

The FUNeral: A Start to a Shared Grieving Process

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Death is becoming a whole new industry with death doulas hired to help the terminally ill, death cafe events created to discuss end-of-life decisions over dessert and coffee and end-of-life workshops conducted by paid celebrants trained to help you plan your celebration of life. Although still not the norm, unique ways of mourning and honoring deceased family members are starting to emerge. Among these new mourning rituals are FUNerals, which celebrate a deceased loved ones with meaningful, and fun memorials.

Key takeaways:

- FUNerals are creating a new industry dedicated to celebrating the life and happiness you had with your loved one.
- Mourning rituals that include fun activities, lasting memorials or mementos, help families and guests share a meaningful experiences that allow the healing process to begin.
- Millennials are the biggest supporters of activities that could be characterized as FUNerals.

Are FUNerals popular?

A National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) Consumer Awareness & Preferences Report determined that only 38.7% of consumers of funerals said religion was *very important* to them in 2018.

John Brickman, funeral director for Brickman Brothers Funeral Home in Willoughby, Ohio, explained that although the older generations still adhere to traditional, religious funerals, younger people are seeking funerals that incorporate spirituality or secular celebration.

FUNerals, a new way of celebrating loss, remind us that, **despite the sadness and pain accompanying the death, we should happily celebrate the relationship that we had.**

Brickman said that the funeral home industry is still in the early stages of hosting creative funerals, with FUNerals not regularly requested.

Grief and mourning – an overview:

Grieving is the process of **cop**ing emotionally **with the painful loss of a loved one**. It involves expressing emotions and taking actions to deal with the loss. A person experiencing grief goes back and forth through five stages, according to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. These are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

David Kessler who worked closely with Kübler-Ross, recently identified an important sixth stage of grief — finding meaning. It is in this sixth stage that FUNerals fit.

Mourning involves **expressing grief through religious or spiritual beliefs**, cultural customs and rituals. Funerals are mourning rituals designed to be carried out with family and friends to reduce grief and anxiety. FUNerals embrace **mourning rituals that show lasting appreciation for the deceased**.

The simple act of hugging at a funeral or celebration service, can reduce feelings of depression and fatigue. Blood pressure is lowered. These simple rituals are therapeutic, providing healing for the mourner.

The NFDA asserts that those personally attending a funeral find the experience meaningful and healing. Attendees progressed further in their grief work, than those who did not pay tribute in person. This research provides important support for **funeral directors working with families to create ways to memorial services that will attract family and friends**.

Changes in mourning rituals

PEW Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study predicts that as those 65 and older begin to pass away, they will be replaced by younger adults, Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996), who have less attachment to organized religion. **Millennials are interested in funerals and mourning rituals that are life-centered**, honoring the deceased's accomplishments and relationships.

Certified celebrants of life have emerged, working with families and funeral directors to create secular memorials that honor the personality and lifestyle of the deceased.

Brickman said that funeral directors will work with families or celebrants to give the family the service they want. **Funeral homes will participate in any way the family needs,** providing a forum, embalming and bringing the body to a memorial celebration or performing a cremation.

Funeral homes are becoming modern venues, refurbishing their dull parlor-like appearances. Upgrades include introducing appealing lounge areas, obtaining a liquor license and creating space to serve hot food.

Mourning rituals as a shared experience

The goal of the FUNeral is to engage in mourning rituals that **allow families to share memories or favorite activities that made their loved one important** to them.

Rituals may be based upon honoring a cause a loved one was passionate about. Attendees may be asked to donate to a specific charity in lieu of flowers or to bring a book or school supplies to help schools in underprivileged areas to honor a loved one who was a teacher.

Some families want to honor their loved ones by respecting the environment and connecting with the natural cycle of life. **Green funerals are becoming more popular.** A few states have

gone further enacting statutes to allow composting of human remains, creating a permanent natural memorial.

Hosting a scattering ceremony or planting a memorial tree are other ways to connect with a deceased family member's love of nature. Other **families may choose to hold an outdoor "fun" experience** by having a release ceremony with paper lanterns, balloons containing handwritten messages in them or candle lighting ceremonies.

Lasting memorials can be created providing mementos at the FUNeral. Instead of prayer cards, the following may be distributed: lottery tickets, recipe cards with a loved one's specialty dish, birdseed packets with a loved one's photo, birdseed packets with a prayer, flower seed packets, like forget-me-nots, with a loved one's name on them, book marks with the obituary or a memorial fan. **A loved one's favorite cookies or candy can be packaged as a small treat** with a photo and favorite saying.

Diamonds, jewelry or paintings made from ashes of a deceased loved one or tattoos also create lasting memorials.

Traditional funeral services are becoming more creative. **Families are adding humor to obituaries**, poking fun at a beloved's support for a losing sports team or odd hobby. Small cards with photo collages on one side and the obituary on the other are replacing prayer cards at some funerals.

Upbeat areas are being organized in the funeral home, with photo boards or memorial posters

and a few favorite items of the deceased, to encourage guests to gather and reminisce. Slide shows and music may also be playing. The deceased's pets may be in attendance.

Some families **purchase white coffins so guests can sign or use paint and markers to decorate the coffin.** The same has been done with cardboard containers for cremations.

Other families have **requested that guests wear the deceased's favorite color or sports jersey,** to the funeral or a memorial event, such as attendance at a ballgame or picnic. Special shirts or baseball caps may also be provided with the deceased's picture or favorite saying.

Memorial events can have themes, including watching a favorite movie with popcorn and treats at a theater or other venue, a bowling party or a game night. **A volunteer event may be held in a loved one's memory** or a walk to raise funds for the deceased's favorite cause may be organized.

Other more lavish FUNerals have included **rented venues with catered food or food trucks, music, alcohol and dancing.** Some deceased loved ones have even left funds for family to take trips to dispose of cremated remains.

In conclusion, in 1882 in the book, *The Gay Science*, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that **laughter is great medicine, a return of strength after a long deprivation.** FUNerals seek to do the same. Through a shared celebration of their

relationship with the decedent, healing of a family's loss can begin.

Resources:

1. The Gay Science.
 2. NFDA Survey Shows Value of Attending Funerals in Person.
 3. Cremation on the Rise: NFDA Predicts the National Cremation Rate Will Climb by a Third Within 20 Years.
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