



**JOURNEY HOME**  
FOR EMPOWERED LIVING AND DYING

# Planning

## An Honoring of a Life Lived

An Honoring of a Life Lived is an end-of-life event held to show respect and gratitude and to celebrate a loved one's life rather than remember their death.

There has been a growing change in the way families and friends honor a loved one who has passed. More and more people are looking into cremation versus burial, celebrations of life versus traditional funeral services—in fact, the number of people who choose cremation is projected to increase by nearly 80% by 2030, and a shift to green natural burials will rise 30%.

A part of this shift can be attributed to the changing notions of how funerals are conducted, their purpose, and their effect.

There is never a right or wrong, good or bad. This booklet offers ideas, checklists, and support for navigating, planning, and honoring a life lived.

We hope this will help those needing support to plan an event, those wanting to offer guidance for their loved ones after they have died, or those wanting to plan and be a part of a Living Funeral.

### **Knowing the Styles of An Honoring of a Life Lived**

#### *Memorial Service/Funeral*

A memorial service is a ceremony to remember and honor the life of someone who has died. A memorial service typically includes a ritual or ceremony, such as a eulogy, prayers, or reading of the deceased person's favourite poem. The service may include family members and friends paying their respects to the deceased by sharing memories and discussing what they will miss most. This is often in a church, with the body being present and a burial.

#### *Celebration of Life*

A celebration of life is usually informal and focuses on remembering the person's life. The difference between a celebration of life and a memorial service is that memorial services commemorate and remember the life of a loved one, while a celebration of life focuses on the deceased person's life achievements.

#### *Living Funeral*

A living funeral is the grandest celebration of your life with a twist—you, the honoree, are living and present to hear the eulogies, praises, and farewells given before death. This gathering of family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues is a ceremony or party to celebrate a person with a life-limiting illness.

## **Let's Begin**

Find a quiet, safe, brave place to begin your planning. Give yourself permission to laugh, cry, remember, and be angry, knowing this is emotional, a time filled with love, gratitude, and grief. Slow down, relax your breathing, and focus on what is important.

Put away all thoughts of doing it right or meeting all the expectations of others. If it is meaningful and loving to you, then you can be assured it will serve its purpose.

Maintain a state of "mindful awareness."

The tendency when something bad happens to us, like the death of a loved one, or when the end of life is approaching is to detach from our physical, emotional, and social selves. To "get numb and stay that way," - but this effort to separate ourselves from what's happening isn't always in our best interest.

Journey Home is with the belief we should seek to be "mindful": to keep our awareness of the present moment (not the past, and certainly not the future); all the while acknowledging and accepting our feelings, thoughts, and bodily reactions to your loss. This allows the beauty, wisdom, and love to come through – life is beautiful, life is painful, death is beautiful, and loss is painful.

In the words of Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer, only then can you accept the things that cannot be changed, have the courage to change the things that can be changed, and have the wisdom to distinguish one from the other.

Certainly, you cannot change the fact your loved one has died or that you are dying, but you can change, at least to some degree, the way you react to the loss—and that takes a certain sense of mindful self-awareness and empowerment.

This event is to honour, show respect, and celebrate the person and the life lived. This will bring emotions to those planning, supporting, and in attendance. Go slow, take your time, and be in trust.

## **Initial Reflections**

- ❖ will your body be cremated, buried, or bequeathed to medical science
- ❖ what type of funeral, memorial, celebration, or farewelling do you want
- ❖ will your body be present
- ❖ will there be a visitation or viewing
- ❖ will there be a graveside service
- ❖ do you want a home funeral/celebration
- ❖ do you want something small and intimate or nothing at all
- ❖ would you like a combination such as a funeral service for the community and a graveside service just for the family
- ❖ will there be a reception or gathering, and where will it be held
- ❖ will there be a provided meal or snacks available
- ❖ who will be the main person to coordinate the funeral or memorial arrangements
- ❖ what is the price range to spend on the entire funeral or memorial
- ❖ where would you like your ashes to go if cremated
- ❖ would you like to send your family away as a memorial

## **Service types**

- ❖ A memorial service is when friends and family gather, but the body is not present
- ❖ A funeral service, the body is present, and the casket may be open or closed
- ❖ A tribute can be held at the time someone dies or years after their death. It focuses more on celebrating the person's life and its impact on others.
- ❖ Celebration of Life, or Life Appreciation Ceremony, is a party in honor of the person who passed away
- ❖ A Living Funeral is a party in honour of the dying warrior; they participate in their celebration of life

## **Notifying Family and Friends**

- ❖ how will friends, family, and the community at large be notified: phone call, email, note in the mail, or obituary
- ❖ all friends need not be notified in the same way
- ❖ keep a list of the people that have been notified
- ❖ prepare to answer these questions when you call people

will there be a vigil

will there be a viewing

will there be a funeral or memorial

if there is a funeral or memorial, will they be able to say a few words about the deceased, and if so, is there a time limit they'll be able to speak

are there things friends can do to help (they will probably ask)

will flowers be accepted, and if so, where should they be sent

## Announcement

- ❖ will there be an obituary or celebration announcement
- ❖ who will write it
- ❖ what are the costs of the announcement as it can sometimes be cost-prohibitive
- ❖ will the announcement go in a newspaper, online, and on social media
- ❖ is there a photo available
- ❖ options to include

schools attended  
military record  
special awards and accomplishments  
accomplishments  
children and family  
family history  
work or professional history  
religious affiliations

We have choices; words matter in how we perceive life and death.

Most obituaries are written in announcing how they died -

fought a battle  
ended the fight  
a long struggle  
after a long sickness  
died from a disease

This focuses on the why, not the who.

It reinforces the fight, the failure, and the shame some people feel at end of life.

We could begin to use words of love; we would begin to shift the way we receive death -

gracefully surrendered  
peacefully transcended  
time of purposeful transformation  
in a beautiful death  
said goodbye with ease  
in the natural act of life, death took place



## **An Honoring of your Loved One**

- ❖ who will be invited to the funeral or memorial ceremony
- ❖ is there tension between family members, friends, or coworkers that will need to be attended to
- ❖ are children invited, will there be people available to help care for children or an activity place for children to play
- ❖ will the body be viewed during the ceremony, if so, where will it be located
- ❖ will clergy or the church be involved
- ❖ do you need speakers for speeches, shared memories, or music
- ❖ who would like to speak
- ❖ will there be an eulogy, poems, readings, verses
- ❖ will others be allowed to speak impromptu at the ceremony
- ❖ music: who will pick the music and songs, will the music be live (if so, who will perform) or from CDs (if so, who will handle the electronics)
- ❖ will there be a formal ceremony program
- ❖ will a program be distributed at the funeral or memorial ceremony, if so, who will prepare it, print it, and distribute it (information gathered for the obituary can be used in the program)
- ❖ will you have ushers or greeters
- ❖ will there be signs on the door to welcome people
- ❖ will anyone need to direct traffic
- ❖ if winter, where will people put coats
- ❖ would there be a guest book, memorial table, or signed picture
- ❖ where there be a place or person to take care of food, gifts, and flowers if attendees bring any
- ❖ pallbearers (if needed)
- ❖ will there be a memorial table, pictures, or film of the life lived

## **Supporting the Family**

- ❖ Will a coordinator be needed for the event
- ❖ A person to ask where things go or what to do so the mourners are not asked to handle the small details
- ❖ Create a list of things people can do to help, such as pick up empty plates or silverware, empty trash, water plants, etc.
- ❖ Household Support
  - childcare
  - pet care
  - lawn care
  - house cleaning
  - any small repairs that need to be done (changing light bulbs, etc.)
  - errands
- ❖ grocery shopping
- ❖ bill paying
- ❖ pickup from cleaners
- ❖ final clean up
- ❖ assemble a team of people to clean up after the ceremony or reception
- ❖ have plenty of plastic trash bags on hand
- ❖ telephone coordinator
- ❖ taking messages
- ❖ put a message on the answering machine

## **Navigating and Preparing for Challenging Questions**

- ❖ did they suffer (people will ask)
- ❖ how did they die (people will ask)
- ❖ be prepared to answer tough questions, for example, “Bob always said I could have his bicycle, should I pick that up while I’m there?” A good reply is,  
“Unfortunately, we cannot distribute any property before the opening of the estate or “before Bob’s wishes are known”

## **Financial Considerations**

- ❖ Minister/Priest/Celebrant  
A gratuity isn't customary. However, these clergy members usually receive something called an honorarium. This is a sum of cash intended to show appreciation for the time and care that the minister put into guiding the ceremony. An honorarium of between \$100 and \$300 is typical
  
- ❖ Funeral Home Attendees  
Most of them will also not expect a gratuity. However, if you find the funeral director or staff member extremely helpful, you can show gratitude through gifts. Those who went above and beyond will appreciate small goodies like a grocery gift basket, coffee shop gift card, baked goodies, and the like

## **Be Prepared for Food**

- ❖ where to store food
- ❖ write down a list of people that bring food so thank you notes can be sent later
- ❖ if guests bring food in a dish that is to be returned, write their name on masking tape and tape it to the bottom of the dish
- ❖ meal planning for the family before and after the funeral or memorial
- ❖ know what food is on hand and what you may need
- ❖ prepare for visitors (have paper plates, napkins, utensils, and cups on hand if the family is expecting many guests)
- ❖ have a backup plan for what to do if there is too much food for the family to handle (donate to meal kitchen, ask guests to take home)

## **Sample Order of Funeral or Memorial Service**

- ❖ Celebrant or officiator's Opening
- ❖ Announcements (turn off cell phone)
- ❖ Welcome
- ❖ Song, Prayer, or Reading (interspersed throughout the ceremony)
- ❖ Eulogy by Celebrant
- ❖ Personal Eulogies from friends or family, if any
- ❖ Rituals such as Candle Lighting (can be placed anywhere in service)
- ❖ Closing Remarks by Celebrant (Benediction, Blessing, or Prayer if Religious or Spiritual)
- ❖ Disposition of the Body
- ❖ Graveside Interment Service (also called committal or burial))
- ❖ Service for cremains (the ashes that remain after the cremation)

It is best when the family or friends can speak about the deceased themselves through personal eulogies. Often, this is not possible for them due to grief and overwhelming emotion.

If the Celebrant delivers the only personal eulogy, then it should contain not just a chronological listing of facts.

## **OTHER RITUALS**

In addition to the words spoken, suggest ideas for other remembrances.

- ❖ A candle lighting is the most used; often, younger children can participate.
- ❖ Some families like to leave notes or mementos in the casket if it is an open-casket ceremony.
- ❖ Grandchildren or young children could leave drawings.
- ❖ If people are uncomfortable leaving something in the casket, have a memory box into which guests can drop a card describing a favourite memory of the deceased.
- ❖ Placing flowers on a closed casket.
- ❖ Moments of reflection for deceased or ancestors.
- ❖ The family can set up, either at the funeral home or the reception, a table with photos and other mementos

## **FUNERAL ELEMENTS**

Example of Traditional Opening Remarks:

We have gathered here today to acknowledge the death of \_\_\_\_\_, whom we have all known and loved. When someone we care for dies, family and friends gather with sorrow in their hearts to grieve and give comfort to one another. We all grieve differently, but at times when death and loss come among us, often the presence of another person's company can bring understanding and support. Just being together, sharing our grief and our love, dissolves some of our loneliness and helps begin the process of releasing our sorrow.

Though we have gathered here today in grief and sorrow, we have also gathered here in celebration. \_\_\_\_\_ led a wonderful life here, and we are here to share our memories and give thanks for the time we had together.

I'm sure each of you feels the ache of loneliness caused by her passing. But shall we also be grateful for \_\_\_\_\_ where a part of our lives? A part of your life unending consequences flowing of love.

It may have been \_\_\_\_\_ goodness, wisdom, and energy. It may have been their devotion to family, helping hand, and courage. Or it may have been their loving smile and understanding. Remember these things and let them endure in your acts and thoughts.

Sample Candle lighting ceremony

This flame symbolizes the eternal light of spirit. This light is there before birth and continues beyond the body's death. We light this candle in honour of \_\_\_\_\_, a beautiful person whose spirit lights the heavens as it always has on Earth.