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the highest standards of
Scottish celebrancy

Sharing Words

2024

Foreword

There are many very familiar and traditional poems and readings for Funeral and Memorial Services and often, these are the most appropriate choices because of their familiarity, and many people like to include them because they have been used in services for other family members.

However, there are also times when, as Celebrants, we would like to suggest words that may be written specifically for the person who has died, or poems/readings which are very fitting, but not always associated with funerals.

As part of our contribution to Demystifying Death Week (6th – 12th May 2024), SICA invited members and associates to submit words that they have written themselves, or that have been used for a service for a particular person, and which felt 'right' for the occasion.

Here is a compilation of our 'Shared Words': some include an explanation or description of the way that the words were chosen, written and used.

The aim of this compilation is to encourage all of us to be more creative, to look beyond the more familiar and conventional words, to quote from unexpected and unusual sources, to be more confident in our own skills in writing, and to support families to find words that are most fitting for the person they have lost.

As services and ceremonies become more and more individual, we hope that our Shared Words inspire Celebrants and bring comfort and to grieving families.

As Celebrants, we may not always know the impact that our ceremonies have, but we do know that words chosen or written to remember, honour and celebrate special lives, can be uniquely significant gifts that we bring.

SICA are very grateful to all who shared their words here.

G. Robertson

Chris Lerpiniere

Sonder Celebrant

Many of my funerals are in Edinburgh and many have involved individuals who were born and brought up in the Leith area. They are fiercely proud of this and consider themselves 'Leithers' over belonging to Edinburgh. Leith has gone through many changes over the years and I think this poem by Don Ledingham reflects those changes and epitomises what Leith means to those who grew up there. Hope you like it as much as I do!

Sunshine on Leith

Where once the whalers left for Artic seas,
Their death points sharpened by a razoring wind
Where herring boats swarmed like angered bees
Their silvered catch disgorged upon the quays,
The entrails of their 'ever-lasting' grounds,
Observe, the shadowed vessels almost hiding,
Readied for their devilled route,
Emptying the Dark Continent,
To the cane plantations for an eternity of grind,
And returning innocently to port,
Laden with their sweet burden,
Icing the futures of genteel Edinburgh generations;
Watch as barrelled Bordeaux roll across the cobbles,
Mixing with the scent of highland malt,
Smell the sweet Speysides, and the island peats,
See the oysters lying in omnipresent piles,
Feeding for the common man;
Hear the boat-building and the machine,
The steel and the steam, the sound of revolution
The thrusting blackening smokestacks;
Then silence, as all depart, the seas run dry,
The builders shift across the globe,
Trade squeezed into Golithian craft;
Touch the underbelly of a deceptive city,
The women of the street,
The salamanders of the night,
The flashing blades and knuckled fights,

The ‘spotting trains’, and brown sugar
Of a different kind,
They too, pushed aside,
Gentrification squeezing all before it,
The Banana Flats, the Royal yacht,
The cruise ships emptying
Another human trade
But still the river runs;
Persevere they proclaim,
And so it shall,
The sun will always,
Shine on Leith.

Fleur Hoole

www.ceremoniesbyfleur.co.uk

I wrote this poem for a couple in our family, who lost their much-anticipated, beloved baby boy on the day of his birth. It was my contribution to the funeral, as attendance was for immediate members of the family only.

As a mum who has faced my own losses, I wanted to celebrate the connection and hope of parents and baby during pregnancy and recognise their precious baby's importance in their family, whilst acknowledging the depth of their anguish. I hope that it can be personalised and may bring some comfort to other families facing a similar devastating loss.

A letter of love

To our dearest and most precious, [Name]

Our heartbeats have leapt to the sound of yours,
Your movements from within are imprinted on our souls,
Our breath has been stolen with your perfect beauty,
Your tiny hands will be held forever in our love.

We will cherish the sweet dreams that we had for you,
You will always be at the heart and soul of our family,
We will miss you in the breaking dawn and depths of night,
You will always be carried - as a treasure - in our hearts,

We will all miss you and love you forever, [Name]

Your loving family

xxx

Tommy Baxter

[Home Page Thomas Baxter Celebrant in Angus, Scotland](#)

Recently I had a funeral for a very elderly gentleman who had been a prolific hill walker. I came across this song by Ewan MacColl 5 years ago when I first became a celebrant and used it at the funeral of a good friend who had also been keen on walking up in the Angus Glens.

The words are beautiful and paint the most colourful pictures in my mind. The song is well known and if I am using the lyrics I tend to use only verse one and two. Anyway, I thought I would share.

Ewan MacColl *The Joy of Living*

Farewell, you northern hills, you mountains all, goodbye.
Moorland and stony ridges, crags and peaks, goodbye.
Glyder Fach, farewell, Cui Beig, Scafell, cloud-bearing Suilven.
Sun-warmed rock and the cold of *Bleaklow's* frozen sea,
The snow and the wind and the rain of hills and mountains.
Days in the sun and the tempered wind and the air like wine—
And you drink and you drink till you're drunk on the joy of living.

Farewell to you, my love, my time is almost done.
Lie in my arms once more until the darkness comes.
You filled all my days, held the night at bay, dearest companion.
Years pass by and are gone with the speed of birds in flight,
Our life like the verse of a song heard in the mountains.
Give me your hand then, love, and join your voice with mine—
We'll sing of the hurt and the pain and the joy of living.

Farewell to you, my chicks, soon you must fly alone.
Flesh of my flesh, my future life, bone of my bone.
May your wings be strong, may your days be long, safe be your journey.
Each of you bears inside of you the gift of love—
May it bring you light and warmth and the pleasure of giving.
Eagerly savour each new day and the taste of its mouth—
Never lose sight of the thrill and the joy of living.

Take me to some high place of heather, rock and *ling*.
Scatter my dust and ashes, feed me to the wind.

So that I will be part of all you see, the air you are breathing.
I'll be part of the curlew's cry and the soaring hawk,
The blue *milkwort* and the *sundew* hung with diamonds.
I'll be riding the gentle wind that blows through your hair.
Reminding you how we shared in the joy of living.

Pamela Dicks

I would like to share this poem. I included it in a service for an engineer that was a very quiet, industrious man that never wasted a moment in his life. In his retirement he had a massive garden that he worked in from dawn until dusk. This poem The Gentle Gardener by Edgar A. Guest was very appropriate

The Gentle Gardener

I'd like to leave but daffodils to mark my little
way,
To leave but tulips red and white behind me as
I stray;
I'd like to pass away from earth and feel I'd
left behind
But roses and forget-me-nots for all who come
to find.

I'd like to sow the barren spots with all the
flowers of earth,
To leave a path where those who come should
find but gentle mirth;
And when at last I'm called upon to join the
heavenly throng
I'd like to feel along my way I'd left no sign
of wrong.
And yet the cares are many and the hours of
toil are few;
There is not time enough on earth for all I'd
like to do;
But, having lived and having toiled, I'd like the
world to find
Some little touch of beauty that my soul had
left behind.

Jacky McKinney

My first contribution is the poem by Rabbie Burns — ‘The Day Returns’. I was meeting with the family of a lady whose service I was asked to lead, and her husband asked that I read this poem for him on the day. He and his wife had been together for over 60 years, and he described how he fell in love at first sight, and that their love kept on growing. I’m a romantic at heart and a sucker for a love story, so was happy to read this for him on the day, however it was also my first reading of a Burns poem. I’m from Northern Ireland and while my accent is often mistaken for the far north of Scotland, I’m very aware that I’m not Scottish and really wanted to do him proud. It really tugged at my heart strings when he started to cry.

The Day Returns

The day returns, my bosom burns,
The blissful day we twa did meet!
Tho' winter wild in tempest toil'd,
Ne'er summer sun was half sae sweet.
Than a' the pride that loads the tide,
And crosses o'er the sultry line,
Than kingly robes, than crowns and globes,
Heav'n gave me more - it made thee mine!

While day and night can bring delight,
Or nature aught of pleasure give,
While joys above my mind can move,
For thee, and thee alone, I live!
When that grim foe of Life below
Comes in between to make us part,
The iron hand that breaks our band,
It breaks my bliss, it breaks my heart!

The quote below was for the service of a lady who had spent her entire life in the care service. She loved to paint and the walls of her room were covered with her pictures; but she also got up at ridiculously early hours and would start to paint. This was fine when she lived in her own little apartment within the complex, but not when she shared a flat. However, I found this quote by accident, but it was a timely accident and it fit her circumstances so perfectly.

But the songwriter Bernie Taupin once wrote, 'early risers catch the world waking and see its true colours'

Gillian Robertson

www.rememberlove.co.uk

One of my first funeral services was for a very enthusiastic mountaineer. He died from Covid at a young age, and, as an enthusiastic mountaineer myself, I really felt the tragedy of his loss of life deeply.

I decided to ask a group of my closest friends and mountain companions to send me a couple of lines about being in the mountains and what it meant to them. Here is the result:

People who climb mountains ...

Find solace, peace and tranquillity.

Enduring friendships, memories of days of beauty and sunshine,

And days of challenge, ice and storm.

Drinking fully from life's fountains, they see a little further and know there is no end,

Always further, always more, always higher,

Always embracing the glory of the world — and humbled by it.

People who climb mountains ...

Test their limits and find their gentle ease,

Find their own heights and relish the moment, the journey, the adventure.

They speak of their hopes and dreams and find listening, fellowship and new beginnings.

Reaching a high on summits, in valleys, on ridges, in all that is around them.

Exhilaration, respect, courage and joy in solitude and in companionship.

Such gifts.

People who climb mountains ...

Know what it is to touch the sky.

John, Mags, Val, Doug, John, Heather, Ann, Graeme, Eilidh, Dave and Gillian

I am sure I am not the only person who had the best Mum in the world!

But, I did!

I was with her when she died, and, during the hours before her death, I wrote these words which were included in the order for the Service of Thanksgiving for her Life. I knew I wouldn't be able to read them, and I really just wanted them to be read in silence by everyone, when the moment felt right for them.

To Mum:

Forever kind, a gentle guide,
A strong and constant presence.
The gift of love and quiet joy.
A patient faith, deepest pride,
Gratitude and hope.
Treasured times, grace and laughter.
Music, and the rhythm of the tide.

Sunrise Sunset Peace.

All my love, Gillian x

And, thinking about my dear Mum, I would like to share some other thoughts and ideas that could be included in a service, or spoken about when we visit families.

My Mum was a great cook – not a Master-Chef sort of cook, but she made the most wholesome and delicious meals, always catering for my Dad's combination of Coeliac Disease and Diabetes, and she made the best soup and the best Mac and Cheese . . . ever!

Whenever I use her recipes, I think of her, and feel very connected to her. These include:

‘Mrs. MacLeod’s Biscuits’ – a delicious tray bake made from rice Krispies!
Canon Balls – truffles coated in coconut.
Complexion Salad – made with lemon jelly and grated carrot!
Tomato and Pear Soup – unexpectedly easy and delicious!
And, of course, Mac and Cheese – her secret ingredient – a teaspoon of wholegrain mustard!

My Mum liked to knit – not ‘a great knitter’, but she made beautiful wedding ring shawls for each of her Grandchildren, and, with many friends, she knitted jumpers and hats for ‘fish and chip babies’ – a charity providing clothes for third world babies, many of whom had Aids, and who were sent home from hospital wrapped in newspapers because they did not have clothes.

When Mum died, I gave the wool that she had left, and the knitting patterns, to a very dear friend who is a ‘great knitter’. She has made lots more jumpers and hats in memory of Mum, and sent them to The Fish and Chip Babies’ Charity – beautiful!

There was one particular ball of wool – a combination of colours that knits up beautifully. I decided to use it to make a scarf (I am NOT a ‘great knitter’!), and made up my own pattern:

88 stitches for every year of your life,
Cast on with love,
Remembering your nimble fingers,
And how you always kept the tension perfect,
Not tight and awkward like me.
Each row bringing memories –
Some big and important,
Some so simple and precious.
And now, a scarf,
The warmth of your love,
Wrapped around me.

Michael Hannah

<http://mhcelebrant.scot>

For the funeral of an astronautical engineer, we chose a short paragraph written by astronomer and author Carl Sagan from his book *Pale Blue Dot*. The title refers to an image taken by the *Voyager 1* space probe in 1990. The probe was sent to explore the outer reaches of the solar system but at one point the camera was turned back on us, on our world. And from a distance of some 6 billion km, the earth appears on this image as no more than a single pixel. A pale blue dot.

Sagan writes: “It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we’ve ever known.”

For a person who liked to fiddle with cars!

Honda Civic Hatchback, Shuttle and CRX, Feb 1984 to Oct 1987. 1342 cc / 1488 cc / 1590 cc

From Chapter 1 Engine

Timing Belt – adjustment

1. This is not a routine maintenance operation and it should only be required if the belt becomes noisy. Adjustment should be carried out with the engine cold.
2. Remove the alternator drivebelt as described in Chapter 12.
3. Remove the rocker cover.
4. Turn the crankshaft by means of its pulley bolt in an anti-clockwise direction to bring No.1 piston to TDC on its compression stroke. In this position the white painted mark on the pulley will be aligned with the raised projection on the timing belt lower cover and the ‘UP’ mark on the camshaft sprocket will be uppermost with the two sprocket notches parallel with the top face of the cylinder head (see Fig. 1.4). The distributor rotor arm will be pointing toward the No. 1 cylinder segment in the cap.
5. Remove the timing belt adjustor access plug (photo).
6. Slacken the timing belt tensioner adjuster bolt. This is easily done by removing the plug in the splash shield under the wheel arch and inserting a socket and extension bar through the access hole and onto the bolt (photos).
7. Turn the crankshaft pulley bolt in an anti-clockwise direction to move the timing belt the distance of three teeth of the sprocket. This action will tension the belt automatically by means of the spring-loaded tensioner.

8. Tighten the tensioner bolt to the specified torque.
9. Refit the tensioner bolt and access plugs.
10. Fit the alternator drivebelt and tension it (Chapter 12).

Haynes Owners Workshop Manual by John S Mead (1991)

Stella Mcculloch

Contribution to the Staged Funeral of Alex Murray.

I've attached the words I said and the poem I read, in my capacity as Alex's friend Stella.

If I'm honest, I wasn't too sure what to expect from the event, but I can happily say that it exceeded my expectations, largely due to the time and effort that had clearly been put in, by yourself and Michael.

Initially, I wondered if it would feel 'staged', but as soon as Michael started the service, I felt as though I was at a real funeral! I was quite invested with Alex's friends watching on the live stream from Costa Rica and had to remind myself that there was no live stream and I think Michael had a similar feeling. I thought that the words of Cate, Ian and I flowed together really well, especially as we hadn't collaborated beforehand and had constructed our own words after reading Michael's heartfelt eulogy.

It was the little details for me that made it, the fact we had an authentically decorated coffin, family and friends speaking and of course Cate's wee dog Millie, who just stole the show!

I was happy to be a part of the event and felt both services were very well received — so well done to both of you!

Hello everyone, I'm Stella and I feel very privileged to be standing here with you all today, to talk about my friend Alex.

We met at Glasgow University, as you've heard Alex was studying Biology, I on the other hand was studying Chemistry, but we met through our mutual love of hillwalking. Alex was one of those people who it was easy to strike up a conversation with and she and I became firm friends. It wasn't all studying and hillwalking though and we were regular attenders at the student union and had some really good nights out.but maybe not for discussion here! Back then everyone noticed Alex, mainly because of her changing hair colour, think of an eye catching, unusual colour and chances are Alex would have had it at some point and then there was the time she shaved her head!

Alex was one of a kind, she was a great friend during our Uni days and then I was so happy to reconnect with her again later in life, after her various travels. I will always remember her for her bright hair and personality to match and for her inquisitiveness when it came to nature and to life in general and I'd like to read for you a piece written by Charles Darwin. It's called 'On the Origin of Species' and seems particularly appropriate, especially as Alex hugely respected his work.

"It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling

through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.....

Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows.

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved".

Fiona Beeley

I carry your heart with me by e.e. cummings .

I carry your heart with me (I carry it in

My heart) I am never without it (anywhere

I go you go, my dear; and whatever is done

By only me is your doing, my darling)

I fear

No fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) I want

No world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)

And it's you are whatever a moon has always meant

And whatever a sun will always sing is you

Here is the deepest secret nobody knows

(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud

And the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows

Higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)

And this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

I carry your heart (I carry it in my heart)

I carry your heart with me

Terry Pratchett Quotes

- “Good Omens”, which Sir Terry co-authored with Neil Gaiman, includes the line:

"DON'T THINK OF IT AS DYING, said Death. JUST THINK OF IT AS LEAVING EARLY TO AVOID THE RUSH."

- Here are just some of the other things Sir Terry wrote about Death, and death.

“I meant,” said Ipslore bitterly, “what is there in this world that truly makes living worthwhile?”

Death thought about it.

CATS, he said eventually. CATS ARE NICE.”

“You get a wonderful view from the point of no return.” **Terry Pratchett**

“It is said that your life flashes before your eyes just before you die. That is true, it’s called Life.” **Terry Pratchett**

“No one is actually dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away.” **Terry Pratchett**

“Why do you go away? So that you can come back. So that you can see the place you came from with new eyes and extra colours. And the people there see you differently, too. Coming back to where you started is not the same as never leaving.” **Terry Pratchett**

On a Birthday — Marion Angus

Time, why are you going so fast?
I like not furious paces.
Milestones glimmer and then are past,
White, solemn faces

I’m coming near to Forever and Ever,
With its flower and leaf unfalling,
Where you, poor Time, are ancient measure,
Fit for a dreams recalling

And fain am I to turn again,
Before this journeys ended,
For a long, long look at the road I came,
So rough, and dark, and - Splendid!

“Softly As I Leave You “ **Songwriters:** De Vita Antonio / Calabresi Giorgio / Shaper Harold David

Softly, I will leave you softly
For my heart would break
If you should wake and see me go

So I leave you softly
Long before you miss me
Long before your arms can beg me stay
For one more hour
Or one more day

After all the years
I can't bear the tears to fall
So, softly as I leave you there

Softly, long before you miss me
Long before your arms can beg me stay
For one more hour
Or one more day

After all the years
I can't bear the tears to fall
So softly as I leave you there

As I leave I you there
As I leave I you there

Meditations Before Kaddish From the Mishkan T'filah

When I die give what's left of me away to children and old men that wait to die. And if you need to cry, cry for your brother walking the street beside you. And when you need me, put your arms around anyone and give them what you need to give me.

I want to leave you something,
something better than words or sounds.

Look for me in the people I've known or loved, and if you cannot give me away,
at least let me live in your eyes and not your mind. You can love me best by letting hands touch hands, and by letting go
of children that need to be free.

Love doesn't die, people do.
So, when all that's left of me is love, give me away.

“Death” by Emmanuel

Death is like taking off a tight shoe.
Even when you are dead, you are still alive.
You do not cease to exist at death,
this is only illusion.
You go through the doorway of death alive
and there is no altering of the consciousness.
It is not a strange land you go to
But a land of living reality
Where the growth process is a continuation.

Life and death
should not be considered as opposites.
It is closer to the truth
to speak of dying as an entrance
rather than an exit.

What the doorway of death offers
is a resurgence of tremendous vitality,
for you are entering from what could be described
as a watered-down version of life
into the thing itself,
the vitality of the primary reality.

If death could be seen
as a beautiful clear lake,
refreshing and buoyant,
then when a consciousness
moves towards its exit from a body,
there would be that delightful plunge
and it would simply swim away.

Dying is self-regulating;
it is of divine origin;
it is absolutely safe.

The fear of death
is the fear of letting go.

As it is in life,
so it is in death.

The process of dying
is always a joyous one
once the human fear has been overcome.

When fear is laid aside
death becomes a most exciting adventure.

There is nothing to fear in the universe;
nothing.

The New Way. Alastair Reid

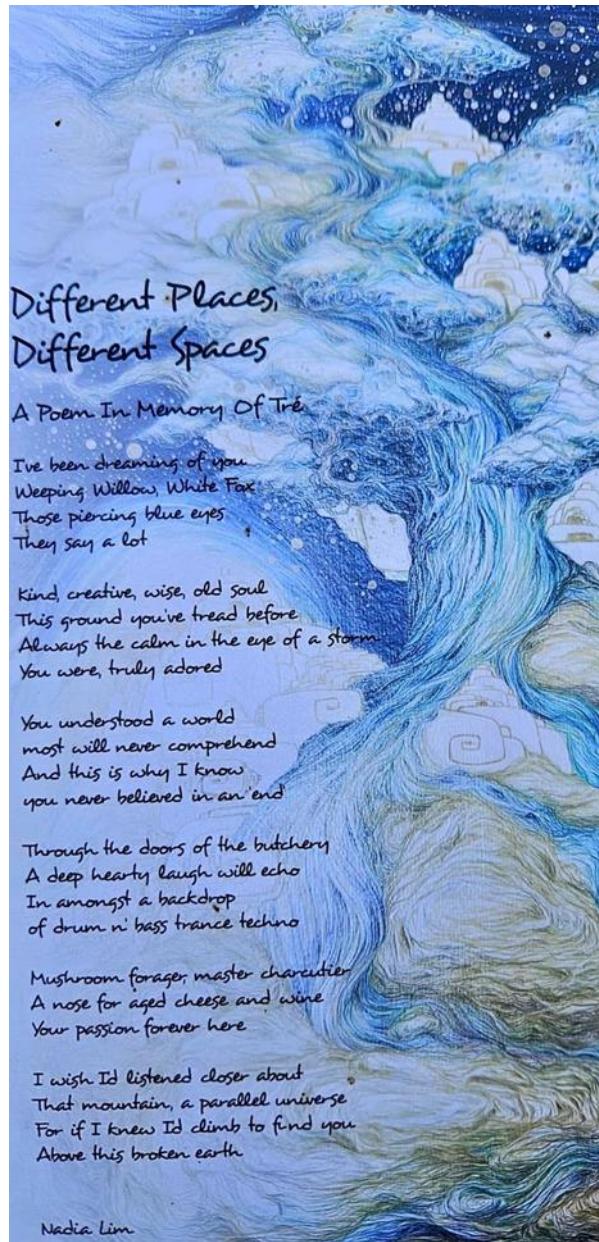
There was not much trouble in that goodbye
In the saying of it, I mean. But the way
was that untrodden one, that lay
over the thick of the older wood,
and not very often had I gone there,
but mostly by one where the grass was bare
and footpath clearer, with sometimes the eye
of a cottage lamp to point the way
But this was a night I wanted away
To a different place, in my different mood.

So I left the road for the higher places
And found the wood- but the path was strange
Having no known tree-trunks to mark its range.
It was dark, for the boughs shut out the sky
Where they bent close over. And owls would call
To the world that the snow was beginning to fall
Oh my steps were slow there .Ways , like faces,
Grow dear with knowing, and going through

Is easy. But this was strange and, I knew,
Was bound to be dark where I'd said goodbye.

Diane McLeish

This is my contribution which my friend Nadia wrote for our beautiful Tres ❤️ only 36 we loved 😊 him 😊 drunk driver wiped him out in a nano second! IXxx



Gordon Smith

I first saw this poem by Donna Ashworth, shared in a Facebook post by Ann Wels. Nothing unusual, or even remarkable, about that in itself but, as with so many things, it was the convergence of time, place and circumstance that compelled me to use it.

I was sitting at my wife's bedside, in Roxburghe House, Dundee, as she was nearing end of life. The patio door was open, with Janet's bed moved so that she could see the lovely day outside and feel the warmth of the sun which was streaming into the room. She was asleep as I read it, which is perhaps just as well since, just as I instantly knew I would use it at her funeral, I knew too that there was no way I could read it myself.

It's not only beautiful, it's also totally true.

Love Came First

by Donna Ashworth.

You don't move on after loss, but you must move with.

You must shake hands with grief, welcome her in, for she lives with you now.

Pull her a chair at the table and offer her comfort.

She is not the monster you first thought her to be.

She is love. And she will walk with you now, stay with you now, peacefully. If you let her.

And on the days when your anger is high, remember why she came, remember who she represents.

Remember. Grief came to you my friend because love came first. Love came first.

Andy Jackson

Traveller's Rest

He is home, his crozier of fishing rods
In hand, his head still in the lonely fens.
A weekend with his unshared thoughts
has unmoored him from his life again.
By streams and dykes in modest spate,
he saw the ripples of his quiet god
in rivers full of fish he never caught,
nor kept, nor threw back to their fate.

He is home, from touring national parks
or weeks with friends in former colonies,
pollen from the showers of bougainvillea
and nameless orchids speckling his tie.
He replays his tape-recordings, barks
of local traders in sunlit squares, camera
creaking with its freight of photographs; sky
and sea and birds, the remains of holidays.

He is home, though she who held the door
to see him in is long gone. A spring flower
bears her likeness, the grain of her name
traceable in doors and skirting boards.
The kitchen clock marks the turning hour,
its quivering hands sweeping him towards
the rest he spends his life not looking for,
but which one day finds him all the same.

The View

for Mum

Sundays mean an easy drive up to the tops,
to catch the view. It's true that you can see
for miles up there, all three Ridings and beyond.
Her eyes, bright and cool as a North Sea fret,
see into living rooms and kitchens down below,
the playgrounds and the studios and offices,
the goings-on of families whose tables she has set.

They say the folk up here are years behind,
as if the only things worth having must be made
by mind and sinew in the workshops of the south,
but gumption is acquired in ways that can't be known,
and though she is the daughter of a sprawl of moor
and industry, she's *a la mode*, and knows the worth
of brass and how it ought to sound when blown.

Remembering her summer days up in the Vale,
her face is young again, and smooth as York stone.
Reckoning her county as a state of mind, its becks
and dales like articles of faith, its sweeps of weather
paint the canvas of a life. A sudden shaft of light
comes streaming through the darkening sky,
marking out the road over the tops, and on, forever.

**The Jewel
for Ruby**



Ruby was the jewel that could never be replaced,
a priceless fire-lit gem to whom the best of us aspire,
whose every polished facet shone a glow of quiet grace.

There was steadfast independence in the setting of her face,
a wisdom in her ways that took a lifetime to acquire,
for Ruby was a jewel that could never be replaced.

Such love of her surroundings, such contented sense of place,
those tea-room assignations all through Yorkshire's rolling shire.
From every polished facet shone a glow of quiet grace.

A little square of chocolate was a sign of simple taste,
or tennis for its drama and *Strictly* for its fire.
Yes, Ruby was a jewel that could never be replaced.

What kindnesses and comfort, what warmth in her embrace,
from lemon drizzle Christmases to christenings and choirs.
From every polished facet shone a glow of quiet grace.

The lights dim at St Mary's for the ending of a race,
a thing of honest beauty, something precious to admire,
whose every polished facet shone a glow of quiet grace.
Dear Ruby is the jewel that will never be replaced.

At a funeral it's very difficult to sum up a person's life in a way that works for everyone; we all knew a slightly different version of Pete depending on who we were to him. Some knew Pete the life-partner, some Pete the father, the grandfather, the brother. In my case it was Uncle Peter, but to others it was Pete the work colleague, Pete the friend, Pete the person you met and said hello to once in a while. Pete the child, Pete the teenager, Pete the man. Yes, the same person, but somehow slightly different for each one of us.

I offer a short patchwork of recollection gathered from family, friends and work colleagues. Thank you to all who have helped with this – you know who you are. Not all of it will mean something to you, of course, but I hope you catch the echo of Pete's voice and his character in some of the lines.

Our Pete Sez

Our Pete sez how do? Not seen you for a while.
Our Pete sez stick with me, I'll show you the ropes.
Our Pete sez Facebook? What a waste of bloody time.
Our Pete sez there's no Tories in this house.
Our Pete sez oy you - get your kids OUT of the sauna.
Our Pete sez everything I know I learned from Max Shacklady's.
Our Pete sez it's alright, I've already fixed it.
Our Pete sez hurry up, it's Question Time on in a minute.
Our Pete sez me mam said not to climb on the shed roof.
Our Pete sez I'd rather be in a Manhattan taxi than on the Metrolink.
Our Pete sez nearest the bull starts, eh?
Our Pete sez you can't beat a bit of Pachelbel's Canon.
Our Pete sez I had a dog once. Right little bastard it was.
Our Pete sez price of a pint these days, it's ridiculous.
Our Pete sez oy you – shower before you get in the pool.
Our Pete sez I can't hear anything when I'm reading the paper
Our Pete sez go and have a walk, it'll make you feel better.
Our Pete sez what's the Swedish for 'get in there Tommy'?
Our Pete sez Territorial Army? More like Dad's Army.
Our Pete sez it's nice, but it's not the Isle of Man.
Our Pete sez you'll have to ask our Alec, he's the boss.
Our Pete sez no ta, just a diet coke for me.
Our Pete sez y'know, I think my snooker's improving.
Our Pete sez Garlic? And Bread? No thankyou...
Our Pete sez come on United, shape yourself.

Our Pete sez me mobile number? Not a clue.
Our Pete sez you've just got to crack on.
Crack on Our Pete. Crack on.

Why The Man Wears Black

They asked about the man
in black; why does he wear
the darkness so? I answered;

Not the black of dull disguise
but dapper coat drawn over clothes,
clothes over flesh, flesh over soul.

Not the black of a mourner's hat
but a flat cap that holds the lid
upon a wise and lovely mind.

Not the black of a hollow sky
but a drape that cannot mask
the eye-flash bristling of stars.

Not the black of a dying day
but a bird-full night, rustling
with his creatures and their ways.

Not the black hull of a closed piano
but the dance of notes between
the solid lines of his libretto.

Not the black of writer's block
but words still to be made,
and curious about their coming shape.

Not the black of absent colour
but the shadow at my shoulder as he
talks me through the birth of summer.

Not the black of *who goes there?*
but the unstruck match that flares
to spark the candlelight that goes before.

So that is why the man wears black;
not as gothic sadness, or a pseudonym
but so the light of others is not dimmed.

For Valerie

In many corners of this flat shire
there are adults who do not know
why they hold a brush so perfectly
or sketch so accurately,
people who do not know
where they learned to love beauty.

There is a schoolhouse, bright and bold.
When you are six or seven
it reaches halfway up to the sky.
Some will remember, to their last,
a teacher who brought that sky down
to where you could touch it.

In the strange, far colonies
some travelling folk remember
meeting with her in queues for a bus,
airport terminals, hotel lobbies.
We must stay in touch she said,
and she kept writing, in a joyful hand.

She would not paint her own picture,
yet still a perfect self-portrait

hangs in our own little galleries,
ochre, umber, sienna, aquamarine,
bright colours always, colours she loved
as deeply as we loved her.

The Walker

The walker laces up his faithful boots, wanders out
through quiet village lanes, hailed by kindly shouts
from travellers who know his single-minded stride.
This walk will take him far from home, through wide
glens, a fording of burns. He sometimes walks alone,
but stops to help the sightless find a pathway of their own.

The walk will take him through the great Savannah,
the noble elephants at rest, to the heaving clamour
of the old colonial towns, then slowly turning east
to lonely saffron villages, where air is thickly laced
with spices hanging sweet as shafts of midday light,
undisturbed by trains that steam through in the night.

Finally, the snow-domed peak he came to climb
comes into view. He knows each journey has its time,
and steps out on the steep ascent, through clouds
and rain, to reach the final summit, where a crowd
is waiting, calling out his name. Then, out comes the sun,
the promise of eternal brightness when the walk is done.

Andy Jackson
azjackson65@gmail.com

Ordinary Women

Ordinary women learn to dance early
to help them stay a step ahead of partners.
They exercise by running down buses,
balancing a baby on each arm.

Ordinary women talk in the street
while lamp-posts lean in to listen.
They sit in offices and schools and homes,
knitting calm from skeins of chaos.

Ordinary women lurk in libraries
knowing the food of wisdom is information.
They share intelligence at ten fifteen;
by noon the news is half way to the moon.

Ordinary women link their arms, and
neither man nor curse can break their ranks.
They never stoop nor bend the knee, except
to hoist the world on their shoulders.

Ordinary women know where everything is,
what it's for, and where you can get it cheap.
They never tarnish other people's hearts,
but polish them with elbow grease and brasso.

Ordinary women are only ordinary
to those who cannot conceive extraordinary.
They do not die, but sing their stories,
smiling in the chorus line of eternity.

Air Band Radio

Each Friday,
softened by wages,
he came home early,
lay dissolving
his worker's grime,
water rising and falling
with his breath,
lapping in sympathy
with the buzz
of his radio -
not music but chatter
from the control tower,
the cocky few
flying in for the weekend.

He knew their business:
diverted souls
bound for Blackpool,
or weathered out
of Ringway,
in their tin cans,
dropping steeply
to the moss-green pasture
across the canal.

His sons passed out
in rigid blue, rank
upon rank upon rank,
starting a life
he might have wanted
as his own,
flashes of himself
in them,
and them in him.

Crisply clothed
in clean dusk air,
he watches alone
from the turf below
the tower, standing
at the wrong end
of his binoculars,
radio hissing
on the car bonnet.

Tiny noisy aircraft
stooge above him,
little wings, diamonds
in the sky, gleaming
with every dip
of their nose,
their earthly forms
of china-cloth
and plywood turned
to miracles of glass
and silver as they rise,
the young man now old,
no chart to guide
the route, just
his unshaking hand
at the controls.

The Long Game

adapted from a poem by Eddie Gibbons

The match's end is drawing near
but we are done with weeping
for the long ball that we did not see
that caught defences sleeping.

Life moves fast out on the flanks,
we all must bear its crosses.
Our star man smiles and nods his thanks
as the long game closes.

We contemplate the lasting worth
of life, and our endeavour -
the pass, the run, the bodyswerve,
the occasional free header.

No substitutions up our sleeves,
some days are wins, some losses.
The anxious faithful still believe,
as the long game closes.

The final moments shamble in,
the game is ending, slowly.
The crowd departs, their chants a hymn,
and no sound is more holy.

Final whistle, floodlights dim.
The pitch is strewn with roses.
Somewhere, another game begins
but here, the long game closes.

Writing a poem to remember someone

Sarah Salway

There are many beautiful published poems that you can use at a funeral or memorial but sometimes you might feel you've heard them too often or you want to write something personal. So where to begin?

Let's start by being aware that this isn't a school exercise, you can't get it wrong, no one is going to judge your spelling, or your grammar, or your handwriting. Also that your poem is something only YOU can write, so it needs to sound like you, how you speak and above all, it's something that sums up the person you are remembering. Sometimes putting in a little trait or memory that will make people laugh is the best thing. Actually very often the emphasis is on 'little' — often the times I've been most moved are when, for example, family and friends talk about the way someone peeled an apple or greeted his neighbours every morning, rather than trying to sum up the whole of someone's life in one line.

Here are three prompts to help get you started.

1. Write a WORDPOOL

It's hard to start with a blank page, so gather together a list of words that come to mind when you think of the person you're writing a poem for. You can put the person's name in the middle of the page and just keep adding words and memories around it. Don't worry about making sense at this point — or whether any of the words link. They can be sayings, favourite foods, colours, landscapes, or just random words such as 'hair' or 'boots' or 'weather'... anything you like..

Maybe you want to look at their job, passion, interest, and put a list of words to do with fishing, family, shopping, building, accounts. You can also ask friends and families for their words, and incorporate these into your poem it's all good.

Then when you have your list of words, read through them all and circle or underline the ones you feel have special energy. Put these on a clean page and start writing your poem including as many as you can. If they don't seem to link, then sometimes that's the best thing, eg

John's favourite colour was red.

We'd shield delicate ears during

Match of the Day, especially when

the Gunners were playing.

Or

In the car, we often played a game,

searching for the one road you hadn't run,

three marathons, ten halves,

£10,000 for charity, goodness knows

how many hamstring stretches

in the hall where your medals

still hang, racers on the starting line

2. The ABCEDARIAN

Perhaps the name is a give-away here, but put the letters of the person down the left hand side of the page, and write from this. You can use first name, first name and surname, nickname, or maybe you want to use Granny, or Best Friend. It's up to you.

*Her favourite thing was laughing,
Everytime we heard her, we'd smile
And she was so kind, always
There to help others, especially
Her grandchildren, her pride and joy,
Endless energy and enormous heart,
Rest in peace, dear Heather, we love you.*

It's worth getting a dictionary for this one, and also because people listening might not get the form, perhaps you'd like to share a copy.

3. Make a COLLAGE

Ask friends and family for things they remember about your loved one, and put these together using a starter such as *We remember, or Jamie always, or even She, eg*

We remember how he was never late for work and yet always stopped to pat a dog. We remember his bright red trousers, the sweets he'd keep for us in a pocket so Granny couldn't see, how he loved sea swimming and holidays. We remember him telling us to work hard at school, teaching us to tell the time. We remember how competitive he was at cards, how he'd cry at silly films, was always first to buy a drink...

Some final tips:

1. Read your poem aloud several times. Sometimes you may want to shorten the lines to help with your breathing (I know that too long lines make me cry), but also you often pick up mistakes you might miss otherwise.
2. Keep asking yourself, does this sound like me? Often when we are new to poetry, we tend to revert to what we were taught at school: old fashioned structures and strange words such as 'hereafter' or 'upon' which we would never say in real life. You want your poem to sound as natural as it can.
3. Don't expect it to be perfect first time. In fact it's excellent to start with a very messy draft, and then edit to really build up a picture of the person. Remember small details bring someone to life. Hopefully you'll find that the more you write, the more things you'll think of to put in.
4. Remember that what you're writing is a gift for the person, for you, and for everyone who hears it. It's a beautiful and worthwhile thing to do.

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