

Holiday Remembrance

By Ryan Helfenbein

Each year during our holiday feasts my father says the blessing. He starts with the standard blessing of the food to our bodies, but then moves into something that is possibly unique to just a family of undertakers. He asks for a special blessing of healing to all the families we assisted that year. My father has always built his undertaking business around the fact that we help families heal. For the countless number of individuals my family has assisted through the years, we can't help but simply take a small moment to remember them -- members of the families left behind.

Memorializing a loss is something that we see each and every day. Statues, monuments and even lights are put in place today to help remember the loss we incur as a family or a nation. But when it comes to the holiday season, it also makes things that are different from years past very apparent, and memories are sometimes all we have. We need to explore how to memorialize the individual so that memories can be shared for future generations.

One concept we see families incorporate during the holiday season to memorialize someone is by simply keeping them as part of the event. For example, during the big Thanksgiving feast, set a place for the one who was lost that year. Have people share a story or memory about that individual regarding how they touched them. Place that memory on the plate where they would have been seated and continue to then reminisce about that person. Yes, it may bring tears, and also laughter, but each of these emotions is important to those around the table. If you find this is a bit uncomfortable to do, then at the very least mention the one who was lost during the time of prayer. Giving them thanks for their love and support to the family and stating how much they will be missed. The idea behind this is to not draw attention to the fact that they are no longer there, but rather to create an atmosphere allowing family members to feel comfortable sharing their emotions with each other and to acknowledge the one who has died. This has benefited many families and for some becomes an ongoing holiday tradition.

Perhaps a private remembrance would be more comforting, with only family present. For example, one family who had lost their child very suddenly has made a tradition to take their

immediate family on a trip during the holiday season. They want to be together, in a private place to reminisce about the one they lost. This has provided them not only a comforting and private atmosphere to emotionally connect, but a "memorial trip" that each of them looks forward to year after year. Ultimately, it has generated a positive outlook from a situation that is unbearable for most.

Cemeteries across the nation have actually begun incorporating areas to provide a place to memorialize at no cost.

One concept is that of the "Christmas Angel." This is something my father has actually incorporated in Stevensville Cemetery located on Kent Island. It is an area where people who want to pay tribute to someone can come and put a rose or flower near the granite angel and sit in a quiet area to reflect on that person's life. This was designed

to provide an atmosphere of comfort to those who wanted a place to memorialize a loved one during the holiday season and throughout the year. We find that many families whose loved one was cremated visit throughout the year.

The idea of memorialization is nothing new. It has been around for years. However, the comfort of doing it openly and freely is something that has become more of a challenge today. Technology allows us a place to hide and in a sense provide an emotional barrier when it comes to dealing with a loss. Let's challenge ourselves to open up to those around us so they might feel comfortable to open up as well. Perhaps a simple prayer this holiday season, the creation of a "memorial trip," or visiting a special place is something that will help a family heal. One thing that can be promised for those who have lost a loved one this year, know that my father will begin the Helfenbein feast with a prayer for you and your family.

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