heal. They have rallied together to offer their creativity and their words that can be utilized in the funeral experiences that we can provide.

We put together quotations, poems, openings and closings and ceremonies that acknowledge the situation and the grief attached to the isolation. These are offered with the expectation that the full story of the deceased would be told as well.

We offer them to you in the hopes that they provide some support and resources as you figure out how to proceed. You can take parts that fit a situation or use the entire piece.

We also encourage you to seek out Celebrants in your community. Even if you have never thought about utilizing the services of a Funeral Celebrant, we are uniquely prepared and trained to have family meetings and to craft a special and one-of-a-kind service for the families you serve. They are your best resource and partner.

If you have questions or need additional information or support, please do not hesitate to reach out.

We're all in this together. Every life deserves to be honored, no matter the situation.

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*1st Edition - March 2020*

*2nd Edition - July 2020*

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## Letter or Statement for Social Media

*A letter or statement that can be posted on your social media or sent to families (feel free to edit to fit your situation)*

Death happens regardless of our time and space and situation. If you are faced with the unthinkable loss of losing a loved one during this unique and scary time, please know that our funeral professionals are there for you. We will work with you to make the right decisions for your family.

You can bury or cremate now and have a service later when people can be together again.

Or you can have a virtual service and invite everyone to join in via webcast or a Zoom platform. Just ask what availability your funeral professionals have for those kind of broadcasting options.

Celebrants all over the world are ready to have a family meeting by phone or Facetime and gather the stories and write a service that honors your loved one. They can perform it now via webcasting or hold it for you when you are ready to have a service.

Grief does not wait and demands that we embrace it. We all are grieving our losses right now--loss of movement and freedom, loss of income, loss of friends and family, loss of security, loss of health, loss of trust. A death just magnifies those feelings and sense of isolation. Allow the people who are trained for this work to help you walk this path and give you words of solace and comfort and ways to put the stories in a place that will help you.

Every life deserves to be celebrated. Even when we are together from afar.

## Considerations for Conducting Services:

The first thing to consider is how the services will be presented.

Some firms already offer webcasting and are comfortable and positioned for this situation. Others will be figuring out very rapidly how to procure the equipment and software and skills.

There are professional companies that offer streaming services on a per service or monthly fee. You have probably already been contacted by some of these companies in the past few days.

There are public platforms such as Zoom, Facebook Live, Go to Meeting, WebX, etc. Consult with others who have used any of these platforms or services for advice or tips on what works or pitfalls to avoid.

1. Live Stream with family present with no participants visible on the screen.

Suggestions:

- Give the family a moment to wave and express their thanks to the people who are joining them.
- Ask the participants to type in their wishes or condolences in the chat function and take a few minutes to read some of them during the service.
- Have a video tribute or pictures of the deceased visible on the screen next to the officiant.
- Be sure that flowers or mementos or flowers or service folders are shown for everyone to see.
- Have a favorite or familiar song played and put the words on the screen so everyone can sing along.
- Put the words to readings or scripture or prayers on the screen so viewers can read along.

2. Live Stream with or without family present and participants are visible on the screen

Suggestions:

- Ask the participants to write a note that can be held up to the camera for the family to see.
- Have a ceremony (a few are included in this resource book) that everyone can do together.
- Have a video tribute or pictures of the deceased visible on the screen next to the officiant.
- Be sure that flowers or mementos or service folders are shown for everyone to see.
- Have a favorite or familiar song played and put the words on the screen so everyone can sing along.
- Put the words to readings or scripture or prayers on the screen so viewers can read/recite along.

3. Taping for later broadcast

- This provides a little more opportunity for editing and smoother transitions to video tribute, music, flowers, service folders, etc.
- Loses the opportunity for real time participation and family involvement.

4. Outside Services

- Have a "drive-in" funeral service with everyone staying in their cars. If you have not yet invested in portable microphone/speakers set up, now would be a good time.
- Borrow a drive in theater in your community and broadcast the service on the screen
- Drive past the home of the family with the coach.
- Encourage people to drive by the home of the family at a set time, so they can acknowledge their "presence" and wishes.
- Gravesides with family standing by their cars. Again, a strong outdoor microphone/speaker system is very important.

## For the Delayed Services

- Offer a community service. If allowed in your area, invite the family members who have not yet had a service. If you are still under gathering restrictions, send out an invitation to all the families to watch on live stream.
- Name the people who have died, have pictures of them if possible. Approach this much like you would when having a holiday service. (See suggested opening words on page 15)
- Light candles or tie ribbons on a stand or a tree to honor each name.

### Invitation for a funeral

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_*

*You have been in our thoughts since the passing of \_\_\_\_\_. We know that experiencing a death in such an uncertain and unsettling time meant that you had to make difficult decisions about where and when you could gather to honor this life.*

*Experts in the field of grief all agree that one of the most important steps in the grief journey is the act of gathering. Grief delayed is not grief diminished and the most important thing that can be done is to create a time for remembering. Giving voice to the stories, seeing the pictures, hearing words of comfort and special music are vital components of creating a safe space to express your loss.*

*Perhaps you put your plans for a funeral on hold and are now wondering if it is necessary or valuable.*

*Our experience in walking with families tells us that it is never too late to have a time to remember.*

*We invite you to contact us to discuss how we can create a sacred space for remembering your loved one. It could be a traditional service, or a placing of the urn, or a time of sharing and communing with others. This can be in person (depending upon the restrictions in your area) or we can stream it so that all your friends and family can participate.*

*Your journey is our journey and we stand ready to walk with you as you find meaningful ways to say goodbye.*

## Quotes that Can Be Incorporated in Services



**John O'Donohue** 2 hrs · 🌐

This is the time to be slow,  
Lie low to the wall  
Until the bitter weather passes.

Try, as best you can, not to let  
The wire brush of doubt  
Scrape from your heart  
All sense of yourself  
And your hesitant light.

If you remain generous,  
Time will come good;  
And you will find your feet  
Again on fresh pastures of promise,  
Where the air will be kind  
And blushed with beginning.

JOHN O'DONOHUE



***"And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently. And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal. And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed."***

***- Kitty O'Meara***

When this is over,  
may we never again  
take for granted  
A handshake with a stranger  
Full shelves at the store  
Conversations with neighbors  
A crowded theatre  
Friday night out  
The taste of communion  
A routine checkup  
The school rush each morning  
Coffee with a friend  
The stadium roaring  
Each deep breath  
A boring Tuesday  
Life itself.

When this ends,  
may we find  
that we have become  
more like the people  
we wanted to be  
we were called to be  
we hoped to be  
and may we stay  
that way—better  
for each other  
because of the worst.

---

LAURA KELLY FANUCCI



### Let Us Agree (Jan Richardson)

Let us agree for now  
that we will not say the breaking makes us stronger  
or that it is better to have this pain  
than to have done without this love.

Let us promise  
we will not tell ourselves time will heal the wound,  
when every day our waking opens it anew.

Perhaps for now  
it can be enough to simply marvel at the mystery  
of how a heart so broken can go on beating,  
as if it were made for precisely this—  
as if it knows the only cure for love is more of it,  
as if it sees the heart's sole remedy  
for breaking is to love still,  
as if it trusts that its own persistent pulse  
is the rhythm of a blessing we cannot begin to fathom  
That will save us nonetheless.

**DEATH, HOWEVER LONG  
EXPECTED, IS SUDDEN AT  
THE LAST...**

MARY JANE HOLMES

### PEACE

By Sara Brown

Peace to the grieving body  
When the mind cannot will it to move  
When it struggles to slow the breath  
When it aches for physical touch  
Peace to the shattered heart  
When the loss feels too heavy to bear  
When it waffles between numbing  
And searching for something that heals

Peace to the anxious mind  
When it reels with uncertainty about the future  
When it's paralyzed with regret from the past  
When it fears what it cannot control  
Peace to the broken spirit  
When the sun shines but inside feels muted  
Peace in the middle of the dark  
and lonely nights of the soul

In the hollow and deafening silence  
While wrestling with the Mystery,  
Grace to surrender to what simply is  
To be still enough to listen

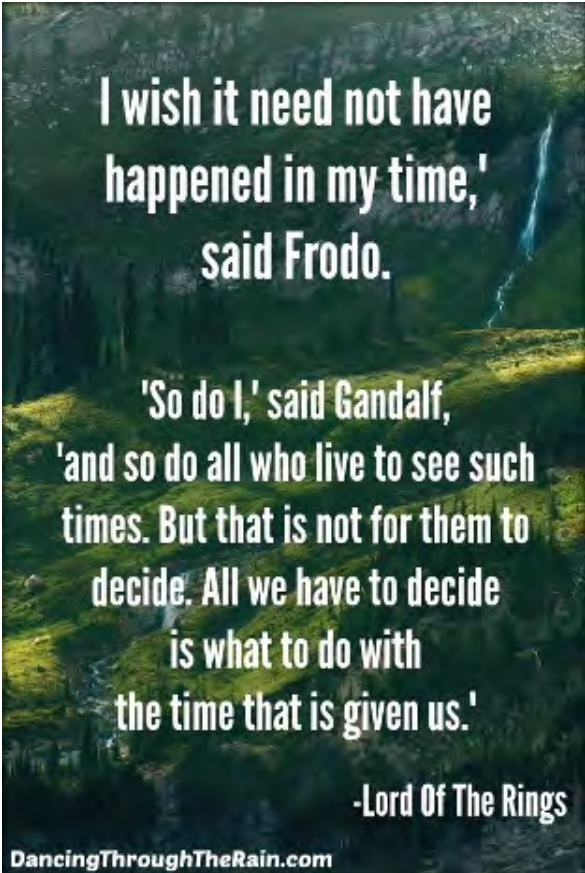
To your grieving body  
your shattered heart  
your anxious mind  
your broken spirit

May they all be blanketed with  
Peace

“The world is indeed full of peril, and  
in it there are many dark places;  
but still there is much that is fair,  
and though in all lands love is now  
mingled with grief, it grows perhaps  
the greater.”

Haldir

Hypable



I wish it need not have  
happened in my time,'  
said Frodo.

'So do I,' said Gandalf,  
'and so do all who live to see such  
times. But that is not for them to  
decide. All we have to decide  
is what to do with  
the time that is given us.'

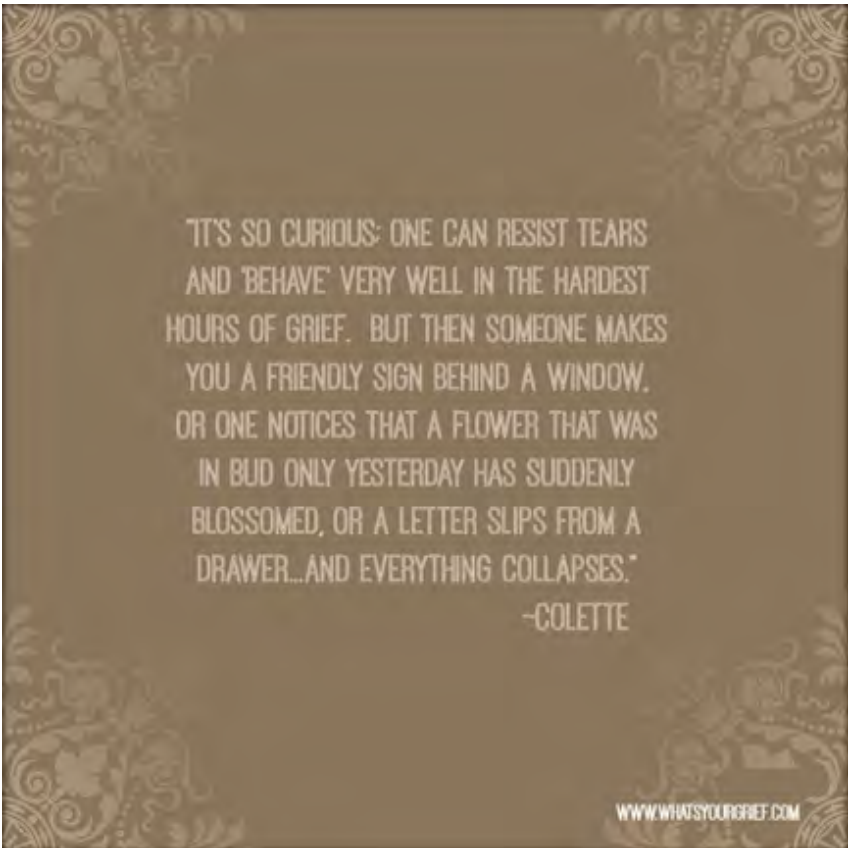
-Lord Of The Rings

[DancingThroughTheRain.com](http://DancingThroughTheRain.com)



No one  
is actually dead  
until the ripples  
they cause  
in the world  
die away.

Terry Pratchett



IT'S SO CURIOUS: ONE CAN RESIST TEARS  
AND 'BEHAVE' VERY WELL IN THE HARDEST  
HOURS OF GRIEF. BUT THEN SOMEONE MAKES  
YOU A FRIENDLY SIGN BEHIND A WINDOW,  
OR ONE NOTICES THAT A FLOWER THAT WAS  
IN BUD ONLY YESTERDAY HAS SUDDENLY  
BLOSSOMED, OR A LETTER SLIPS FROM A  
DRAWER...AND EVERYTHING COLLAPSES."

-COLETTE

[WWW.WHATSYOURGRIEF.COM](http://WWW.WHATSYOURGRIEF.COM)



In the blink of an eye,  
everything can change.  
So forgive often and  
love with all your  
heart. You may never  
know when you may  
not have that chance  
again.

Lessons Learned In Life

"Everyone must leave something behind when he dies, my grandfather said. A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you're there."

-Ray Bradbury  
Fahrenheit 451

"If there ever comes a day when we can't be together, keep me in your heart, I'll stay there forever."

-Winnie the Pooh



Promise me you'll always remember:  
You're braver than you believe, stronger  
than you seem, and smarter  
than you think.



# GRIEF

by Gwen Flowers

I had my own notion of grief.  
I thought it was a sad time  
That followed the death of someone you love.  
And you had to push through it  
To get to the other side.

But I'm learning there is no other side.  
There is no pushing through.  
But rather, there is  
**ABSORPTION.**  
**ADJUSTMENT.**  
**ACCEPTANCE.**

And grief is not something that you complete  
But rather you endure.  
Grief is not a task to finish,  
And move on,  
But an element of yourself -  
An alteration of your being.  
A new way of seeing,  
A new definition of self.



# 1 Words for Opening

The singular need of the human race is to be together.

Tribes, families, teams, communities, states, countries, continents. Gathering for protection, for the common good, for support, for entertainment, for shared vision and goals, for comfort. Gathering becomes even more important at those moments in life when we stop to acknowledge a milestone. Birthdays, holidays, reunions, graduations. It is an innate drive to be with others. That the event is not properly recognized until the significant people in our experience share it with us.

This is especially true at the time of death. Our first inclination is to go, to commune, to hug, to share stories, to break bread, to remember. . .together.

During this unique and unsettled time in the history of the world, we are prevented from following our natural instincts. How can we honor a life and mourn a death without others surrounding us?

So, we are called upon to be together from afar. To trust the power and mystery of spirit that will join our hearts and minds together. To call upon the best feelings inside each of us to make an extra effort, to remember long after this day is gone. Because we can create community even when we are isolated.

We invite you to relax and reflect. To listen to the stories and music. To add your own memories in your heart as you hear the words. To send healing thoughts of solidarity, of shared grief, of promises of tomorrow.

And we ask that you pledge to walk alongside, even from a distance, after today. When the lights are turned off, when the screen is dark, when the pictures have faded and you continue your days of sheltering and protection, your work begins.

The beauty of this particular time in our existence is the power of communication. Stay in touch. Send an email, make a call, Facetime and laugh together, text a memory. Or, as we sink into the demands of a less complex and busy schedule for this moment in time, perhaps it's an opportunity to revive the age-old practice of writing a letter, a card, a picture, a note. Your spirit flows through the act of writing and provides something concrete and visible that this family can hold in their hands. Something that will stay with them in the dark days of grief to come.

So we ask that you join your hearts and thoughts together as we begin to remember \_\_\_\_\_.

## 2 Words for Opening


We gather today to honor the life and mourn the death of \_\_\_\_\_. We are here in spirit for the family: \_\_\_\_\_ (*names of family*). We pledge to be here for you, offering ears for stories, and promising shoulders for tears when we have the chance to be together again.

Grief does not wait and demands that we embrace it. We all are grieving our losses right now—loss of movement, loss of income, loss of friends and family, loss of security, loss of health, loss of trust. A death just magnifies those feelings and sense of isolation. Allow the people who are trained for this work to help you walk this path and give you words of solace and comfort and ways to put the stories in a place that will help you.

We gather today, because it is an important and vital part of our experience to share this sacred moment, to be still and listen to each other's hearts, to dedicate ourselves to being our best selves because \_\_\_\_\_ was in this world.

Every life deserves to be celebrated. Even when we are together from afar. So, let us begin.

## 3 Words for Opening or Closing



“The greatest joys in life are found not only in what we do and feel, but also in our quiet hopes and labors for others.” - Bryant McGill

These are strange and unsettled times. When safety and security feel threatened to our very bones. When usual has no meaning. When we ache for contact and find ourselves at a distance.

A death in the family, a loss in the community, only magnifies that feeling of being undone. Of the world being turned upside down. Of time stopping and normal being a distant memory.

So we gather in the only way we can to offer the only thing we can—our hearts, our support, our promise to never leave you alone.

But the other thing that this strange and scary time has shown us is the innate goodness of people. Those moments of kindness, those sacred acts of love and sacrifice.

Those who have delivered groceries and essentials to those who cannot leave their homes.

Those who sat down at their sewing machines to create life-saving masks for our health care workers.

Those who volunteered at food banks and community centers.

Those who sheltered in place to save others.

Those who gave of their plenty to help those who worry about having enough.

Those who have reached out to check on each other in so many unheralded acts of concern.

Those who made sure to thank the grocery worker, the restaurant delivery person, the mail and carrier professionals who kept you in touch with your world.

Those who paid for services not received, understanding that the person who cuts your hair, does your nails or cleans your house depend upon customers for their very survival.

Those who made the effort today to be with you, to honor your loss, to mourn as a community what this death means to everyone.

We pray for each other and pledge to never forget that the only way we survive is together. Even from afar.

We celebrate that this dark time in our experience has shone a light on the best in all of us.

We offer to you what we can—our hearts, our support and our promise to never leave you alone. Expect to hear from each person in the coming days, weeks and months. Welcome the texts, the calls, the emails, the cards. Feel the warmth being sent, the hugs that will be shared.

We acknowledge that grief is as unique as a fingerprint and each of you will experience this loss in your own way and in your own time. So be kind and offer grace to yourself as you enter this path of the unknown amidst the unknown. We ask for blessings on each of you.

## 4 Words of Opening for a Community Ceremony

The singular need of the human race is to be together.

Tribes, families, communities, states, countries, continents...gathering for protection, for the common good, for support, for entertainment, for shared vision, for comfort. Gathering becomes even more important at those moments in life when we stop to acknowledge a milestone. Birthdays, holidays, reunions, graduations, births and deaths. It is an innate drive to be with others. That the event is not properly recognized until the significant people in our experience share it with us.

This is especially true at the time of death. Our first inclination is to go, to gather, to hug, to remember...together.

During this unique and unsettled time in the history of the world, we are prevented from following our natural instincts. How can we honor a life and mourn a death without others surrounding us?

So, we are called upon to be together from afar. To trust the power and mystery of spirit that will join our hearts and minds together. To call upon the best feelings inside each of us to make an extra effort, to remember long after this day is gone. Because we can create community even when we are isolated.

The \_\_\_\_\_ Funeral Home recognizes that so many families in our community were unable to have a service at the time of their loss. That restrictions and isolation required a pause, a delay, a holding until it was safe to be together again.

So, we wish to honor each life that we had the privilege to serve during this time. To give voice to their names and faces. To light a candle in remembrance. To give each family a time to hold those stories and thoughts close to their hearts once again.

Every grieving person needs journeyers on their path. Those special people who pledge to walk along side, to hear the stories, to embrace the sadness, to lift up the memories. Today we are all journeyers as we remember each life that was important and special and unique, as we reflect upon the impact that each life had on the world.

*Suggestions: Have music that is instrumental or non-genre specific. Light candles as each name is read or tie ribbons on a stand or a tree. Show pictures if available.*



## 5 Blessing for Opening or Closing

May we all understand that the journey of grief is long, and each person finds what helps them along the way to get them through the next hour the next day, the next week.

May we recognize that these special times require special efforts to be present in new ways. That hugs from a distance are powerful, that there is always a time to say I love you, that support and comfort comes in many forms, that we each walk this path of grief to the place of gratitude. May we never let anyone grieve in isolation.

May you understand that tears are memories in motion and there is no better way to express your grief than through those sacred moments of crying.

May you find your own special way to honor \_\_\_\_\_'s life, hear \_\_\_\_\_'s voice and claim \_\_\_\_\_'s spirit in your heart while being grateful each day for the life, love and example of \_\_\_\_\_.

May God give you peace and comfort in your memories and in the lessons learned from this good and faithful servant. Amen

## 6 Prayer for Opening or Closing

Dear God of Broken Hearts,

Today there is a gathering of family and friends who are reeling in shock, in despair and in disbelief that they are here. They wish to hold on to each other, but our times have determined that this cannot be possible at this moment. They search for answers, for solace and for a promise of peace. Help each of them as they find ways to live in a world that no longer contains \_\_\_\_\_, who loved to the very best of \_\_\_\_\_ ability, who overcame so many challenges and shared his/her spirit with all who came into his/her sphere.

We ask for wisdom in sorrow and lessons in being present for each other in unique and special ways as every heart navigates their way on the grief path. For this we give thanks. Amen.

## Candle Ceremony

Candles are important in our existence. We light them for special events, for birthdays, for holidays, for reverent moments of worship, for quiet times at home. There is something powerful and peaceful about the light that reflects back into our souls.

Today, to bring us all together, we are going to share the light. To create a sacred space of reflection and memories, to send thoughts across the miles that can be felt by everyone here.

We're going to pause for a few moments and let you find a light: A candle, a flashlight, a lighter—whatever you have in your home that can break the darkness. We'll play some music to give you a minute to find something.

*MUSIC*

Now we light our candles together (*officiant lights candle*). We trust in the power of spirit and connectedness that brings us together. We promise to hold our lights from this day forward, to spread that warmth to each person here as we remember \_\_\_\_\_. Let the world know that being alone does not keep us from being together.

We light our candles in thankfulness and memory of \_\_\_\_\_ and pledge to support each other as we find our way to a new normal without this light in each of your lives.

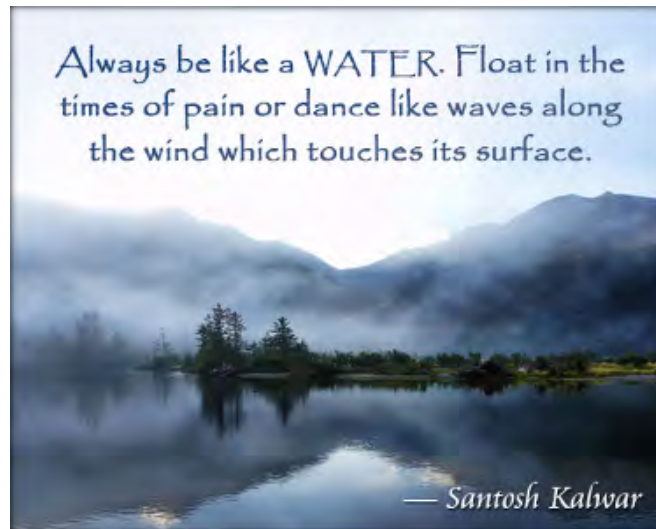
## The Ties that Bind Ceremony

The loss of a loved one in typical times is hard enough, during these times of uncertainty and isolation it is beyond devastating. The normal comfort of coming together to seek solace and share our collective grief is not an option. We search for something, anything, with which we can center ourselves so we can move forward in our mourning of this loss.

You have been asked to find some type of "tie." It can be a piece of yarn or thread, a ribbon, even a shoelace. Please take it and find something nearby to place it around. It can be a lamp, a candlestick, a stair railing, or anything similar. Now, wrap the tie around the object and secure with some type of knot or bow. As you do this, think of something positive that bound you to \_\_\_\_\_. Love provided, wisdom shared, or comfort given. Whether through words or actions, the impact \_\_\_\_\_ had on your life is still present, even though they are no longer here. Use this "tie" as a symbolic reminder of that impact, and reflect upon it when you need some grounding amidst the chaotic swirl of the here and now. And remember the others who grieve with you. Even though you are not physically together, this symbol you each have in your homes binds you in solidarity and spirit. Reach out to them and share your memories of \_\_\_\_\_ and let the senses of sight and sound fill the gap in your hearts that touch would usually provide.

We do not know what the future holds, but we know what \_\_\_\_\_ meant to us and our lives. In times of uncertainty, let the love \_\_\_\_\_ represented be the tie that binds us together despite our distance.

## Water Ceremony



It has been said that water has memory. Water refreshes, cleanses, nourishes and re-imagines. Water reminds each of us that we are not alone in this world. That we depend upon each other just as we depend upon the air and the water that sustains us. Water has memory and can be a powerful conduit of our own memories.

We are going to give you a moment to get some water. It can be in a bottle, a glass, a bowl. Whatever is available to you. We'll play some music for a few minutes.

### *MUSIC*

Now we invite you to whisper your memories of \_\_\_\_\_ into the water: A funny story, a time of struggle and strength, that moment when you knew that \_\_\_\_\_ was a special person in your world. Or, if you are here to support one of the family members, speak your encouragement, your wishes for a safe journey, your promise to be present now and when it is again safe to be physically in community.

You can save that water in a bottle to share with the family at a later time. Or take it outside and sprinkle it in the garden or on a tree, trusting the earth to hold that memory for you. Water has memory. Let it help us hold on to our memories.

## Words Ceremony

The entire existence of the human race depends upon words. Words encourage, destroy, bless, curse, create, communicate, deceive, guide, inform, comfort, love, anger, and bind us all together.

Words can reach across time and barriers, traditions or nations. Words can inspire or discourage. Words can heal.

But sometimes, we don't have words to express the deep experiences that flow from our hearts and souls. We often say that when words fail, ceremony speaks.

So, we invite you to participate in this ceremony to provide you a safe space for your words.

As you think about \_\_\_\_\_ or about \_\_\_\_\_'s family, find something to write on. A piece of paper, a rock, a card, a ribbon, a magazine, a newspaper, a brick—anything that can accept your words. Write down one word that captures your thoughts, your memories, your grief, your hopes. Or just write \_\_\_\_\_'s name. The act of attaching your words will help cement this life's work and life's legacy into your own heart.

# 1 Closing Words



Grace is what \_\_\_\_\_ gave of freely to each of you in his/her loving path. Grace is how you walked each day with \_\_\_\_\_ through the sunshine and rain, the mountains and the valleys. Grace is what you offer to each other as you grieve together and individually trying to articulate what this life has meant and will mean to you.

Grace is understanding that the way we heal our world in this moment is to be distant and determined. Grace is embracing the opportunity to be present in new and different ways. Grace is promising to journey from afar until the time we can once again journey together.

Grace is what is called for as we help the family navigate truly understanding that this special life is gone. Grace is what you bestow on others who come into your world as a way to celebrate and honor \_\_\_\_\_ 's influence in your life. Grace, at the end of the day, is the one thing that can give all of us hope.

So, as you take a deep breath and try to figure out how to put one foot in front of the other, remember the smile, the compassion, the singular personality of \_\_\_\_\_ and how he/she would face the world with defiance and undaunted bravery. This, too, is the gift of grace that he/she leaves you.



## 2 Closing Words

So now how will you remember \_\_\_\_\_? Have his/her favorite candy/dessert/beverage. Make a special time to sit with your family and tell \_\_\_\_\_ stories. Go take a walk and breathe in the glorious air and breathe out your stress and concern and sadness. Watch the birds as they bring joy and song into this sad world. Write a card or a note. Find something that \_\_\_\_\_ gave to you or something that reminds you of \_\_\_\_\_ and place it in a special place so you will think of \_\_\_\_\_ each day.

Be grateful. Grateful for the people around you.

Grateful for those brave people who stood in the storm to serve others during our time of crisis.

Grateful for a time of quiet and reflection, a time to reset and reconsider what is important in life.

Grateful for the promise of tomorrow and the promise of one of these days.

Grateful for the life of \_\_\_\_\_ and the impact h/she made upon this world.

Grateful for memories and stories.

Grateful for missing human touch and welcoming gatherings.

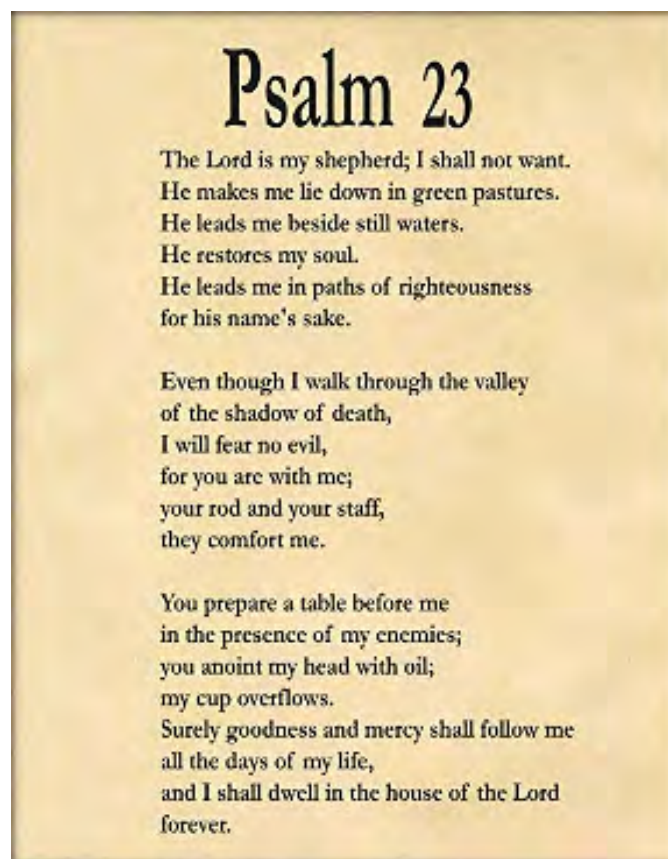
Grateful for family, for safety, for friends, for the future, for love.

## Scripture Reading: 23rd Psalm

The 23rd Psalm is often used at moments such as this. The ancient words can provide assurance and solace in difficult times. But, we often think of the creator of this poetry as King David, who sat on the throne and was in charge of all he surveyed. However, history informs us that at this point in his experience, David was on the run, afraid for his life, hiding in a cave, alone. He was in a place he'd never been before.

Today, as we try to make sense of saying goodbye without the comfort of gathering and touch, you might be afraid, hiding in isolation, alone, in a place you've never been before.

So, let us listen to this words that have been read so many times with new ears, with an open heart, with a searching spirit as you seek support in times of the unknown. May it bless your hurting heart and seep into your soul.





## Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 3



As the scripture tells us, to everything there is a season. Today we find ourselves in a season of distance and difficulty, a season of fear and sadness. While the entire world grieves the undoing of all we hold dear, you are grieving the loss of \_\_\_\_\_ and the season of feeling alone in your journey. Truly this is the time to refrain from embracing.

But the ancient words also promise us that there is a season of embracing, of love and of peace. So, we hold fast to that hope that soon this season will, too, pass and we once again will find ourselves in a season of gathering and sharing.

And, when that season comes, may we also find that our season is fulfilled in gratitude and grace.

That we don't once again become consumed by the trials and trivia of everyday life.

That we don't take our friends and loved ones for granted.

That we look at the world with new eyes of understanding that life can change in an instant and that we live with intention and purpose.

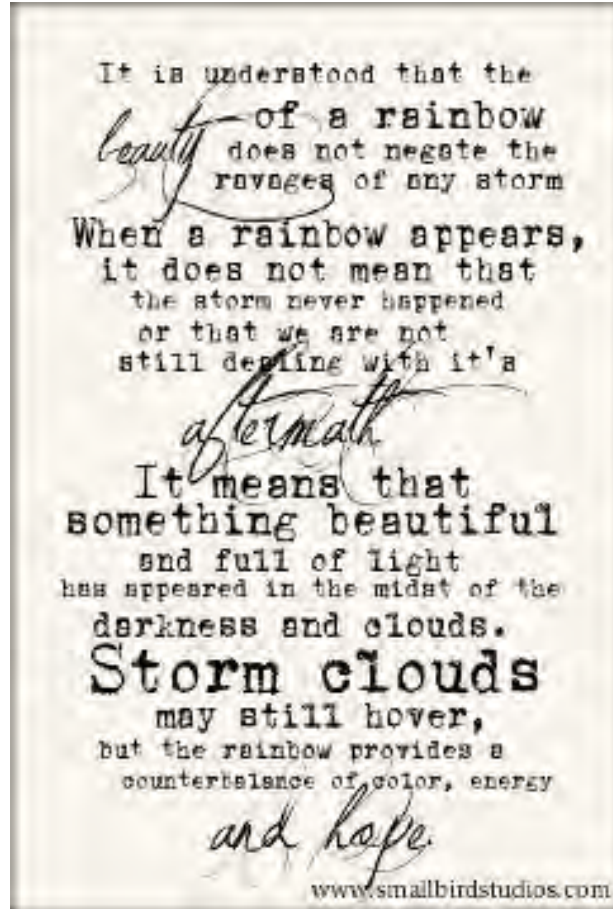
That we remember this moment in time when we stood together from afar to honor this life and mourn this death.

To gather up all those memories and carve a special place in your heart to hold them fast.

To look forward to the day when you can sit around and say "do you remember when" and share laughter and tears as you embrace the life of \_\_\_\_\_ and make it a daily part of your perspective and presence.

This is a time to plant those moments for a harvest in future days.

## Graveside for A Baby



And now we come to say our goodbyes to \_\_\_\_\_. Death has forced us to let go of the baby you ached to hold, to carry, to teach, to love. As you whisper your words of love, you send your thoughts, your hopes, your dreams and your wishes for a healthy, happy little \_\_\_\_\_ who would have grown up to have an impact on his/her world. You are now the ambassadors of \_\_\_\_\_'s legacy. When you leave this place, you do so with a promise to remember and to represent all that is good in the world because of the love that created this little life and the grace that can be shared with others.

Say a prayer, whisper a blessing, think of a person who needs to feel unconditional love, and dedicate yourself to making the world better in \_\_\_\_\_'s name and in his/her memory. You may come back often to tell him/her a story, to place a flower, to remember a special day or days that never could be. This will always be holy ground, the place where his/her name and his/her story will be remembered.

### *Closing Prayer*

*For the gathering of family and friends and the warm embrace of support, even from a distance, we are grateful.*

*For the brief days of life that will leave memories for a lifetime, we are grateful.*

*For loving choices and brighter tomorrows, we are grateful.*

*For a beautiful baby who blessed everyone in \_\_\_\_\_'s short time on this earth, we are grateful.*

*For the safety of understanding ears and strong shoulders, we are grateful.*

*In all things, in all ways, we are grateful. Amen*

## Graveside: Bubble Ceremony

*(instead of having a balloon release. Family members could stay in their cars and watch the bubbles. You could print these words for them to read along in case they can't hear the microphone outside. It is suggested that you purchase an industrial size bubble machine)*

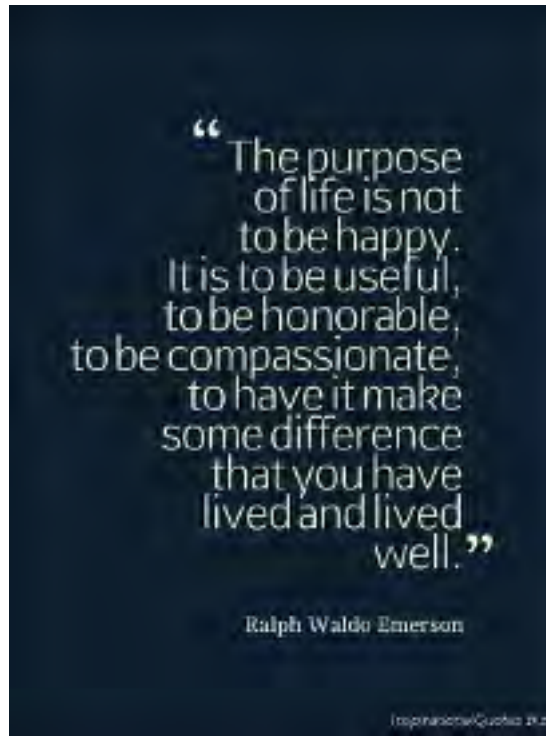
Bubbles are magical. They make us smile. They make us giggle. They remind us of simple joys and simple times.

Bubbles are brief. They are here for just a moment, sparkling, bouncing, shimmering. Then, having completed their task, they are gone. Left behind is the memory of the joy and the experience.

So, as we watch these bubbles dancing in the air, let us be thankful for \_\_\_\_\_'s time on earth. It was not long enough for anyone here, but \_\_\_\_\_ completed his/her task, brought joy, light and energy into the world. Now his/her task is completed. While it makes us sad to not have him/her in your world, you can remember this sparkling life that bounced through your lives and left memories that will stay with you forever.

## Graveside

*(if you are allowed to have gravesides in your community)*



And so, we come together to honor the life that \_\_\_\_\_ lived. He/She was honorable, compassionate, vigilant and undaunted. He/She lived well in the world that he/she made.

We come to lay him/her to rest next to his/her family, to bid him/her a fond farewell, to acknowledge the pain of loss and the days of grief that lay ahead for his/her family and friends, and to honor this ground as holy ground.

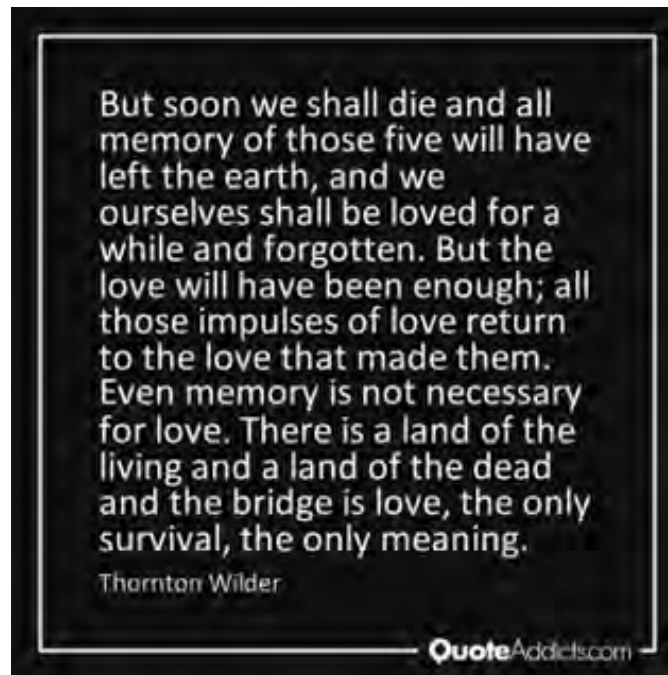
From this time on, this land will be sacred to you. For it is here that your loved one, \_\_\_\_\_ returns to the earth from which we all came. It is here that generations to come will find a connection to their roots. They will come here and feel the sense of belonging to a greater force called family.

It is here that many will come to feel the presence and the love shared in life. Some will come often. Other may come only on rare occasions; all who come will be blessed. We come to make a sacred space of remembering. To make it a place of peace where you can come to have a chat, to share a moment, to shed a tear, or place a flower. All in the memory of \_\_\_\_\_ who touched each of your lives.

It is here that we show honor to the memories of a life that touched us and remains alive in our hearts, for no one is dead until they are forgotten.

May we therefore now hallow this ground and pledge to remember and honor \_\_\_\_\_ for as long as you live. We say goodbye to \_\_\_\_\_ and wish him/her a peaceful journey as he/she leaves us. As we lay him/her to rest, we remember the lives in love that have gone before him/her.

Thornton Wilder wrote in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*



You will be sustained and comforted by that love and the thin place between life and death where those memories can flow and warm your hearts. Where memories are just a breath away.

#### *Final Blessing*

For the life of \_\_\_\_\_, we are grateful. For the example of unconditional love and unquenchable spirit\*, we are grateful.

For the strength of family and friends, we are grateful.

For a shining life of optimism and intentionality, we are grateful. For a strong man/woman who always believed in tomorrow and took care of everyone around him/her, we are grateful.

Be with this family as they find places to put all these memories and lessons that will comfort them in the days and weeks and months to come. Wrap them in love, give them journeyers who will walk with them, remind them daily of the amazing gift of a life that they were given. For all of these, we are grateful. Go in peace and love each other in \_\_\_\_\_'s name. Amen

*\*(substitute qualities that fit the person you are remembering throughout the blessing)*

## Ceremonial Words for Presenting Cremated Remains

*Some Celebrants are creating a ceremonial opportunity when the family comes back to pick up the cremated remains of their loved one. This can be a powerful and special moment. Take the family into a quiet room, light some candles or have some flowers there with the urn and then utilize some of these words before presenting the remains. Adapt them to fit. Or invite some of the family to offer a memory.*

### General

It is an important day when we gather together to honor a life and mourn a death. Time stands still for just a moment as we stand here to acknowledge that someone has touched our lives, has left an imprint on our hearts and that our souls are eternally changed. \_\_\_\_\_ left this life on \_\_\_\_\_ but his/her spirit and his/her living made a difference and will continue to do so as long as each of you remember him/her in your hearts and carry the lessons of his/her life with you.

You now are the representatives and the ambassadors of \_\_\_\_\_'s legacy. ***She/He gave you wonderful gifts of kindness, graciousness, strength, acceptance and love. \_\_\_\_\_ showed you how to live with challenges and struggles and how to survive. While not every moment was easy and not every memory etched in gold, in the final analysis, \_\_\_\_\_ gave to each of you every inch of what she had to offer. She/He never held back and always tried to give it her/his all.*** (note: This part would depend upon how much you knew about the person, relationships, etc. and would need to be written to fit the deceased.)

You are her/his future and her/his memories. Be kind and patient with one another and allow each one of your family to experience grief in the way that fits them best. Washington Irving said, "There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief...and unspeakable love.

Accept your tears and expressions of loss. Accept the angels in human form who come along with a word, a hug or a memory to share. Help each other during those difficult times, the holidays, the anniversaries, the birthdays, the times when you will miss her/him the most.

### Blessing

*May you go forward today with a small flickering of light in your soul. May the memories of your loved one begin to bring comfort rather than pain. May the words, touch and presence of others bring solace. And may you be blessed in your coming in and going out, grateful for a life lived and a legacy left behind. Go in peace.*

### Child

*A small life walked by  
Leaving footprints on our hearts forever.*

Children are nature's way of telling us that the world should continue. The young ones in our world can melt the hardest hearts, bring smiles to the cynical and sad and make us look forward to tomorrow with promise and hope. Children are supposed to live beyond our time. We are here when they come into the world but we do not plan to be here when they leave. They are our legacy—they are not supposed to be our past.

And so now honoring the times you shared are even more special and sacred because it is the way that you keep his/her lights alive in your lives. It takes a village to raise a child—it also takes a village to mourn one. You don't overcome the death of a child, you learn how to live in different ways in the world and see the world for them, and remind others what they have lost.

In this moment and from now on you will remember \_\_\_\_\_, the place he/she has in your heart and the responsibility you now carry to keep his/her life alive through your memories and your stories.



## Still Birth or Pregnancy Loss

*This ceremony could be used for a graveside for a single child or when burying the hospital remains of several stillbirths.*

*A small life walked by*

*Leaving footprints on our hearts forever.*

Children are nature's way of telling us that the world should continue. The young ones in our world can melt the hardest hearts, bring smiles to the cynical and sad and make us look forward to tomorrow with promise and hope. Children are supposed to live beyond our time. We are here when they come into the world but we do not plan to be here when they leave. They are our legacy—they are not supposed to be our past. And when one does not even have an opportunity to take a breath to become a part of our lives, the loss is quiet, deep and long lasting.

Too often people consider pregnancy loss a minor grief—one that can easily be conquered. But they are sadly wrong. For the minute the test was positive, the moment that a little movement could be felt, the tickle of the first kick—these were special and sacred memories that the parents believed were only the first in a long life of experiences.

And so now honoring hopes and dreams that each parent shared are even more special and sacred because it is the way that we keep their lights alive in your lives. It takes a village to raise a child—it also takes a village to mourn one. You don't overcome the death of a baby, you learn how to live in different ways in the world and see the world for them, and remind others what they have lost.

In this moment and from now on we will remember this/these little one(s) that were here for a whisper, the place he/she/they have in our hearts and the responsibility we now carry to keep their brief appearance in life alive through our memories.

## Parent or Grandparent

Parents give us roots and give us wings. They bring us into the world, provide a foundation and then give us the tools to find our own way. They are the ones who listen to our dreams, wipe our tears, hold us through our fears and remind us every day that we are loved and cherished. Though we may have grown up and grown away, there is still something special about sharing our victories and commiserating our defeats with that special parent figure in our lives. Even if the relationship might have been challenging at different moments, we never stray far from the promise that home is where the heart is.

Losing a parent, even after a long and full life, leaves an empty place in our hearts. We go to the phone or open our email hoping for a message, expecting a call. We remember the past and wonder how we will continue without that knowing smile, that calming voice, that ever present belief that life is worth living and the holidays were that most important time for family. ***The mother who always knew the right thing to say or when not to say anything at all. The father who stood strong and assured whose very best gift to you was his pride and his acceptance. The grandmother who always had your favorite cookies waiting for you when you walked into her house. The grandfather who could share those old stories and make them seem new again and again. That special mother-in-law who accepted you into her family as one of her own. Or a father-in-law who offered a unique relationship as a friend and a mentor.*** (note: You could use one or more of these depending on the relationships represented or write something that will fit.)

And so you can now promise that you will take the best of what you inherited from \_\_\_\_\_ this parent in your life. The warmth, the support, the strength, the choices, the mistakes, the struggles and the successes—all have formed you into the special person you are. While maybe not every memory is etched in gold and not every moment was great, ultimately they are an unshakable part of your life.



## Sibling

The relationship of siblings is both simple and complex. We share a roof, sometimes a room or even a bed. We grow up as close as twins or we are separated by time and space. We share DNA or are brought together by the joining of two families. No matter what the family configuration, there is something completely unique about sisters and brothers. We know the deepest secrets that we promised not to tell, and we share a heart that hurts when the other has troubles or struggles. They can be a pain and a delight. They can be brutally honest or blindly loyal. Our siblings are supposed to be there forever, to grow up and grow old with us. They see the world with us and help us make sense of the good, the bad and the ugly. And to secretly know that mom really did like you best.

Learning to live without \_\_\_\_\_ your brother/sister means finding a different set of ears who will hear you, who knows your history and loves you anyway. You will miss the talks, the family gatherings, the wise words and, probably, the wise cracks. No one can keep you grounded and humbled like a sibling.

## Spouse

*I'll miss you tomorrow  
When the toothpaste cap is on  
I'll miss you tomorrow  
When I must unlock the front door  
I'll miss you tomorrow  
When mine is the only reflection in the mirror  
But I will celebrate today  
The memories of you*

Family is what God chooses for you. A spouse, a life partner, a soul mate is what you choose for yourself. Whether it was a new and fresh relationship shining with hope for the future, or one of many years that had burnished itself to a vibrant mellow glow, the relationship between partners and spouses is a singular experience. This is the person that we took into every inch of our space. This is the person that we pledged to share the good times and the bad, the victories and the defeats, the dreams and the realities of living day to day with someone who knew you by heart.

The loss of a spouse is one that reminds you every day of what was and is no more. The empty space in the bed, the coffee cup that goes unfilled, the car in the driveway that has no place to travel, the picture albums full of happy times past, the home that is stuffed with memories everywhere you look. Each day presents a challenge for finding new ways to hold the special moments in your heart without letting them overwhelm you.

You can gather your family even closer during these days and in doing so honor the life of \_\_\_\_\_. Or take that trip that you had always promised each other you would take but never quite got around to it. Seek out someone whose shoulders can take your tears and whose ears are ready for your stories. You can spend quiet times alone with your thoughts, grateful for the experience of love and the gift of a life shared.