

# Eulogies

By Ryan Helfenbein

A silence came over the guests as the widow approached the podium. Her husband was resting peacefully in a closed wooden casket surrounded by flowers showcasing the tremendous number of people he had touched during his life. The widow pulled out a tissue to dab her eyes before organizing her papers in what appeared to be notes to help navigate through the memories shared with the love of her life. She opened with a general thank you to all in attendance. As she looked down to her notes to begin reading, she began fidgeting with her phone. Looking at it, putting it down, and then looking at it one more time a bit longer than the first. She politely excused herself for a minute before placing it up to her ear. "Hi honey...Yes, everyone is here to honor your life." The widow continued with this 'phone call from the beyond' sharing stories of the guests in attendance and what her husband was now doing to showcase the loves of his life. Activities, past family members and friends and even highlights the two shared together were discussed while emotions flooded the church. She closed the conversation with a declaration of love for one another and their family and how he will be waiting for her upon her arrival later in the future. As she put the phone away, she again thanked everyone who attended and then quietly stepped down, returning to her seat.

This stunning example of an extraordinary eulogy will remain as a comfort to those in attendance long after the service is over. Let's face it, a well shared eulogy can be some of the most moving moments during a final farewell. We learn that these terms of endearment date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They are designed to showcase a life lived and allow friends and family to travel through memories shared together. Most importantly eulogies provide, for those at the time of a loss, something to hold onto as they cope with their grief.

Too many times undertakers have witnessed officiants at funeral ceremonies get this all wrong. While I could never disclose some of these cringing moments, I can say that there are many officiants who do get it right. These officiants who are well rehearsed in eulogies often begin with honesty in stating how they wish they knew the individual because of the memories shared. Even better is when the master of ceremonies cues a family member or close friend to come forward and give a personal testimony to the one all in attendance loved. The key behind these moments is to include memories that many can relate to, events people re-

member and stories that all told to one another too many times over again. Share a taste of their unique personality and most importantly pretend as if they were in the audience listening to every word.

Often times great eulogies include jokes, poems and even the individual singing a song (prerecorded of course). One that stands out is of a woman who stood in front of all in attendance and began describing her late husband's sleeping habits. The sounds and odors that would be emitted from his body as he slept and the frustration she would have during these moments. It was then all tied together with the love they shared and how she will now miss those silly moments.

Eulogies can also be very moving, create life lessons and leave us with a feeling as if time completely came to a standstill. A friend of mine recently lost his mom and wow did he ever nail the eulogy to showcase her life. Most importantly it left an impact on not only those that knew her well, but even gave my staff members goosebumps. Dean navigated us all through his mother's life using funny moments, her love of animals and adventures shared with others. But it was in his closing where he used a song lyric from Chris LeDoux that not only gave a clear insight of his mother's strong will, but offered a creative approach to learning one last lesson from the life his mom lived:

"Sit tall in the saddle, Hold your head up high. Keep your eyes fixed where the trail meets the sky. And live like you ain't afraid to die. And don't be scared, just enjoy your ride."

"Thank you all for sharing mom's ride with her."

After all, isn't life all about creating memories, sharing them with one another and making our individual mark here on Earth? Regardless of the personality, we all have memories to share. Take the time to tell the story of someone you love and leave a lasting impact for generations to come. It is up to us to continue sharing the stories of the lives lived and take comfort from the memories they left behind.

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