



# How to Plan a Memorial Service

**GOOD NEIGHBORS OF PARK SLOPE**

**PRESENTATION BY SUZANNE GREEN**

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# WELCOME



Suzanne Green  
Owner and Lead Planner

## *About me:*

I've lived in Park Slope/Windsor Terrace for over 20 years.

I've worked in the fields of dispute resolution, financial services, care management, and end-of-life planning for the past 25 years.

In the last three years, I've coordinated 600+ Celebration of Life events with my team - ***each was as unique as the honoree.***

# Funeral, Memorial Service, Celebration of Life: *What's the difference?*

- Tone
- Timing
- Attendees
- Body or remains present

A **Memorial Service** and a **Funeral** are end-of-life events that honor someone who died recently. Religious and cultural factors often dictate the timing, usually within a week or two of passing. The body or remains are typically present at a funeral and may or may not be present at a memorial service.

A **Celebration of Life** can be held in the weeks or months after death with a focus on celebrating a loved one's life rather than focusing on their death. Family, friends, and neighbors gather to celebrate their passions, values, intellectual curiosity, professional achievements, and societal contributions.

# COVID Changed Everything About How We Gather



**"Permission to do things differently"**

# How Cremation is Changing Memorials

**Cremation Rates:** In 2023, the cremation rate is 60%. By 2035 this rate will grow to 80%

## "Greener" options are trending:

- **Electric Cremation (highlighted in a New Yorker article shared on Good Neighbors of Park Slope in early March)** vs. current gas methods.
- **Alkaline hydrolysis or more commonly known as Water Cremation**, uses water, alkaline chemicals, heat, and sometimes pressure and agitation to accelerate natural decomposition, leaving bone fragments and a neutral liquid called effluent.
- **Natural Organic Reduction, more commonly known as Human Composting:** In January, New York State became the sixth to legalize this option. The body is placed in a reusable, semi-open vessel containing suitable bedding – wood chips, alfalfa, or straw – ideal for microbes to go about their work. At the end of the process, a heaped cubic yard of nutrient-dense soil, equivalent to 36 bags of soil, is produced that can then be used as fertilizer.
- **Tree Burial:** Returned to its most natural form, the body is readied for burial and adorned in 100% organic biodegradable flax linen that breaks down at the pace of nature.

# GETTING STARTED

## Step 1: Determine the Location

- In-person
  - Home
  - Restaurant
  - House of Worship
  - Catering Hall
- Virtual: A virtual component enables family and friends to come together from near and far without traveling. Speakers and guests attend with a wifi or mobile connection on their own device.
- Hybrid - both in-person and virtual guests (\*most popular)

## Step 2: Select a Date/Time:

- Most speakers/guests are available
- Meaningful date: birthday, anniversary, holiday
- Coincide with a family reunion or other planned gathering

## Step 3: Event Planning

- Planning Committee: who are the decision-makers?
- Different strengths for different tasks
  - event planning & coordination
  - media creation
  - tech experience if virtual

## Program

Opening Remarks

Storytelling Speakers (live or recorded) with different perspectives sharing: eulogy, remembrance, tribute

Reading / Poem / Scripture / Hymns

Musical Performance (instrumental or vocal)

Group Activity: examples include: Toasts Candle Lighting, Virtual Hold Hands, Haiku sharing, Word Cloud

Slideshow: share photos and **music**

Facilitated Open Share

Closing Remarks

## Elements

**Connect with what brought them joy!**

**Incorporate a few of their favorite things.....**Ice cream parties, fireworks, wearing a favorite team (school, clubs) jersey or colors, candle lighting, toasts, haiku, and other poetry writing, sharing and preparing a favorite cookie recipe, sharing knitting and quilting projects made by the honoree, eating Dairy Queen Dilly bars, wearing a favorite irreverent T-shirt belonging to the honorees, yoga stretch, 7th inning stretch (with “Take me out to the ball game” played), Wordclouds, top ten lists (David Letterman style)...

*And the list goes on.....*

# Sample Event Program



*Remembering*

**Charolette Rossy**

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**Celebration of Life**

May 14, 2023

3:00 PM PT, 5:00 PM CT, 6:00 PM ET

## *Order of Service*

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**Welcome and Remembrance by:** Joseph Rossy

**"Amazing Grace" performed by** Johnny Rossy

**Remembrance by:** Mary Rossy Cohen

**Remembrance by:** John Williams

**Poem "A Mother's Love" by:** Jennifer Lamont

**Slideshow**

**Toast led by** Gamma Phi Beta Sorority Sisters

**Open Share of Memories**

**Candle Lighting Ceremony**

**Closing Remarks**

# TRENDS in Memorial Planning

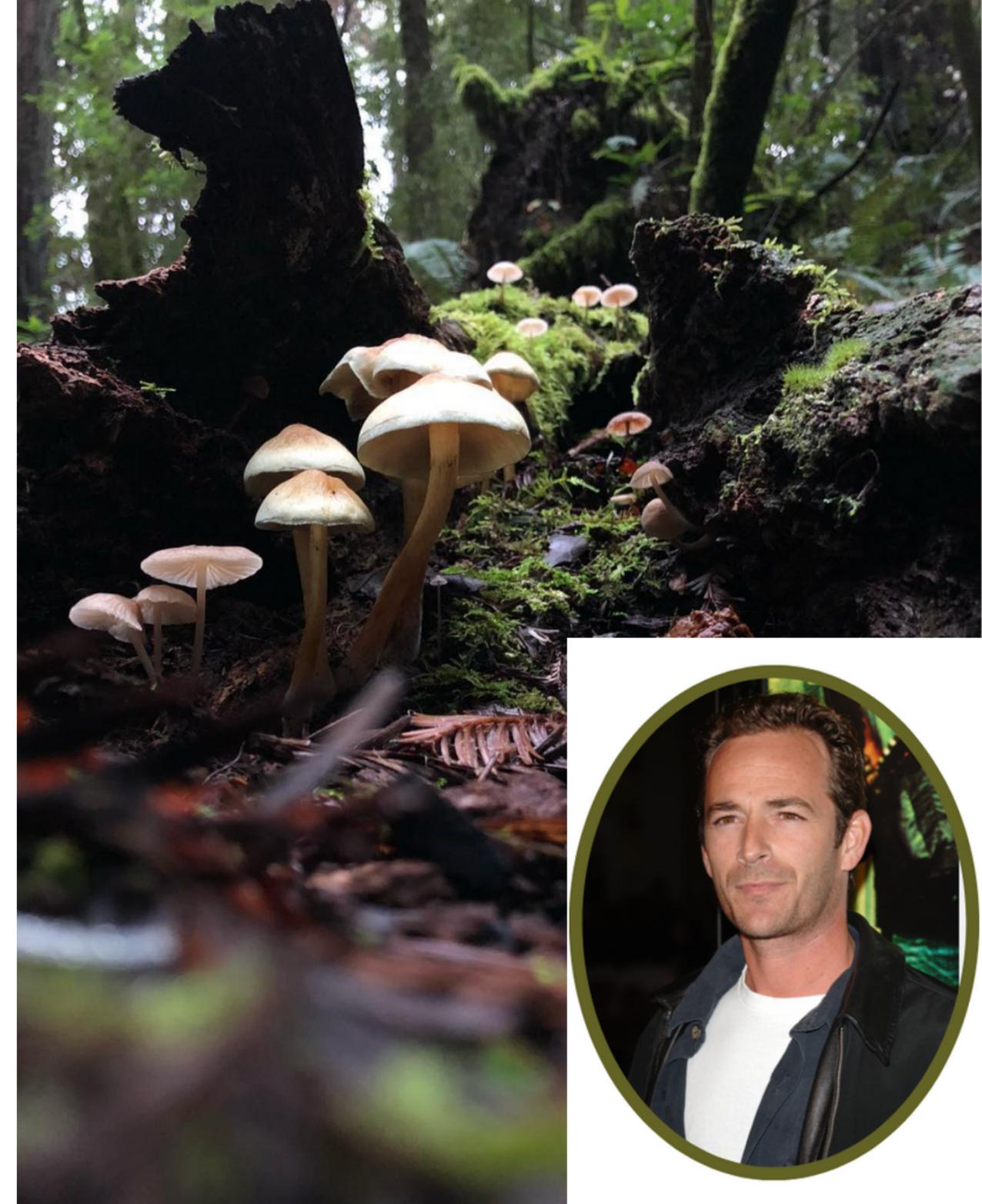
- All virtual or hybrid events
- Living Life Celebrations
- Celebration of Life
- More than one end-of-life event
- **The last word...**  
In Oct 2022, a woman who died of cancer at age 81 prepared for the occasion by making handmade Ouija boards for guests and a photo of her sticking her tongue out and putting her middle fingers up in the air, along with a little note that read, "**Let's keep in touch!**"



**Share your wishes with your loved ones.  
It may be one of the greatest gifts you give.**

There is great comfort in knowing how a loved one wants to be cared for in death.

Luke Perry's daughter shared that her father was buried in a "Mushroom suit" after his unexpected death. She said, "My dad discovered it and was more excited by this than I have ever seen him. He was buried in this suit, one of his final wishes.



# Planning A Memorial Takeaways

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## **Create an end-of-life and legacy plan.**

Just as a will is a legal document that shares your wishes for your estate after you die, create a ***Celebration of Life & Legacy Plan***.

This gives family and friends direction on how you want your life to be celebrated. Some considerations:

- Photos
- Music
- Tone (Crying corner with monogrammed hankies or a blood donation in lieu of flowers)
- Passions

# Telling Your Story

Write your obituary.

Sharing your life story how you want it told is one of the best gifts you can give yourself and your loved ones.

Leave instructions for the type of Memorial Service you'd like.

**Always share the "why"**

## **"The Best Obituary Ever, and the Wacky Funeral That Followed"**

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/hartfordcourant/name/joe-heller-obituary?n=joe-heller&pid=193855516&fhid=24219>

Joe was a frequent shopper at the Essex Dump and he left his family with a house full of crap, 300 pounds of birdseed and dead houseplants that they have no idea what to do with. If there was ever a treasure that he snatched out from under you among the mounds of junk, please wait the appropriate amount of time to contact the family to claim your loot. We're available tomorrow. Joe was also a consummate napper. There wasn't a road, restaurant or friend's house in Essex that he didn't fall asleep on or in. There wasn't an occasion too formal or an event too dour that Joe didn't interrupt with his apnea and voluminous snoring. Besides his beloved wife, Irene, and brother, Bobby, Joe was pre-deceased by his pet fish, Jack, who we found in the freezer last week. that they have no idea what to do with. Feel free to be as late as you'd like as Joe was never on time for anything because of the aforementioned napping habits. **Joe despised formality and stuffiness and would really be ticked off if you showed up in a suit. Dress comfortably. The family encourages you to don the most inappropriate T-Shirt that you are comfortable being seen in public with as Joe often did. Everybody has a Joe story and we'd love to hear them all. Joe faced his death and his mortality, as he did with his life, face on, often telling us that when he dropped dead to dig a hole in the back yard and just roll him in.** Much to his disappointment, he will be properly interred with full military honors (and maybe Jack) next to his wife on Friday, September 13, at 10:00 am in Centerbrook Cemetery.

# Did a Premature Obituary Inspire the Nobel Prize?

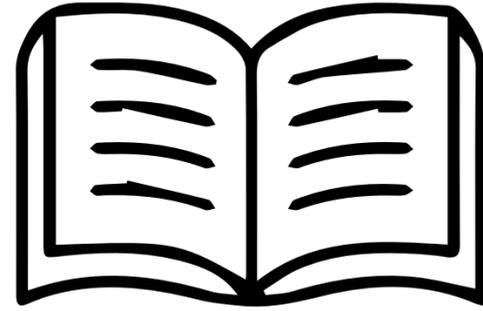
Until his death in 1896, Alfred Nobel was best known for his family's invention of dynamite and the invention of an explosive device called a blasting cap, earning him the nickname “dynamite king.”

But, in 1888, Alfred's brother Ludvig died in France from a heart attack. Thanks to poor reporting, at least one French newspaper believed that Alfred had passed and wrote a scathing obituary that branded him a “**merchant of death**” who had grown rich by developing new ways to “mutilate and kill.” The error was later corrected, but not before Alfred had the unpleasant experience of reading his own death notice.

His biographer and many others believe the incident may have brought on a crisis of conscience and motivated him to reevaluate his legacy. He re-wrote his will and donated most of his fortune to the Nobel Prize institution, which would annually recognize those who “conferred the greatest benefit to humankind”.



# Resources



## ***"Yours Truly: An Obituary Writer's Guide to Telling Your Story"***

By James R. Hagerty

Obituary writer for *the Wall Street Journal*

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## **Lets Reimagine End of Life**

<https://letsreimagine.org/>

Let's reimagine loss, adversity, and mortality and channel life's challenges into meaning and growth.

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## **End Well**

<https://endwellproject.org/>

End Well is a nonprofit dedicated to the belief that all people should experience the end of life in a way that matches their values and goals.

# Resources

## End-of-Life Resources

**Lantern**

<https://www.lantern.co>

**Cake**

[www.joincake.com](http://www.joincake.com)

**Empathy**

[www.empathy.com](http://www.empathy.com)



**Thank you!**  
**Do you have**  
**any questions?**



**holding space**  
EVENTS

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