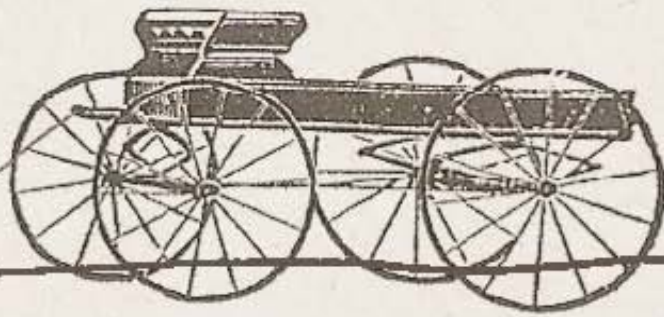


# Ask the Undertaker



By Ryan Helfenbein

My wife recently had our third child. What we found to be rather interesting is that immediately after the birth, friends and family called and emailed, asking when they could swing by to congratulate us. Many of them offered to bring us meals and to watch our other two children while we acclimated to this life-changing event. As appreciative as we were, all my wife and I truly needed was to get some rest, gather our thoughts and prepare ourselves for the coming days, and even years. After the first two weeks of having our new baby home, phone calls dropped off, fewer friends stopped by and the delicious home-cooked meals became carryout from the local restaurants delivered by yours truly. This was eye-opening because many individuals who experience a loss of a loved one go through the same scenario. Yes, a very different emotion, but the pattern is the same: an inundation of assistance almost immediately, and less when we might need it more. So when and what should we do for our close friends and family who experience a life-changing event, such as the death of a loved one? Better yet, what shouldn't we do?

First let's identify that all we want to do for our grieving friend is to make it clear that we are available to help, and most importantly, we want to show that we care. If we do this only a short time after the friend has suffered a loss, then we tend to get back to the daily activities of life and work, and our own family. Then comes the void, when visitors are needed most. Any major life change, whether happy or sad, can be followed by a period of letdown or even depression. This time is often many days or weeks after the event takes place

and becomes a common issue with which many families struggle.

Offering assistance through a hot meal or simply letting a grieving friend know you are there is always generous, but make it a point to go visit them again weeks after the loss of their loved one. Invite them to go out for a cup of coffee, lunch or maybe just for a walk around downtown Annapolis. Let them know that you are still there for them to lean on and will be for the duration. While doing this, be sure to let them talk about their loved one. It provides them an outlet and a chance to release some of their emotions. Whether there are tears or laughter, providing someone the chance to talk about their feelings lets you play a role in being there at an important time.

Since we were blessed with our new addition during the hurricane, we were often asked to retell our experience. Similarly, a grieving family is often asked to retell their experience by friends asking "what happened?" Although it was rather enjoyable to embellish the story of how our baby arrived, for the bereaved person, retelling tends to become much more stressful. Rather than asking this common question to a grieving friend, simply look them in the eye, let them know you are there for them and to call whenever they need a shoulder to lean on. A hug never hurts in a situation like this. That will go so much further than having them relive such a life-changing event.

If you want to go one step further and provide assistance that is outside the norm, you could offer to swing by during an agreed upon time to answer the phone for them. With the technology we have

today, who knows, you might even be able to help answer emails, text messages and keep up on social media discussions. Often times those who go through a major life transition tend to put rest on the backburner. By providing this good deed to a grieving friend, you can show them you care and relieve them of the feeling of being overwhelmed. It will give them a time for rest, a time to get away for a few hours and most importantly, a time for themselves.

Life-changing events present many hurdles, whether happy or sad. Regardless of the emotion felt by the one we love, we always need to be mindful of what the needs of that individual may be. Not only how we can offer our assistance, but when.

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## Bay Bytes

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