

THE FUNERAL

Third Edition



A Chance to Touch

A Chance to Serve

A Chance to Heal

DOUG MANNING

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A Chance to Serve

A Chance to Heal

InSight Books, Inc.
Oklahoma City

The Funeral third edition

A Chance to Touch, A Chance to Serve, A Chance to Heal
Doug Manning

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PO Box 42467

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800.658.9262 or 405.810.9501

www.InSightBooks.com

OrdersAndInfo@InSightBooks.com

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BOOKS • RESOURCES • TRAINING

Dedicated To
Arnold Dodge
Funeral Service has never had a better
friend, and neither have I

“We” Squared

I love to write in the first person. I like to talk about you, me, us and we instead of the normal they or some professional title. This makes my books seem more personal and warm. That has never been a problem until I started writing this book.

I was a pastor for thirty-seven years, so when I talk about the clergy I am a “we”.

I have always been deeply involved in the funeral process. My best friend in high school worked at a funeral home and became a mortician. I spent many nights of my youth hanging out with him among the dead. In my pastorates I was always good friends with the funeral directors. I have helped them embalm, make ambulance runs, and go to the home to remove the body when a death happened. For a brief time, I was part owner of a funeral home. When I talk about funeral directors I am a “we”.

Welcome to the world of “We” squared.

– Doug

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Section I

The Value of the Funeral



*The very first step towards success in any
occupation is to become interested in it.*

– Sir William Osler

The Value of a Funeral

I have watched the movement away from the traditional funeral with a deepening sense of sorrow and foreboding. There is a growing perception that the funeral is barbaric and plastic, and that funeral directors are charlatans preying on families when they are the most vulnerable. The idea seems to be that since a person can be buried in a cardboard box, anything more than that is a waste of money and a rip-off. Articles blasting funeral service appear in major publications on an increasingly regular basis. These articles take the most extreme examples possible and pass them off as the norm. Publications that have always held themselves to a high standard for reporting are now willing to use the same type of writing as the muckraking tabloids in order to blast the funeral profession.

There is also a growing perception that sophisticated people are somehow above the need for a public expression of grief. It is considered “more civilized” to take care of such things in a more private manner. The loved one is quietly “disposed” of with no fuss. Anything else is considered gauche and undignified.

I wish Jackie Kennedy had cried at her husband’s funeral. We have the image of her standing on the steps of the capital in stoic silence while John John saluted his father. The whole world gushed about how strong she was, and talked about how much dignity and sophistication she showed in her dealing with this tragic death. That has become our model. Classy people don’t cry. Dignity allows for no public showing of grief. To cry is a sign of weakness. To really break down is just not done in cultured circles.

I have not only observed these perceptions as they developed, I have lived with the results. My brother died and disappeared. His body was removed from the emergency room within minutes of his death and transferred to a crematorium where he was cremated. No one saw him after his death. A few days later we gathered in a military chapel on the base where he served and held a twenty minute memorial service. The service had to be done in twenty minutes because an honor guard was to present the military ceremony at the end. When the service was over we moved to the officer's club for a cocktail party.

I had to officiate at my brother's funeral. I did not want to do that, but there was no one else. He had no church affiliation and no clergy person to call. Someone remarked that doing the service must have been one of the hardest things I have ever been called upon to do. I responded that it was not hard at all, but I wish it had been. We gathered together to act like no one had died. The whole service was a process of denial. My mother did not shed a tear at her son's funeral.

The cocktail party was strained and unreal. I expected this to be different than other such gatherings, but it was not. We stood around and made small talk, denying that anything had happened. My brother's death became the elephant in the room no one dare notice.

My brother wanted this kind of service because he was convinced that this would be easier on his family. A leading columnist wrote recently that his friend had chosen this kind of service instead of the "normal three hanky jobs that are so hard on the family." That is the current perception and that is how my brother saw it.

My brother was right. It was easier on the family. Denial is always easier than reality. The funeral itself was not hard at all. Had he chosen a normal funeral there would have been much more crying and more public display. But to determine if this is truly easier on the family we must look beyond the service itself. When a family comes to me for help in their grief journey I begin by asking them to tell me about the funeral. If they had a minimal and very private affair, I know my work will be much longer and more difficult. Most often it means the family entered

their grief closed off from friends and in denial. If they start off closed and in denial it is very difficult for them to be comfortable opening up and facing reality in our sessions together.

I still wish I could have had a time of saying good-bye to my brother. I can identify with some of the feelings of the families who have loved ones missing in action. They just disappeared and left an empty place that we find harder to fill because of the lack of closure and good-byes.

My brother's wife died within four years of her husband. Until almost the day of her death she was still calling me in the middle of the night crying about her loss. Her grief was still as fresh as it was the days after the funeral. When the denial could hold no longer and she had to face the loss, she found it much harder to do than most of the people I deal with. That could have been caused by other factors of course, but from the many late night calls we shared I grew more and more convinced that a good part of her problem was based on his disappearing. I have nothing against cremation. I have a lot of things against making bodies disappear.

I have been deeply involved with the grieving process for over thirty years. My interest started when I realized that as a minister I was totally ignorant about the grieving process and that I was doing a very bad job helping people through their grief. A young couple's daughter died suddenly and the mother was hysterical. Her husband and the doctor were trying to get her to calm down. She stepped back and said, "Don't take my grief away from me, I deserve it and I am going to have it." That statement went through me like a knife. I realized that was what I had been doing. That was how I saw my job. My job was to cheer people up. My job was to keep them from crying. If I could get a family through the funeral without tears, I thought I had done a masterful job.

I was forced to face my ignorance and was determined to do something about it. That was in the early seventies so there were very few books available to read. I read all that I could find and the total was less than six. At that time I had never heard of such a thing as a self-help group on any subject, much less one dealing with grief. Without any guidance, I decided to gather a group of

About the Author



Doug Manning

Doug's career has included minister, counselor, business executive, author and publisher. He and his wife, Barbara, were parents to four daughters and long-term caregivers to three parents.

After thirty years in the ministry, Doug began a new career in 1982 and devoted his time to writing, counseling and leading seminars in the areas of grief and elder care. His publishing company, InSight Books, Inc., specializes in books, video and audio productions specifically designed to help people face some of the toughest challenges of life.

Doug has a warm, conversational style in which he shares insights from his various experiences. Sitting down to read a book from Doug is like having a long conversation with a good friend.



BOOKS • RESOURCES • TRAINING

Touching Lives. Creating Memories.

Selected Resources from InSight Books

By Doug Manning

Building Memories: Planning a Meaningful Funeral

The Continuing Care Series

*Don't Take My Grief Away From Me**

*Grief's Second Mile: Beyond the First Year**

*Lean On Me Gently: Helping the Grieving Child**

The Power of Presence: Helping People Help People

Book or DVD

Sacred Moments: A Minister Speaks About Funerals

The Special Care Series

Thoughts for the Lonely Nights journal and CD

*Thoughts for the Holidays**

Other Resources from InSight Books

I Know Someone Who Died coloring book

by Connie Manning

The Empty Chair: The Journey of Grief After Suicide

by Beryl Glover

Memories Too Few: A Letter to Parents About Pregnancy Loss

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The Shattered Dimension: The Journey of Grief After Suicide

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