


## News from Head Office ...

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# Trainers' update

Recently sitting in a seemingly endless stream of Sydney traffic I noticed for the first time that the trees had begun to bud and my winter weary heart leapt for joy. Such is the power of memory, that in the days since I have seen signs of new life emerging all around and have begun to eagerly anticipate the beauty of blossom trees and colourful gardens.

Today's *Trainers' Update* focuses on the power of memory and its importance in the healing process for those who have been bereaved. It includes some interesting insights into past and present cultural practices and offers suggestions for memorialising our loved ones. These "memorials" help us to release some of the energy connected with our feelings.

Another important Spring task offered within *Seasons for Growth* is the need for forgiveness. In recent months we have seen two interesting examples of people writing about or sharing their experience of forgiveness.

The first was found in Una Glennon's book, *Ciara's Gift: Grief Edged with Gold*. In this book, she states,

Grief doesn't end. You learn to live with it. No matter what day it is there's an underlying sadness in everything. But it doesn't prevent you from enjoying life. It's part of that paradox of life that the two can actually go on at the same time.

This inspiring mother whose daughter's murder remains unsolved 13 years later tells how coming to terms with this tragedy has made her a better, less judgmental person, and why she had to forgive the person (or persons) who robbed her of Ciara.

The second story of forgiveness is found in Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton's *Letter to Open Minded Australians* published in the Herald Sun in August, in which she states,

Forgiveness is for yourself, it puts the responsibility on those who hurt you, and lets you get on with your life. It does not say it is ok to hurt me, then hurt me

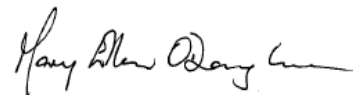
again. It simply says yes you hurt me, you had no right to do that to me but you did. I acknowledge that you did that and that I am not responsible for your actions.

I will not take over the continuation of you actions towards me by allowing you or them to dwell in my mind and continue to fester and ruin my life. I have taken back control of my own life and head space and move forward. I am moving forward, not looking backward.

So, have I forgiven everyone involved in creating the fiasco of the last thirty years and the public so willing to believe the worst and spread nasty rumours? Of course I have. I have handed the hurt back to those who caused it and it is up to them as individuals to ask God to forgive them for what they did, because I forgave long ago and moved on.

While both of these women write from a Christian perspective, their insights into the power and need for forgiveness are helpful for all who seek to let go of the pain and resentment of past hurts and so be freed of the "thief in our heart".

May your Spring be a time of new life in all its fullness.



Mary Ellen O'Donoghue rsj  
CEO, Good Grief Ltd.





# Memorialising...

## *Creating presence out of absence*

When someone dies, it can feel as though they leave behind a hole that can never be filled by anything or anyone else. Those who love them will often seek to create some sort of permanent marker to commemorate their life and honour their death. In the face of absence, we feel a need to create a presence of some kind, and a memorial provides a focus for family, friends and future generations to reflect, remember and pay tribute.

Memorials can provide a space for people to grieve for and connect with the dead. They facilitate a conversation with the person who has died by naming them, and, in doing so, separating them out as individuals with a unique and precious legacy. The creation of a memorial can be a therapeutic process, providing a focus and purpose for someone who is grieving, and helping them to feel connected or close to their loved one. The completion of the memorial does not indicate that the search for meaning is over, but it can mark a turning point in the grief journey and provide a site or object that serves as a “visiting space”.

Memorialising is a practice as old and varied as humankind.

- It has taken the form of great structures: the pyramids in Egypt were built to honour pharaohs who died, and the Taj Mahal in India was built by an emperor as a monument to his late wife.
- In some cultures parts of the deceased’s body or belongings were fashioned into keepsakes for those who mourned them: ancient Greeks venerated the ashes of their dead, while in Victorian society people would plait the hair of their loved one and include it in earrings and brooches. Today we can have gemstones created from the ashes of our loved ones, or have their ashes enclosed in precious metal to make rings or pendants.
- To mark burial grounds, some Aboriginal tribes erect burial poles or leave stencil markings and paintings in caves
- The Maori erect a memorial stone called a “Hura Kohatu” in the final stage of their mourning journey, and return to it to leave painted pebbles, food, plants, shells and beer for their loved one’s spirit.
- Headstones and statues have been part of Western society’s culture of memorialising for centuries. Today this practice has expanded outside the cemetery to include plaques in crematoriums and the many roadside crosses that flank our highways.
- If you added up all the memorials in the USA you would have enough to dedicate one to every American who’s ever lived, every American who’s currently living, as well as five or so generations’ worth of Americans yet unborn!<sup>1</sup>



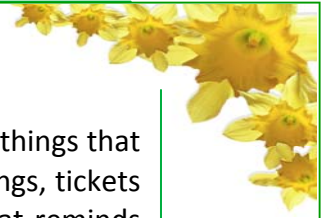
Aboriginal Burial Poles



One of the biggest fears of a person who is grieving is that the person they love will be forgotten. A memorial serves as a solid and constant commemoration of the life of a loved one, so that their memory can live on long after their death.

<sup>1</sup>Bill Andrews, president of the American Institute of Commemorative Art, *Believer* magazine 2010

## Ways we can memorialise...



**Create a memory book.** This is like a scrapbook filled with memories of or things that remind you of the person who has died. You can include photographs, drawings, tickets to a movie, game or show you attended together, a poem they wrote or that reminds you of them, a pressed leaf or flower from their garden, their favourite recipe... anything that is unique or special to them. You can add comments next to the things you stick in the book, and this can be a great thing to share with others or to take to 'introduce' someone to the person you love.

**Make a memory box.** This is a similar idea to the memory book, but here you have the space for objects that remind you of the person you love, eg presents they gave you, things they owned and held dear, or items that remind you of them. You can include letters, diaries, pictures, plaques, medals, jewellery, things from nature like feathers, gumnuts or shells, souvenirs from shared holidays, wrappers from their favourite sweets, even their handkerchief or swimming cap... anything that represents a part of them. You can make the box yourself, or decorate a shoebox. A memory box can become a precious treasure trove that you continue to add to and for you to sort through when you want to feel close to them.



**Make a space.** Set aside a nook in your home to commemorate your loved one's life. You can put together a collection of framed photos, some special objects like figurines, plaques, awards, or trophies. A favourite hat, pair of glasses or a walking cane can offer simple but precious memories of your loved one, as can a favourite book or magazine. By placing fresh flowers around them and lighting candles from time to time you can bring the space to life.

**Organise an annual event.** If they loved cricket, you could hold an annual cricket match. If they loved to barbeque or bake, a gathering around food is always a wonderful way to share fond memories and make new ones.

**Support a cause.** Donate to or volunteer with a charity that your loved one was committed to, or which is relevant to the way they lived or died. You could have a commemorative fundraiser with friends and family or make a donation in their name.

**Plant a tree.** Or a shrub or pot plant... choose a plant that reminds you of your loved one in some way and spend time nourishing it and watching it grow. If you have the space, a memorial garden can be a beautiful way to honour a loved one, and provides a space for quiet reflection.

**Name something in their honour.** These days you can dedicate all sorts of things to the memory of a loved one. You can name a star after them, or sponsor an animal at the zoo, a bench in their favourite park, or a seat at the theatre.

**Make a Memorial Website.** There are many websites that provide space for you to create an online memorial for your loved one. You can include pictures, quotes and music, and you can open it so that friends and family can leave comments and messages too.



## Website news!

Firstly, thank you to all of you for engaging with the new website and all the new procedures. We've been getting great feedback on the content and the "look and feel" of the site, and you will be pleased to hear that we are in planning to make the registration process more simple and streamlined.

The reason we redeveloped our website and database was to increase our training numbers and to ensure that we have usable and up-to-date data on all our Companions. And so far, so good!

- ◆ 1,130 Companions are now registered!
- ◆ Sales of Grief Awareness materials (Picking Up the Pieces, Literature for Life etc) have increased by approximately 20%
- ◆ 415 Companions were trained between July 08 to July 09



## *Memory Flowers* by Donna Ellis & Philippa Morton

*Memory Flowers* is a beautiful children's picture that has been written and illustrated by Donna Ellis and Philippa Morton that centres around a young family comprising of Mum, Dad, Rory, Lauren and their pet dog, Charlie. Charlie is old, and when he dies the family must find a way to say goodbye to their much-loved pet.

As Dad prepares to bury Charlie in the box they all decorated, they pick flowers from their garden to place on Charlie's grave. As each one places their flowers with Charlie they share three special memories of him. Together they cry a little, laugh a little and remember the happy times they shared.

After they bury Charlie, they decide to go for a drive to his favourite beach. Along the way they drive past a cemetery and Lauren asks her dad what all the flowers on the hill are for. And so they learn that 'memory flowers' can be for people too.

The purpose of this story is to show how memories can be kept alive, and how they can bring happiness through the tears. With simple language and bright engaging pictures, this book serves to gently open a conversation on death and grief between children and adults. It is ideal for children who have suffered loss, or simply as a medium to demystify the subject of death with them in a gentle way.

*Memory Flowers* costs \$14.99 and can be ordered online at [www.vetmax.com.au](http://www.vetmax.com.au) or by emailing [sales@memoryflowers.com.au](mailto:sales@memoryflowers.com.au).

It is aimed at children aged 6-10 years.

