



INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE A UNIQUELY SPECIAL SERVICE FOR YOUR LOVED ONE

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| CONTENTS | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Timescale | 3 |
| Organisation | 3 |
| The Service | 4 |
| Religious Readings | 5 |
| Poetry in the service | 5 |
| The outline of the service | 6 |
| Partly Religious | 7 |
| Non Religious - Humanist Style | 7 |
| The Questions | 8 |
| <i>How were they known?</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>Birth details:</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>Life as a child:</i> | <i>9</i> |
| <i>Life as a teenager:</i> | <i>9</i> |
| <i>Homes:</i> | <i>9</i> |
| <i>Working:</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Holidays:</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Love & Marriage:</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Family:</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Hobbies & Pastimes:</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Likes & Dislikes:</i> | <i>11</i> |
| <i>Character & Personality:</i> | <i>11</i> |
| <i>Awkward moments</i> | <i>11</i> |
| <i>All of these can provide a rich source of memories and anecdotes...</i> | <i>11</i> |
| Contact details | 12 |

INTRODUCTION

Losing someone close is a traumatic and stressful time in anyone's life. Each day is an unknown and planning the service can be overwhelming.

This guide is based on the hundreds of meetings that I've had with bereaved families and is simply there to help you focus on the things we will need to talk about.

The questions are designed to be used as a prompt, not a questionnaire. Some questions may not seem relevant, but often are. We can only give a flavour of someone's life – not a definitive biography.

I conduct services for all ages and the questions reflect that range. Don't worry if you cannot answer them all.

When we talk, the whole meeting is framed around these notes and we start with a blank sheet of paper.

Throughout the process, I hope that you feel that you have ownership of the service.

Our aim throughout will be to create a very special and personal service that honours your loved one and is focused on the celebration of their life.

After the meeting, I will:

- Write the contents for the Order of Service - it's my template for writing the service.
- Order the music for the service.
- Write the service and e-mail it to you so that you can make sure that you are happy with it and amend if need be. This can take a few days depending on the time before the service itself. The final physical print is usually done the night before.
- Ensure that the service is personal and respectful and accurately reflects their character, personality and life.

TIMESCALE

- **Order of Service** - needs me to send the contents to your FD or you if the family are producing their own - ASAP.
- **NB: IF YOU ARE PRODUCING YOUR OWN, PLEASE DO NOT PRINT UNTIL WE HAVE SPOKEN!**
- **Webcast** – if you want one, I will order it and send you the log-in details to forward to friends and family.
- **Music/webcast/visual tribute** – all these need to be ordered in advance.
- **Pictures for a visual tribute** - need to be with me at least 3 working days before the service.
- **All content** for writing the service 3 days before.
- **Draft service to you** - 2 days before the service (usually the evening.)
- **Approval of the script** - the day before.

ORGANISATION

There are some questions that I will need to ask you that are worth bearing in mind:

- Will family members carry into the chapel?
- Will your guests follow behind or enter first? In a church service, the congregation are always in the chapel first. If you are having a webcast, this is a better option. Family bearers have a health and safety session first - it is more comfortable for them if the rest of the congregation go into the chapel while this is happening, rather than have everyone watch.

- There is also an option to have the coffin 'in place'.
- Closing the curtains is a symbolic and painful moment. Would you like the curtains closed during the last piece of music, at the end or not at all? Traditionally curtains are closed during or at the end of the service - remember there is always a choice.
- Some crematoria have a voile curtain - like a net curtain. This does give closure, but also leaves the coffin on view.
- Some crematoria still have a system where the coffin is physically moved. This tends to be the case with the oldest buildings. If this is the case you may wish for nothing to happen, in which case the coffin will remain on view at the end.
- Are you having a wake/reception and where?
- Are you supporting a charity?

THE SERVICE

It's worth remembering that a funeral service is **about** a special person, but is **for** everyone who will be there.

From when we meet or talk, we work together to create the service that you want. The meeting is my opportunity to get to know you and your loved one. When I have written the service you will get a word for word draft prior to the service. Accuracy is important, but so is your involvement, your ownership of the whole process.

As a celebrant I am there to do as much or as little as you wish. Occasionally, I act as a 'master of ceremonies' linking contributions from family and friends. More often, I conduct the whole of the service as the 'voice' of the family.

The service is a 'civil service'. This means that we can include whatever the family feel is appropriate and is 'about' your loved one in particular. It is about making it as personal and fitting as we can. Many people have faith, but are not 'religious' - they may be more comfortable if a few faith elements like the Lord's Prayer are included.

What is The Committal?

The service is a celebration for the life of the person who has passed away. The Committal is the part of the service where traditionally we say goodbye to them. In my services the emphasis is on us making a pledge, a commitment that we won't forget them. It can include a commendation to Almighty God if you wish.

How long is a service?

The service will be limited in length to the time booked at the crematorium. A service in a 45 minute 'slot' should last no longer than 30 minutes. Some families book a 'double' slot which allows more to be put into a service. It also allows time to move large numbers of people - a few hundred mourners take far longer to assemble at the beginning and to leave the chapel at the end.

The length of time in a chapel varies from venue to venue and sometimes the time of day. Slots can be 30 minutes long, some are 40 minutes long. (West Herts and South Essex both run on 40 minute slots). Some have an hour slot - Bentley and Hendon for example. These times will impact on the length of the service. Some venues will charge if a service goes over.

A good way to look at the service is the number of words in it. The total service should be about 2500 - 3000 words - plus three music tracks it will make a service about 30 minutes long. The Eulogy would be about 1500 words. More music means less words.

Any contributions from others need to be concise - from a practical point of view a total of no more than a 500 words - 4 people 125 words each maximum, 2 people 250 words etc.

A service with more than 4000 words will CERTAINLY be rushed and go over the allocated time, impacting on the following service. Some crematoria will charge for extra time.

Sometimes speakers will say that they are going to talk for a set length of time.

Unfortunately, different people have their own version of 3 or 4 minutes! Using a word count is a far more accurate way of gauging how long pieces will take.

If there are other speakers, it is generally better for them to do their contribution early in the service both from an emotional point of view and so that they can take in the rest of the service without worrying about having to stand up to deliver their part.

If they are reading, it is important that I have a copy of their script beforehand. There are several reasons for this, but particularly time and content. In addition, it helps if for some reason they cannot speak their contribution, I can read it for them.

It really is important for them to rehearse their piece beforehand. The more that they rehearse it the easier it will become.

We can also include recorded messages. Most modern smart phones will produce very good recordings.

Generally, the difference between a Tribute and a Eulogy is well defined – a tribute is about what the deceased meant to the writer, the Eulogy is the story.

Are there other people who will be speaking or participating? If possible what will they be doing? If they are using any form of technology are there back-ups? Something as simple as no plug socket can cause havoc - some chapels were built 50 years ago or more and may not have the facilities.

Are you having a slideshow? If you are making your own, please call before you start. On the day a tribute is far removed from the idea of a business presentation and needs to fit into the service discretely without impacting negatively on the service or mourners.

When things go well they enhance a service beautifully, when they don't ... 30 minutes can soon disappear on 'techy' things.

RELIGIOUS READINGS

A Civil Funeral Service is essentially 'secular' but can include some religious elements such as readings, hymns and prayers. Bible readings can be an important part of a service for some families.

POETRY IN THE SERVICE

Poetry in a service should be chosen carefully to reflect the person who has passed away and how the people at the service are feeling.

Poetry does play a useful part during a service, particularly when the message is positive and personal and appropriate for the part of the service that it is read. They are also useful where family members want to make a contribution, but are not ready emotionally to write and deliver their own piece.

It has a purpose beyond sharing the words – focusing everyone's attention on the same thing for a few moments. Some poems are better early, some better in the closing stage of the service.

Are there any particular poems or music that have already been chosen?

Many poems can be personalised:

For example 'She is Gone' by David Harkins is a very appropriate poem for the end of a service. The opening words are 'You can shed tears because she is gone...' would become 'You can shed tears because Steve has gone...'. Even better is when a reading is written in 'first person' - 'You can shed tears because I have gone'. It's what they might want to say to you.

The order does work very well and splits the service into sections that help the service to flow. The tribute section allows for people to write/say what the deceased person meant to them - tributes are usually very personal and don't include too much in the way of anecdotes - those can be included in the Eulogy.

Is the service to be semi religious? Including the Lords Prayer allows for people who have faith and makes them feel a little more comfortable.

The Lord's Prayer is useful in a partly religious service as it embraces people with faith into the service. It is also a communal moment and helps focus people before the Committal. Even without it, we can include a period of silence for those with (any) faith to say their own private prayer.

This version seems the most well known and is the version that I use:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen

The Catholic version omits "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, For ever and ever"

Anything else, subject to time can be included. This can include readings and poetry delivered by myself or others. Hymns don't have to be a part of the service.

PARTLY RELIGIOUS

Entry music
A welcome and introduction
Reading (optional)
Tribute (optional)
A Hymn (optional)
The Eulogy (the story)
Music for reflection
Quiet reflection
The Lord's Prayer (optional)
The Committal (The formal farewell)
Closing words
Reading (optional)
Exit music

NON RELIGIOUS - HUMANIST STYLE

Entry music
A welcome and introduction
Reading (optional)
Tribute (optional)
The Eulogy (the story)
Music for reflection
Quiet reflection
The Committal (The formal farewell)
Closing words
Reading (optional)
Exit music

For a burial, the structure will be similar - the Committal is taken from the chapel service and conducted at the graveside - it helps to have a reading first.

THE QUESTIONS

The answers to the questions help shape the whole service and bring relevance to each part, but especially the Eulogy, their story.

There are two reasons for the questions that follow - the first is simply to get a reasonable chronological timeline of their life. The second is to use some of the answers to add colour to the whole thing. It's what made them special.

However, it is important that the person we are talking about would be comfortable with the things that will be said during the service.

Anecdotes will reinforce memories and remind people about their life. Both parts will make their story. Tales of their early life, for example, will help paint a picture in words of who they were and how those days affected their adult life.

The Order of Service can be completed before we talk your loved one in detail This can be done by phone and/or email.

We can do the meeting itself by phone, video call or face to face. With the help of the questions, some families prefer to write their thoughts and send them across to me.

Allow about an hour altogether for discussing everything - it is a chance for you to get to know me and me to get to know them. It's worthwhile having any certificates handy - long birth certificates, marriage certificates, enlistment papers, discharge papers all provide useful information for the meeting.

HOW WERE THEY KNOWN?

- The name that they were known by. This is how I will refer to them during the service.
- Their maiden name or other name changes:
- The names of key family members - this should be kept to people who will be mentioned by name (especially if they will be at the service):
- Parents names:
- Siblings (brothers and sisters) names:
- Partners name(s):
- Other family members:
- Children:
- Grandchildren:
- Great Grandchildren:

BIRTH DETAILS:

- Where were they born?
- When were they born?
- What were/are their parent's names and what did they do at that time?
- Did they have brothers and/or sisters?
- What were their names in order? What was the difference in ages of their siblings?

LIFE AS A CHILD:

- Can you describe their character and personality as a child?
- Are there traits that are family traits in behaviour or attitude?
- Did they take after anyone in a particular skill or talent?
- Are there stories of the games and sports that they played with each other, trouble that they got into or things that they enjoyed doing and sharing with their siblings?
- Did they have a particular close/best friend either in childhood or later life? Lists of names are always a sensitive part of a service - better to have no list, than miss out a person.
- Where did they grow up? Where were they brought up? *Someone brought up in the country would have a very different background to someone who lived in a big city. If at some point their family moved, say to a New Town like Harlow or Stevenage the contrast in their life might be great.*
- Why did the family move?
- Where did they go to play?
- Were they close to extended family members, grandparents, uncles and aunts etc?
- Did extended family get together much? Was there a piano at home? Did they learn an instrument.
- If they were a child during the war, were they evacuated - if so where to? Children were often evacuated more than once and not always kept with their siblings.
- Did extended family play a major part in their upbringing?
- Was it an experience they enjoyed? Did they revisit years later or keep in touch?
- When they were young did the family take holidays. Where to? What type of holidays were they?
- Did they go to Sunday School or belong to any clubs or groups... Cubs, Guides, Army, Air or Navy Cadets or go to swimming, dancing lessons etc?

LIFE AS A TEENAGER:

- What schools did they go to?
- What did they enjoy about school? What didn't they enjoy?
- What was their favourite subject?
- When did they leave school? *(The leaving age was 14 up to 1947, 15 to 1972, 16 afterwards)*
- Did they win any awards - sporting trophies, school prizes etc.
- When did they leave school?
- Did they go on to further education?
- What was their favourite music at this time? Favourite films or TV?
- Did they pick up on the culture of the time - fashions, music, films, TV etc?
- Did they have a big crowd of friends?
- When they were old enough to go away by themselves were there special holidays then?
- The decade that someone hits their late teens is often very significant and impacts on much of their later life.

HOMES:

- Where people lived is a wonderful source of memories.
- What was their house like? If they lived in a Victorian terraced house in the 1920's and 30's, they probably had gaslight, an outside toilet, a tin bath. Is their childhood home still there?
- What addresses? E.g. 45 Engleheart Road in Catford was always a happy place. Norah simply had an open door policy - everyone was welcome and somehow she always had food to feed them.'
- Who else lived there?
- Were there special neighbours?
- Did they have a 'family forever home'?
- Why did they move to particular areas?
- For some people in their younger days it might be appropriate to discuss their bedroom - *perhaps it was covered in pictures from a sport or a pop artist?*
- Were there garden/garage/room features that reflect their hobby? Perhaps there was a very tidy and organised shed, or a chaotic garage - *'John was a just in case man... his garage was full of things that he kept - just in case. To anyone else it was disorganised but he knew where every last thing was!'*

WORKING:

- What was their first job?
- How did they get it?
- Where did they work and how did they get to work?
- Did they do National Service? Which branch? Did they serve abroad?
- What jobs did they do?
- Where did they work?
- Are there amusing stories of them in the workplace?
- Are there work colleagues that might have useful input?
- When did they retire?

HOLIDAYS:

- Where did they go with their birth family?
- Where did they go with their own family?
- Where did they go in later life?
- Are there any funny holiday stories or stand out holidays?
- Did they go away with other people - friends, family etc?
- Did they prefer to relax on holiday or were they very active?
- What sort of things did they enjoy doing on holiday?

LOVE & MARRIAGE:

- How did they meet their partner?
- When did they meet?
- How long did they court for? How long were they engaged?
- Are there stories about the proposal, the wedding day or the honeymoon that could be shared?
- Where and when did they get married?
- Was it a big wedding?
- Where did they start married life?
- Where was their first proper home together?
- **In uncomfortable situations, relationships don't need to be mentioned.**

FAMILY:

- Did they have children?
- What are their names (in order)?
- When were they born?
- Are there grandchildren, great grandchildren?
- If they didn't have their own children are there any others that played an important part in their lives (nephews, nieces etc)?
- Are there special memories of them as a mum or a dad, an uncle or aunt or as a grandparent?
- Were they a good homemaker? Were they organised. Did they like everything to be in its place?
- Were they a good cook? What particularly? Did they have a signature dish?

HOBBIES & PASTIMES:

- What hobbies did they have? (*E.g. gardening, knitting, crocheting, DIY, walking, cycling, driving etc?*)
- What were they good at?
- Did they keep in touch with family and friends by letter, phone calls or visits?
- Did they belong to any clubs or teams (sport, hobby or social)?
- Did they do puzzles - *e.g. jigsaws, Sudoku, crosswords?*

- What sports did they enjoy/follow/participate in? *e.g. football, cricket, boxing, bowls*

LIKES & DISLIKES:

- What types of music, books and movies did they enjoy?
- Did they have favourite TV programmes?
- Did they like animals and have any pets?
- Did they like the outdoors?
- Did they enjoy cooking?
- Are there signature dishes that will always be remembered?
- Did they have favourite foods or perhaps ones that they didn't like?
- Did they embrace technology – Phone/tablets/TV remotes/computers/the Internet etc?

CHARACTER & PERSONALITY:

- Did they have any particular sayings, phrases or stories?
- What do you think they will be most remembered for?
- Is there anything that they would have been particularly proud of?
- Can you come up with say 10 words that describe their character and personality honestly – remember everyone listening to the service knew them, so make it realistic?
- Looking at the words that describe them can you give examples of why those words were chosen?
- Did they have a personal philosophy on life?
- Are there any stories that show their character?

AWKWARD MOMENTS

- This is not an exclusive list – we can add anything that you think is appropriate. Sometimes it is useful to discuss things that wouldn't be appropriate as part of the service - most families have something that falls into this category. Knowing what to avoid or even imply is very useful. For example: dates can be difficult, particularly when a child is born a few months after a wedding! Prison is difficult and will vary from family to family - some like it mentioned in a light hearted way, others really don't want it shared in any way. The service is a positive way to celebrate a life, not to share negative points.
- There may be great sadnesses that need to be mentioned - often the loss of people very close.
- Many families have estranged members and the immediate thought is not to mention a miscreant brother or a troublesome sister.
- Fallings out generally happen later in life. They can be mentioned as part of the beginning of the Eulogy - John was the oldest of four. By the time he was five he had been joined by George, Paul and Ringo. It's just stating a fact and they need not be mentioned again. Much harder implying he was an only child.

The more information we have to choose from, the better - we can leave out the less significant bits. The questions will simply be a starting point.

ALL OF THESE CAN PROVIDE A RICH SOURCE OF MEMORIES AND ANECDOTES...

- Someone born during the 1920's is likely to have done some sort of work for the War Effort.
- Anyone born up to about 1940 may have done War service or National Service. Regiments etc as well as postings and jobs are useful.
- Discharge papers often have a testimonial that we can use in the service.

- As a member of the Armed Forces, they are entitled to have a Union Jack or appropriate flag draping their coffin.
- Men born before the 1st October 1939 were eligible for National Service.
- During the War, women over the age of 18 had to work for the War Effort in either the ATS, factories or as a Land Girl. Men enlisted.
- Someone born in the 1930's may well have been evacuated during WWII - for many this played a very big part in their lives. There may be other wartime memories - sights and sounds. For some the war had a huge impact on their families, for others very little. They may well have remembered times spent in Anderson shelters or Morrison shelters. Children loved watching the dogfights high above and exploring bomb sites.
- Whichever decade a person experiences their late teen years may influence the clothes they wore, the music they liked, their social life. Their mode of transport will be very much linked to the time. The 1950's were a time when motor bikes with sidecars were popular, as was cycling.
- The period after the War finished was a time of austerity and rationing. Make do and mend was the rule and living during this period often formed people's attitude to money and waste. For many families in East and South London hop-picking was a memorable part of their lives.
- Holidays in the 1950's were generally family orientated, revolving around camping, caravanning and holiday camps. The late 1960's were the beginning of package holidays. These were important times and often the only break a working parent might have. Often companies had an annual shutdown so work colleagues might meet up at the seaside.
- One of the great attractions of a holiday camp was being waited on. The entertainment of an evening may have been the only time the family went out socially together. Often Hi-Di-Hi holidays!
- In many towns the period from 1950-1990 was the time when every large company had a social club with lots of varied entertainment. Life often revolved around them.
- Sometimes you won't have all of the information - if you are the son or daughter of the person who has passed away, you will have missed say 20 years or so of their life - you weren't there. There may be older family members, brothers or sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins or even just lifelong friends who are worth asking. The worst that will happen is that they will say they don't remember - but sometimes the most wonderful information comes back. Not only does it enhance the service, but it makes them feel remembered and included.
- From the early 1950's the music charts are a good source of evocative music and a great way to fix a point in time. When they got married Love Me Do by the Beatles was at Number 1. News events may also be relevant.

CONTACT DETAILS

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