

# ‘When I die, do something’

By Ryan Helfenbein

Linda Stuart is a ‘celebrant,’ out of Toronto Canada. This is someone who assists individuals in creating a one-of-a-kind celebration of life. A tribute specialist or master of ceremonies, some might even call them. In a recent article she shared a personal story of her friend, Judy, who had called regarding her mother who had just passed. Judy was distressed and confused how to best honor her mother’s memory.

Judy came across a handwritten note from her mother that read “When I Die, Please do Nothing.” This was found shortly after Judy’s mom took her last breath. Stressed beyond belief, Judy called Linda asking how she could in fact do nothing to honor her mother’s life. She went on to share how doing nothing would suggest to the community that her mother’s life was not ‘special’ enough to warrant recognition.

It was at this point that Linda advised Judy to have a conversation with her mom as if she was right in front of her and share why she felt it is important to be given the opportunity to receive support, publicly declare their closeness and take the first of many steps toward the healing process. Linda’s approach with her friend enabled Judy to first gain the harsh reality that her mom had in fact passed and allow her to begin talking through personal feelings to gain an understanding of what she now needed in order to work through her grief.

It was explained in the article how Judy’s mother always wanted her daughter to be happy, above anything at all. She was so concerned about Judy’s well-being that she thought it would be best for Judy to not spend time or money for a public gathering or memorial. When in fact, Judy explained to Linda, that if she was to share these feelings with her mom now, her mom would realize that she would be robbing Judy and the ones who love her most from the opportunity to start working through grief. It became apparent that a compromise needed to take place.

Judy and her family found that compromise and coordinated a gathering time with their local undertaker. Together they cre-

ated a public gathering that they believed their mother would have agreed to if they had that conversation while she was alive. As a result, Judy received in person hugs, not the virtual kind from social media. Instead of being ‘ambushed’ by well-meaning friends randomly while out in public, Judy was able to emotionally prepare to have meaningful and supportive conversations at a specially designated time. Judy listened to countless stories of how her mother positively impacted others and more wonderful memories were shared than she had ever imagined. The experience she had was so healing that Judy’s father, who also had a “do nothing” request, changed his mind regarding his final plans to in fact “do something.”

Linda shared that people often feel guilty when they are “made fuss of.” Many humbly feel that they are no more special than anyone else and often use the common statement of “My family should spend their time and money doing something fun instead of crying over me.” Linda writes “a funeral or gathering is not a gift we give ourselves. It is a gift that we give to those who enjoy being with us. It is a gift to those who wake every morning with the realization that your arms will never wrap around them again. It is a gift we give to those who go to bed every night with the hope that we will visit them as they sleep.”

It was shared that after her friend’s experience, Linda was motivated to preplan her own funeral. Her final wishes will be based on what her family and the ones who love her “need.” Ultimately, she writes, “I want them to make a fuss — not out of some ego-driven need to be the center of attention but because I know that a fuss is what’s necessary when we lose a loved one. I want red wine and pink roses and a chocolate buffet. I want my family to feel and hug and connect. I want an uplifting ceremony overflowing with tears and laughter and applause. I want them to look at me one last time as they simultaneously say goodbye and hello to their new life without me. **When I die, I want them to do something.**”

*Ryan, owner, supervising mortician and preplanning counselor at Lasting Tributes on Bestgate Road in Annapolis, offers area residents solutions to high-cost funerals. He can be contacted at (410) 897-4852 or [Ryan@LastingTributesFuneralCare.com](mailto:Ryan@LastingTributesFuneralCare.com)*

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