

Remembering ... With Love

How to Move Beyond Grief
to Peaceful Remembering



by Sheila Martin

Sea Breeze Press ©2002, Sheila Martin

www.FuneralsWithLove.com

Dedication

For you ... and the memories you hold of loved ones who have gone before you.

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Publisher

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Surrey, BC
Canada V4A 2H9
(604) 576-4904 (9 – 5, Pacific Time)

Note: Phone number will change after the end of August 2002.
For the up-to-date number after that, [visit our website](http://www.FuneralsWithLove.com).

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Healing Your Grief

In this booklet, we'll look at grief, love, and remembrance. There are many options given here. Use only the ones that appeal to you, or simply take one as a starting point to spark fresh ideas of your own.

DEEP GRIEF

“If you love deeply, you will grieve deeply. If you deny your grief, you deny the reality of the love you felt.”

—Diana McKendree

When you lose someone you have loved, the memories, experiences, and feelings you shared together belong, now, to no one else but you. Your way of grieving, too, will be uniquely yours.

You may relentlessly seek out people to talk to, to retell the story of the dying and the death, or you may present a stoic face to the world and only express your grief in private moments. You may cry every day for weeks — or not cry at all until suddenly, months from now, something trivial triggers a flood of tears and you know you are crying for this loss.

How do you climb back out of the sea of grief and despair? How do you stop the pain? The answer is: do not try. Do not seek to escape the pain. Only by embracing your grief, holding it gently, will you know release.

Feel the grief. Feel the rage, and the fear, and the overwhelming sense of loss that this death brings to you. Weep as often as you need to. Pound a pillow until there's nothing left to pound. Drive to an isolated spot, roll up your car windows, and scream out your frustration and fear.

Let your defenses drift away. Stop fighting the pain. Even, see the pain as your friend. See your acceptance of the pain as the safest way to inner peace, acceptance of the death, and love of the life you are living today.

Returning to life

Later, when some time has passed, reach out to life again. Sometimes we stay too long in the pain, fearing that to let it go will mean we no longer miss or love the one who has died. But think of what you loved about that person. Was it not her aliveness, her joy, or his unique way of reaching out to the world around him?

And did he or she not love you for the same reasons? Expressing your own aliveness today is a way to show your love — for everyone you love now, and have ever loved.

Remember, too, that you will never go “back to normal” . . . back to the way things were. You can only go forward into your new life.

As you travel the often bumpy road from grief to healing, you will sometimes run from the pain, sometimes pretend it isn't there, sometimes embrace it, and eventually walk beyond the pain into a richer, more compassionate life than you have ever known.



ACKNOWLEDGING THE DEATH

“Another practice that many have found useful is to put a photograph of the departed loved one on a table, perhaps with a candle and some incense next to it, so that each day for the first week or two after death one may sit for half an hour or so with the loved one and speak to him of the love that has been shared and the need for him to continue on his journey.

After ten days or so (as the heart dictates), the practice may be carried out only on a weekly basis, on the anniversary of the death, for a total of seven weeks. This is a skillful means both for the departed and for the individual who may be in grief, for it allows a letting go and a sending on that is skillful for both. It allows the finishing of business while a recognition of death and loss is fully acknowledged.”

— Stephen Levine, *Who Dies?*

In practical terms, what can you do, right now, to heal your grief? Here are a few suggestions.

Read about death and grieving

There are many excellent books on bereavement and coping with grief — everything from sociological studies by academics to compelling first-person accounts by people just like you who have suffered a loss.

There are books especially for the survivors of someone who has chosen suicide, for parents who've lost a baby at birth or through miscarriage, books for widows and widowers, books for those who've lost someone to cancer, and more.

Experienced librarians can help you choose exactly the right book. As well, most bookstores have a selection of the most popular and recent titles. Several fine audiotapes are now available as well.

Find a support group

In most communities there are support groups for those who are grieving. These groups may be run by a church or a nonprofit society, or they may be simply a group of people in a similar situation who have banded together on their own.

You may want to seek out a group that deals specifically with your situation: for instance, Compassionate Friends, for parents of children who have died, or Widows Helping Widows, or a group for the survivors of someone who was killed violently.

Start a support group

If you can't find a support group that meets your needs, consider starting one yourself. Place a small ad in the "Personals" section of your newspaper inviting others to call you. For example: "Have you lost a family member to suicide? New support group starting. Will meet Thursdays at 7:30. Call Anna at 555-1234."

Doug Manning's book, *Comforting Those Who Grieve*, is a good source of ideas on how to start a support group and what to talk about at meetings.

Talk to friends

A friend who can quietly listen is worth her weight in gold. You may find that not everyone has the confidence and skill to support you in your grief. Some friends may be uncomfortable with your pain and want you to "get over it" quickly.

Others may make insensitive remarks or even drift away from you, just when you need them most.

Even though you may feel hurt or confused by such behavior, try to understand that they are only showing their own fear and pain. You can even use these occasions to learn forgiveness and compassion.

The bonus, of course, is that the more understanding you show to others, the more understanding you will draw into your own life.

Talk to professional counselors

Sometimes we need more help than our friends can give us. If the pain seems unbearable — even to be getting worse — do seek professional help. A trained therapist can help you shed light on the beliefs and fears that are causing so much pain. You can learn to take all that energy, which is going into hurting, and transform it into joyful, loving energy.

Many therapists specialize in grief counseling. If you're not comfortable with the first therapist you find, seek out another whose style and values are closer to your own. You deserve the best of care.

Listen to sad songs

In Denver, Colorado, psychologist Larry Huston offers a workshop called “Country Mourning” to help people work through grief. “Country music holds the seeds of healing,” says Huston. “To heal hurt, you have to move toward pain, not away from it.” He recommends tunes like Patsy Cline’s Crazy or Hank Williams’ She’s Long Gone Lonesome Blues. Listening to these mournful songs, says Huston, “the listener is reassured that he or she is not alone in this world.”

Be good to yourself

Find active ways to love yourself. Go for long walks, buy yourself a bouquet of roses, get tickets for the hot new play in town, have friends in for a barbecue, sign up for a night school massage course, take up oil painting. Do something you’ve always wanted to do. Do whatever makes you feel good about you.

For children suffering the loss of a parent, bedtime can be especially hard. One young mother decided to buy a good tape recorder and a selection of children’s

tapes and soothing music. Each night, she let her two children take turns choosing a favorite tape to listen to in the half hour before bedtime. All three were comforted by this new ritual.

Reach out to others

Time and again, survivors have said that what really helped them the most was when they reached out to others. Could you volunteer to teach adult illiterates to read? Help an elderly friend put in a garden? Bring baking to a shut-in? Maybe the experience you've gained through this death would make you a valuable resource to someone going through the same thing. You have a tremendous amount to give, and there are many who would welcome your help.

Rituals of Remembering

The traditional rituals and ceremonies of remembrance can be healing too. Here are some possibilities for you:

Visit the cemetery or mausoleum

For some people, visiting the cemetery is a way to express their grief and love. You might plant a bush or bulbs at the gravesite. Then, caring for the plants becomes an opportunity to grieve by taking action. If it feels like a duty or is too painful to visit the grave, don't go. It is just as meaningful to grieve at home, where your memories of the person are stronger.

Mark the first anniversary of the death

The first anniversary can be a difficult time. You might want to mark it in a special way. This doesn't have to be a sad or formal ceremony. Perhaps Dad's favorite meal was steak and scalloped potatoes, so you prepare a big feed of them

for family and friends. After dinner, you spend a little time together remembering Dad and reliving the best days of his life.

Or perhaps the child you have lost used to love to ice-skate. On the anniversary of the death, you could bundle up the whole family and spend the afternoon at the skating rink.

Remember the birthday

My grandmother died at age 93. Seven years later we had a small ceremony to mark the day she would have celebrated her 100th birthday.

Have prayers or Masses said

You may arrange for prayers or a Mass on the anniversary of the death, a birthday, or “just because” you want to. It can be a source of strength to know that the community of believers to which you belong are joining together in prayers for your loved one.

Place a memorial ad

Most newspapers include a memorial column after the obituaries. The classified ad staff will usually help you write it, or they may have a booklet of suitable poems.

Gifts and Foundations

A gift to a charitable group or favorite cause is a special and lasting way to celebrate the life of someone you loved. There are so many worthy recipients in so many fields: health care, education, social services, spirituality, community improvement, the arts, the environment, and research.

There are three types of gift-giving: a direct, onetime gift to a charitable group or cause, a contribution to an ongoing fund within a community foundation, and the establishment of a private foundation.

A gift does not have to be large. The money you would have spent for a birthday or anniversary gift for your special person can buy something for someone she loved.

A direct gift usually benefits the recipient on one occasion; a private foundation continues the donor's generosity for many years. For instance, as a memorial to a doctor, you could establish a scholarship foundation to assist students who intend to become general practitioners. To honor a woman who spent her last months in a hospice, you might establish a fund to aid in research for care of the dying.



YOU LIVE FOREVER

“Know this: when you care, when you fight injustices and when you love, you live forever.”

—Phil Wilson

Writing Your Memories

Many people — even those who haven't written since high school English class — have turned to writing both as an outlet for grief, and a way to celebrate the life of the one who is gone. Here are some suggestions for those who want to use this powerful tool.

Keep a diary or journal

Even if you don't consider yourself a writer, think about keeping a journal for the next few months. A private journal is the ideal place to write out your grief, anger, and self-pity — and your cherished memories.

The journal itself doesn't have to be fancy. If the book you are trying to write in is beautifully bound with gold-trimmed pages, you may be too intimidated to write much. A child's exercise book may be just right, or a stenographer's pad, or a loose-leaf binder. A computer gives you the freedom to change and edit whatever you've written.

Whatever tool you use, give yourself permission to write absolutely anything — including your most hateful and angry thoughts — knowing that you can throw them away later, while keeping the record of your good memories.

Write a memorial poem or story or song

A poem, story, or song is a uniquely personal way to remember. What you write could be just for yourself, or you may want to share it with others. Ann Eck's family in Montana put together a booklet for friends and family several months after Ann's death. The booklet included a smiling photograph on the cover, prayers from the service, and excerpts from the many letters Ann's husband, Laurence, had received.

As Laurence says: "Preparing the booklet helped all of us, as therapy for our grief, to move ahead in a positive fashion, while giving us an opportunity to express our feelings and record them."



"SWEET CHARLIE"

"When my father died last year after spending his last years in the Gorge Hospital, we wanted to do something that would be appreciated by the staff members who cared for dad, as well as present and future residents.

We asked staff for their suggestions and they agreed on a portable radio/CD player. We purchased a good quality machine and added a couple of CDs and placed a small plaque on the player, dedicating it in dad's name. This has proven to be a popular gift.

An equally appreciated effort started out to be a picture board that I put together for dad. It was entitled ‘Charlie Clarke — this is your life’ and contained pictures of dad and his family throughout his life.

The idea was to make dad proud of his life and his family, but it turned out to serve another useful purpose. It told the staff who Charlie Clarke was and they came to know their “Sweet Charlie” as a person with an interesting and happy life rather than simply an old man waiting to die.

When dad died and I was cleaning out his belongings, a nurse asked if I would leave the picture board as an example for other families to emulate. It now occupies wall space and one staff member recently told us that it not only helps them to suggest similar ideas to families but also helps the families to overcome the guilt of placing loved ones in a nursing home.

It was heartwarming to hear that such a simple idea has become a worthwhile suggestion.”

—Bob Clarke

Write a letter to the one you’ve lost

Especially if there are things you wish you’d said or done before the death, writing a letter to the person can help. Pour out your heart. Say everything you always wanted to say — things you didn’t even know you felt. Once you’ve done that, you might write what you imagine his or her reply to you would be.

Make lists

List all the things you want to remember about the person. List everything you wish you’d said or done (or wish you hadn’t). Then, make a list of everything you are glad you said or did. Make a list of every way in which your life will be disrupted by this death. (For example: “Now there’s no one who remembers the excitement of Connie’s first tooth” or “I’ll have to learn to drive now” or “Who will tell me when I need a haircut?”) Make a list of everything that was wrong with the service (and then list everything that was right).

Write, or even speak out loud, a dialogue

Making up a dialogue with the person may cause you to feel extraordinarily close to the other again. The process often yields startling insights as well. Play with the dialogue. Don't have any expectations about where it will lead you. For example, here's a young wife talking with her late husband:

Me: How could you do this to me, John? Leaving me alone with 2 kids, and not enough insurance, and you're only 38. I told you to see the doctor about your chest pains. I can't believe this has happened to me. I hurt so much.

John: Sorry sweetheart, I really am. I should have listened to you. But gee, you wouldn't believe the great golfing up here.

Me: Don't joke with me, damn it! It makes me miss you even more

Creating a Memory Book

Creating a Memory Book is another special way to remember the dead. A Memory Book can contain anything that reminds you of the person: writing, photographs, remembrances from other people, special condolence letters, writings or objects created by or for the person, artwork, awards, certificates, medals, and postcards.

If you have children who are not old enough to write, let them tell you their memories while you tape record or write them down. Or perhaps the child could do a special drawing of what the person meant to her.

A wonderful way for workplace colleagues to focus their grief is to create a book of memories for the family. Many people are not aware of their loved one's accomplishments and impact at their workplace. It's a way for you and your co-workers to express your grief, while at the same time creating a precious memento for the family.



“A picture album we put together to honor Mom’s life had this notation under a picture of the empty wheelchair: ‘— the cane, the walker, and finally, the damned wheelchair were an affront to Mom’s feeling of independence — it was as though Mom decided — enough is enough!’

She was tired of the pain and forced inactivity — so — she gathered her family around her very subtly, wrote her letters, and made her phone calls and then — on Jan. 3, 1988, in her own bed, in her own house, Mom passed on into the great unknown — as inquisitive about this ultimate adventure as she was about everything in this life’.”

— Bob Clarke

What kind of book to use

If you plan to tape or glue objects into the Memory Book, a big scrapbook — the kind children use in art class — is ideal. A photograph album is another possibility. If you just want to write, a bound book with blank pages might be best. You can find blank books in many book and stationery stores.

What to write or include

In the Memory Book, tell the story of your relationship: how you met, what you liked about each other, the important moments you shared, what you liked to do together, what you fought about, what you learned from the person. Talk about how it felt to be together, expressions he characteristically used, how she would always touch your cheek to say goodbye, the taste of his barbecued hamburgers, the time you cried together over a lost promotion.

What about newspaper clippings? For example: the time he won a swimming competition, the announcement of your engagement, or a letter to the editor that was published. Is there a family tree you could add to the book? You might want to include old letters and photographs, organized either chronologically or according to themes. For example: “Marlene at Home,” “On the Job,” “Our Vacations.”

Are there any family traditions or legends you want to describe? Perhaps a favorite cookie recipe, his political views, her athletic skills, a few words about what you learned from him. The Memory Book can reflect your picture of the person, or that person's place in the world. It is entirely your own creation.

If you plan to do a Memory Book, do it soon. You want to capture the essence of the person now, while your memories are still fresh. Then you will no longer have to be afraid you will forget the person you loved so much.

 REMEMBERING PEACEFULLY

“It is not a question of forgetting, but of regaining the capacity to remember peacefully.”

— Michael Simpson, *The Facts of Death*

Creating a Memory Video

A home video is an audiovisual version of the Memory Book. If you have children or grandchildren, this is an ideal way to involve them in remembering. They will probably want to take over the project — directing, producing, and filming the video.

There's no need to buy a video camera. If you can't borrow one, many video stores will rent you one for a day. You can even rent a VCR unit on which to play back the video. You may also want to rent a separate microphone, an extra battery, and a battery charger. The only thing you need to buy is a blank video tape.

Planning the video

You certainly don't need a complete script for your Memory Video, with every word written down and rehearsed. But you do need some idea of who will be speaking, what you'll be filming, and in what order.

Keep in mind that whatever you record, stays recorded, and in exactly that order — unless you have the equipment and skills to edit the tape. (This means you won't want to record the kids fooling around as they learn to operate the camera, nor will you want 10 minutes of someone's tears.)

Have at least an outline for a script. Is the video just for you? Or will it be for your children, all your friends, and family? How do you want your audience to feel after viewing the video? Can you find some interesting locations and other people to participate? How about a few scenes in Dad's workroom, or Sarah's nursery, with Joey's soccer buddies, or Mom's bridge club?

Will you or someone else narrate the video? A narrator could introduce the video, tell some basic facts, and link each segment to the next. You may want to include special props, such as a graduation diploma or bronzed baby shoes.

Adding sound

You could have music playing in the background: a teenager's favorite rock group, perhaps, or simply someone whistling. The music could be coming from an audiotape, or CD player, or someone playing the piano or guitar.

While you're at it, why not create a video of your living family and friends? Our family cherishes the audio tape we made during the celebration of Grandma's 90th birthday, another of Grandma telling her favorite stories, the family-history video my sister and I made in honor of our parents' 40th wedding anniversary, and the "This is Your Life" video my husband Bob and I made for Dad's 80th birthday.

A Memory Video can be a wonderful legacy for your family for generations to come.

Memorials on the Internet

Since early 1994, mourners have been able to express their grief by memorializing their loved ones on the Internet. Because sites appear and disappear so frequently on the Internet, your best idea is to use a search engine to track them down. Use a phrase like “virtual cemetery” to get started. On some sites, users can upload music and voice recordings, photos and video clips.

While a small charge is reasonable, to compensate the site provider for their time and labor, there is no need to pay hundreds of dollars for this service. Be sure that you have a good feeling about the site and their business practices before paying any fees.

Naming a Star

When Vancouver police officer Larry Young was killed senselessly in a drug bust gone wrong, his fellow officers “purchased” a star in his name as a gift to his widow and two children. The family received a certificate from the [International Star Registry](#) (a private business) that the star which bears the star map designation Hercules RA 16h 56m 32sd 38 long. 15 lat. is now called Larry T. Young.

The gesture means a great deal to the family and friends who loved him.

A Memory Quilt

One of the most heartwarming ways to remember someone special is with a Memory Quilt. Have your favorite photos (black and white or color) transferred onto fabric and create a quilt around them.

Ami Simms has detailed instructions in her self- published book, *Creating Scrapbook Quilts* (Mallery Press, 1993).



THE HUMAN SPIRIT

“The human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it.”

— George C. Scott

Thanks for reading

Dear Reader,

I hope that among these ideas you will find both guidance and comfort . . . and that today, in this moment, you will feel the love of all those who have ever loved you.

I invite you to send me your stories of special ways to remember someone you loved . Let me know whether or not you'd be willing to share it with others in a future edition of this booklet.

Please email me at sheila@FuneralsWithLove.com.

I would love to hear from you.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sheila", is displayed on a light gray grid background.

P.S. If you are looking for a lawyer to help you prepare a new Will or settle the estate, [click here](#) for access to top-quality, convenient **legal help and advice**.

eBooks by Sheila

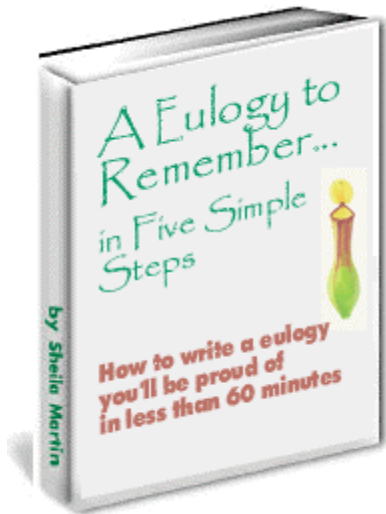


You may also want to take a look at my first eBook, [How to Plan a Loving Funeral](#).

Readers of this book have called “a godsend” and have told me it’s like having a knowledgeable friend beside you, to guide you through the crisis.

Dr. Bernie Siegel called it “an excellent resource” and Reverend Richard Gilbert, of the World Pastoral Care Center, called it “a treasured friend for the bereaved.”

And here’s our most requested eBook: [A Eulogy to Remember](#).



- If you have been asked to give a eulogy for a family member or friend and **aren't sure where to begin ...**
- If you are not sure what to say, and want **specific, step-by-step suggestions** that will make the writing easier...
- If you'd like to see eulogies that others have written, so that you can model them... (**seven sample eulogies**)
- If you'd like advice on how to **make sure your voice doesn't break** when you deliver the eulogy...

then [A Eulogy to Remember](#) was written for you.

About the Author

Award-winning writer Sheila Martin lives with her husband, Bob, and cats Boomer and Bambi, in a home on the ocean in White Rock, British Columbia.

She holds an honors degree in sociology from Simon Fraser University.

In 1986, Sheila and her sister, Toni Alain, coauthored and self-published a cookbook called *Food from the Heart*.

She has written two eBooks: [A Eulogy to Remember](#) and [How to Plan a Loving Funeral](#).

Among the many people Sheila remembers with love are her grandma Jenny (1984), friend Paul Meagher (1989), friend Noah Kemp (1991), cousin Bob Burge (1995) and most of all, her beloved sister Toni Alain (1992) and father Duncan Simpson (2000).

