



What Helps

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“I don’t want a fuss made about me after I die. You will have been through enough. Many of the services I’ve been to just didn’t reflect the friends I knew. I don’t want anything. Besides, it costs way too much and it will just upset you more to have some kind of show.”

I wonder how often a version of this is spoken by well-intentioned people “getting their affairs in order” who want to protect and care for the ones left behind. Just look at the number of obituaries in the paper and on-line that say “To respect the wishes of ... no service.” Yes, times are changing.

The need to honour the life of a deceased loved one has been a constant since the beginning of recorded history. For the bereaved, it can be a gift to feel comforted through meaningful rituals and through the support of community.

The emphasis here needs to be on the word ‘meaningful’. When you leave a gathering of any size, your heart, spirit, and mind should connect in a way that heals, and feels right.

As you will read in this issue there are many unique ways to honour the passing of loved ones. The Yukoners who have shared their personal stories here hope you will be inspired to take some time to reflect and consider how you would like to be remembered by those closest to you. What would ease their grief and help them continue to find meaning in their living. And how would you like to remember a loved one who hasn’t given specific instructions.



New Program Highlights Remembrance

Mark your Calendar...

Hospice Yukon Volunteer
Appreciation and AGM

Thursday May 23
5:30-9pm

Golden Age Society
4061A 4th Aveue
Whitehorse

RSVP 667-7429

This spring Hospice Yukon piloted a new program... a Digital Story-Telling workshop.

Over the course of two afternoons, participants created a one to three-minute video-story of a loved one who has died, using a laptop computer, digital photos, and their own words.

The technology was easy to use, and everyone ended up with a finished product that was very moving. Digital stories are a wonderful way to express and share memories of a life lived.

One participant shared that “one of the things that I valued most was being with a

group of people who were all making a digital story around something that was deeply personal and yet universal. There was great learning in hearing everyone else's work.”

We will offer this again in the fall. If you are interested in this, please contact Hospice Yukon for more information.

Remembering Trevor Sellars By Stacey Sellars and Kelley Jardine



Trevor Sellars with his wife and two daughters, Stacey and Kelley.

When a loved one dies, from the moment they take that last breath, all we want to do is remember them.

Remembering their smile, laughter, and cherished moments spent together is something we will find ourselves doing for the rest of our lives.

For many, a formal funeral is the chosen way to say final goodbyes, grieve and begin the healing process, but this is not for everyone. For some, the thought of a somber affair focused on loss is too much, saying goodbye is already difficult enough.

When our father lost his battle with a brain tumor late last fall, he requested that in lieu of a funeral, we host a “Drinks on the Deck.”

It has been our summer weekend tradition to fill our parents’ deck with our closest family friends, soak up the sunshine, and enjoy every minute of the laughter and love that such a gathering brings.

Our parents probably spent half of their lives together sitting out on that deck, playing cards, drinking wine, hosting friends, and just simply enjoying each other’s company.

Our lives were shaped by this ritual, and made better for it as each evening on the deck brought a sense of happiness and family, comfort and joy.

With this in mind, it is no surprise that our father wanted us to celebrate his life in our home. Ever thoughtful, dad knew that we would struggle to say goodbye, and he wanted his girls to be able to celebrate the best parts of him, in one of our favorite places, along with our dearest friends.

Dad had only a couple requests for his “Drinks on the Deck” memorial. The guest list would be small—only our regular deck crew and a few choice others. He asked that we play the song “Gravity,” by John Mayer and that we all drink a finger of Scotch, his favorite.

On the day of, we made a selection of dad’s most loved foods, prepared the Scotch bar, and put up some of our favorite photos of him. We decorated a tree in the front yard with fishing lures, as dad was a passionate fisherman, and invited everyone to take a lure to remember him by. Our friends further decorated the tree with photo albums,

collages, and sentimental artifacts, creating a loving tribute.

A reading of Henry Scott Holland’s “Death is Nothing at All” reminded us all that while physically dad was no longer present, a little bit of him was in everything around us.

With words of love and thanks we drank our Scotch and toasted a life well-lived and a man well-loved.

No eulogy was given, nor was it needed, it was clear that everyone had in their hearts words for our father. Instead, not unlike past deck parties, stories were shared and laughter filled the silences; the presence of friends and the familiar comfort of this beloved ritual helped to ease our grief.

There was no better way to celebrate our father’s life than with the friends he so loved in our family home.

“With words of love and thanks we drank our Scotch and toasted a life well-lived and a man well-loved.”



Stacey and Kelley fishing with their Dad in Haines, Alaska

A family physician reflects on rituals By Dr. Rao Tadepalli

Whether we expect it or not, the reality of the life cycle process ends in losing a loved one, whether it be a close friend, somebody we came to know, or a family member.

Thoughts of that person, what they would be doing if they were still around, and thinking of their lives fill our conscious brain after they have passed away.

Personally, as doctors, we have come across many who are going through this very sensitive period.

Researchers have suggested that the normal 'grieving period' is anywhere between 3 months to 2 years, but can be longer.

Most people 'slow down', pause for a moment and recant the memories with the

person they have lost. Those vivid arguments, birthdays and other things, may bring a smile or a tear to your face.

Meeting with your friends or family, going over your memories of the person, and looking at pictures helps bring a tone of completion.

Counseling in the form of an experienced friend, family or professional counselor is helpful in most situations.

Local Hospice Yukon can be a helpful resource at the time of need to help connect the dots and provide useful information.

At times the end comes unannounced and prematurely. This is quite a difficult time and one needs all the support they can get from friends, colleagues,

counselors, study or work place.

Doing something to honor the loved ones life also, in most cases, helps with the healing process.

Examples I have encountered that honour the lost ones would be; to have a formal funeral, holding a ceremony, immersing or spreading ashes, erecting a bench, or doing nothing according to the loved one's wishes.

When one is healthy and safe, return to normal activity as much as possible lessens the pain of the loss.

In closing I would say that every person's healing process is different and we need to be mindful and respectful of the way they cope.



Dr. Rao Tadepalli has supported many patients through major losses in their lives.

"Doing something to honor the loved one's life also helps with the healing process."

Death Is Nothing At All A Poem by Henry Scott Holland

This is the poem that was read at Trevor Sellars' celebration of life:

*Death is nothing at all.
I have only slipped away to the next room.
I am I and you are you.
Whatever we were to each other,
That, we still are.*

*Call me by my old familiar name.
Speak to me in the easy way
which you always used.
Put no difference into your tone.
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.*

*Laugh as we always laughed
at the little jokes we enjoyed together.*

*Play, smile, think of me. Pray for me.
Let my name be ever the household
word
that it always was.
Let it be spoken without effect.
Without the trace of a shadow on it.*

*Life means all that it ever meant.
It is the same that it ever was.
There is absolute unbroken continuity.
Why should I be out of mind
because I am out of sight?*

*I am but waiting for you.
For an interval.
Somewhere. Very near.
Just around the corner.*



Celebrating a Life

By Doug Bell



Doug Bell (right) and his son, Bernie (left), who died of cancer in January of this year.

"The richness my wife and my son brought to our lives helps our family carry on."

Once upon a time, many decades ago, a friend asked me to do something I'd never done. She wanted me to do a eulogy at a "celebration of life." I had not met the phrase before, and was appalled at the thought of celebrating the loss of our friend.

Thinking long and deeply about the unique friend we had lost I soon embraced wholeheartedly a celebration of her life as the way forward, not an ending.

Our current proliferation of experts have put another word in my face about loss of life. I hear it almost daily, but

as "celebration" grew, "closure!" does not, as it pours out from every electronic orifice in the land if I switch them on.

Speaking personally "celebration" I need, "closure" I do not, ever. One pundit defined closure, as most grammar school grads know, as to 'finish', 'conclude', or 'an end.'

I have no desire for a conclusion! Yes, moving on as we must but I will continue to celebrate their lives. The richness my wife and my son brought to our lives helps our family carry on.

Our individual family celebrations of life will vary, and be as unique as each family is unique. That is our way and as it should be I think.

Recognizing and celebrating everyone's uniqueness is what we did with an Open Door to our home in Bernie's name in March.

It's a home where he played, talked, argued and laughed. When you pick up, or look at something in this simple family home, the stories flow.

The very air is rich with memories and this day we chose to be his day again. It was informal, as was he, but oh, he could fill a house with laughter and joy—and often did, our Mr. Reliable.

It was an informal "come when you can, stay as long as you can" gathering of friends and family. It was Bernie's way.

Besides, he loved a party, and we filled it with his personality through sharing memories of his foibles, follies and triumphs. This sharing from his friends, co-workers, customers, and all who met him on his trails around this place he loved was a gift to Caroline, Trevor, Leah and myself.

Closure will not come to this home. A continuing celebration of memories will, for they will carry us through as we move on toward our time!

I share an anonymous sourdough tribute with you which fits him, and all his friends and co-workers in the trucking industry, who daily contribute so much to this Yukon, the northern home we share.

"This is a hard, demanding country. For the most part it has always attracted the more self-reliant, individualistic and adventurous type of people. Most asked little of others, but gave freely of themselves. They were people worth knowing, and worth remembering."

They are, oh yes they are!

"Little by little, step by step, I learned that I didn't need to hang on to the death to remember the life. What a joyous discovery."

Katie Brown

Honouring A Loved One Your Own Way

By Krystal Olito

When a family walks into the funeral home and the first thing out of their mouth is “Mom has requested no service, please just have her cremated and we’ll take her ashes.” I have to question, *well what do you need?* Did you want a funeral service, a memorial, or a celebration of life?

There seems to be a significant shift in funeral service recently. I have been working at Heritage North Funeral Home for 6 years now, and as a newly licensed funeral director and embalmer I notice that we see less and less of the ‘typical funeral’. This is not necessarily a bad thing, it is just the way our society is moving—more people want personalized memorial services.

This is a very positive thing if taken in the right direction. The most important fact is that we are not only celebrating a life lived, but also grieving and mourning it. Mourning allows the bereaved to publicly show that they are grieving and that support is desired. Grieving is a more personal experience that is different for everyone; it allows us to emotionally show that we miss our loved one.

A service can be anything from a celebration of life at a public place with four hundred guests, to a three person private service at the funeral home. There is no limit on how to mourn a loved one.

There are valuable benefits to having a memorial service of some type.

Catherine Saunders, the author of *Surviving Grief*, outlines that a memorial service:

“Initiates bereavement; Provides support and comfort to the bereaved; Validates the life of the deceased; Serves to recognize the major change that has taken place in the lives of the bereaved; Gives people the opportunity to publicly acknowledge their love and devotion to the deceased; The rituals are, in the highest sense, a celebration of that life.”

Sometimes families are the ones who do not want to have a public service. I try to suggest a simple yet significant way to celebrate their loved one:

A family dinner and favourite meal mom used to make, going for a hike on your favourite trail and sitting to reflect on a life lost, a small graveside service and releasing balloons to ‘release’ a loved one together, having grandma’s favorite tea with her fine china.

Anything that brings you closer to the one you have lost is a meaningful experience and can be a way to help you in the grief process.

As a funeral director I see the importance of having some type of memorialization after a life has ended. There needs to be a grieving period and a celebration to show that this life was significant and has

impacted people.

Part of our job as funeral directors is to help the bereaved find expression for their emotions through ritual. We can help by showing them effective ways to help the mourning process.

Funeral services are also a way to start the grief work; it allows us to un-attach from the physical being and to mentally accept that they are gone. This is a hard task but a very healthy part of grief work. Funeral rituals are a valuable way to recapture the essence of our relationship with the one who has died.

Ultimately there are no rules in funeral service; there are no limits on how personal, how small or how large the celebration has to be.

It can be a tough time for the community to show they care. Many do not want to impose but it is an amazing feeling to have the love and support shown from many different people. The community is able to show the family members an integrated image of the deceased.

By personalizing the service we are able to say goodbye to our loved one the way we need and want to.

I hope that over the next few years I continue to see a significant shift in the way funeral service is going, and that we as funeral providers are able to accommodate people in the best way that suits their needs.



Krystal Olito is a funeral director at Heritage North Funeral Home in Whitehorse.

“Funeral rituals are a valuable way to recapture the essence of our relationship with the one who has died.”



“having grandma’s favourite tea with her fine china”

A Community Remembers *By Stacey Jones*



“It was a beautiful afternoon, which I think helped us all through our early days of the grieving process...”

In 2000, when my mother, Vivien, was dying from lung cancer, she told us that she did not want a funeral. She was a humble woman who never liked to draw attention to herself, so not wanting a funeral service came as no surprise to us.

We lived in a small town where my parents had lived for decades upon decades.

When it came time to decide how we could honour our mother’s wishes and the many relationships that exist when you live in a tight knit community, we decided to host a potluck luncheon at the Community Hall.

Hundreds of family and friends gathered to pay their

respects and celebrate the life of a woman that many came to love.

My father, sisters and I sorted through photographs old and new and created display boards with pictures that we thought mom would approve of.

No one stood in front of the crowd to share any final words or stories about this woman. Instead, we each mingled and talked amongst ourselves sharing our sadness and joy.

It was a beautiful afternoon, which I think helped us all through our early days of the grieving process, while honouring the one that we had lost.

I often look back, reflect and wonder what my mom would have thought about that afternoon; I think that she would have enjoyed seeing all of us together.

I also think that she would have gained some comfort in knowing that we would eventually be okay.

How couldn’t we be, with all of the love and kindness that was gathered in that big old hall?

There is no doubt in my mind that she would have been completely humbled to see just how many people came out that cool October afternoon to honour her and her family.

Honouring Dad with Dignity *By Trish Eccles*



Trish with her Dad, Ross Eccles, on one of his visits to the Yukon.

My dad died of pneumonia on September 11, 2012, exactly 3 weeks after his 90th birthday. I had the good fortune of being with him during the last week of his life and when he died.

My sister and I are very different people but fortunately when it came to making arrangements for our mom’s death 14 years ago and our dad’s death in September, my sister summed it up by saying, “We do this really well together.”

We knew we would not be planning a traditional funeral for our dad as we had for our mom, which in many ways

was a blessing because it meant we didn’t have to rush.

We planned his celebration of life for September 29th which meant that his sister from Ontario would be able to be there. It also gave us more time to write his obituary and for me to work on his eulogy.

Our dad was a pilot instructor during W.W. II and was a member of the Legion. We found out that the Colour Party from the Legion of which our dad was a member could come and march at his service. This turned out to be the highlight of our dad’s memorial. The Legion

members were all in uniform and marched in with flags and recited a prayer. We found a bugle player and bagpipe player who played The Last Post and Reveille. I’m pretty certain there was not a dry eye in the house at that point!

All of this gave our dad’s service such an air of dignity, honour and respect that I had not anticipated and it was overwhelming, rich and meaningful. I know our dad would have been extremely proud of ‘his girls’ for pulling it all together and would have been delighted at the number of people who attended and how it all worked out.

Doing It My Way

By Barb Evans-Ehrich

Last summer I spent time caring for my 89 year old Mom in Ontario as she neared the end of her life, and I believed it would be helpful to me to be an active part of everything after she died.

Women through the ages have showed respect and love by washing and dressing the body of their deceased. I asked the funeral director if this would be possible and he gave me a look of surprise. He wondered “Are you of the Hindu faith?” I replied that, no, I am a Christian wanting to carry on this long-held tradition.

I brought two of her favorite outfits to the funeral home and gave the option to my Mom’s faithful volunteer to join me in caring for her body. After some hesitation she said yes, and one of the directors assisted us. It was

helpful for me to respectfully care for my Mom’s body, and to see that her spirit had left her body. Her volunteer and I reminisced. We teared up sometimes and chuckled as well. I painted her nails and placed a hankie and her white gloves under her folded hands.

On the day of the ceremony I, along with her grandsons, my husband, and two good friends took Mom’s casket out of the van and carried her to some willows by a little pond in the cemetery. I asked my boys to consider seeing her body because it might help them believe Grandma was really gone. We did open her casket and placed her Bible, drawings, and a few white roses inside. A little later twenty of us sat in lawn chairs around her grave and shared stories, read her favourite scriptures, and sang a couple of songs a capella.

When her body was lowered, we invited people to take turns helping bury her body. Her grandsons started and also helped at the end when we patted down the soil and smoothed it out. We then enjoyed some of her favourite food—lemon meringue pie and vanilla ice cream cones.

For our family it all just felt real and right. A couple of weeks later it was touching to hear what Mom’s friends felt about the ceremony. Initially, they weren’t sure about “all of this” but in the end, they felt free to say what they needed to say and were comforted by the simple ritual and ceremony.

Oh yes, this summer I am sending a card to those people with a great photo of Mom holding her coffee cup. It will read: True faith, a simple life, a helping hand. This was my mom.



Barb and her family carrying her mom’s coffin to the gravesite.

“We opened her casket and placed her Bible, drawings, and a few white roses inside.”

Christine Gray—Volunteer of the Year!

Christine has been involved with Hospice for several years. She is our vigil coordinator and also vigils herself.

She has been the Lights of Life tree sitter coordinator for four years, and often fills in as a tree sitter when others have to miss a shift.

Christine also volunteers in our Healing Touch program,

and sees clients at Hospice House and Macaulay Lodge.

Here’s what Christine has to say about volunteering with Hospice Yukon:

“Volunteering for Hospice Yukon gives me the opportunity to give back to our community.

There is nothing greater than feeling like you have helped

someone during their time of need.

I enjoy working here because Hospice Yukon supports their programs and volunteers as well as they support their clients.”

Thank you, Christine, for your years of commitment and service to Hospice Yukon!



Hospice Yukon’s 2012 Volunteer of the Year, Christine Gray, will be honoured at the City’s Volunteer Reception on April 24.

How Hospice Yukon Supports Dying and Grieving People



Hospice Yukon's holistic programming has been developed to provide practical and empowering tools to help manage grief in a healthy way, whether the loss is recent or happened many years ago.

Grief is processed in different ways by different people. Experiencing grief by engaging mind, body, spirit and emotion is an empowering path to healing.

Please take a moment to read about our programs and services, and visit our website. Contact us to learn more or to register. Confidential support is provided free of charge.



Living With Loss

- Introduction to Healthy Grieving -

Counselling

One-on-one counseling for dying and grieving people

Grief Support Groups

Day of Quiet Retreat

Grief Discussion Group

Walking Group

Healing Touch

A relaxing energy therapy that supports physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health using gentle touch to clear and balance your energy system.

Lending Library

Our extensive library of books and resource material is open to the general public.

Vigil Support

Bedside support in the final days and hours of life.

Professional Support

Support and resources for professionals and caregivers.

www.hospiceyukon.net

Please visit us online at www.hospiceyukon.net

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