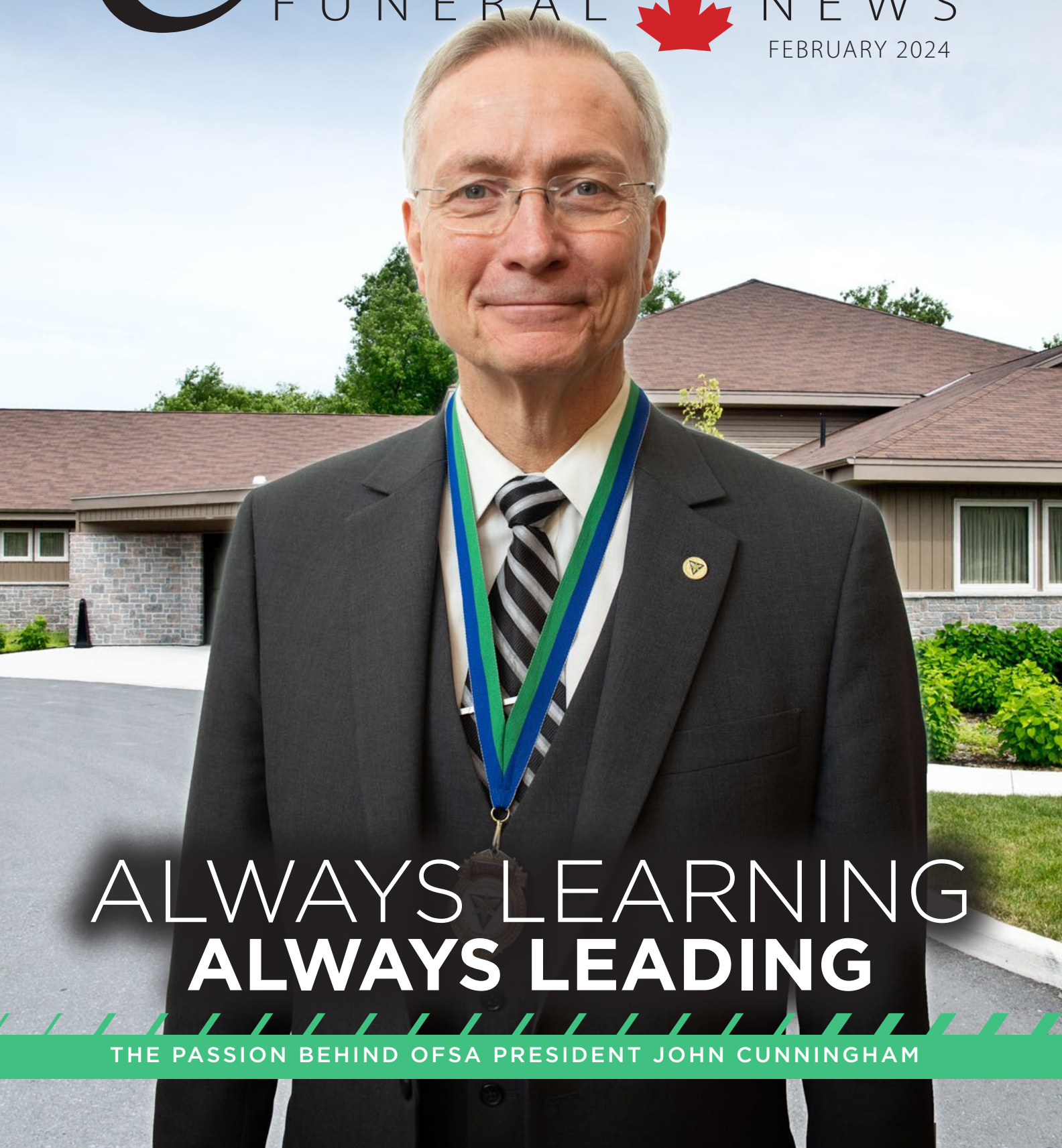


Canadian

FUNERAL NEWS



FEBRUARY 2024



ALWAYS LEARNING
ALWAYS LEADING

THE PASSION BEHIND OFSA PRESIDENT JOHN CUNNINGHAM

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"Don't cry because it's over; smile because it happened." ~ Dr. Seuss



John Cunningham

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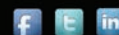
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Pat Ottmann

CONFLICT ENTREPRENEURS

by Pat Ottmann

"To point with pride, view with alarm and occasionally recommend."

“Conflict entrepreneurs” is a new term to me but one that struck a chord as I listened to a podcast where a gentleman named David Brooks was being interviewed. For context, the subject matter centred on “Why everyone’s social skills are getting worse.” Brooks went into detail on numbers that paint a pretty discouraging picture for our young people and the trends that are prevalent today. The manner in which current technologies isolate people, intended or not, is creating a class of very lonely people without the social skills to get out.

Brooks then went on to talk about what this isolation has done to people in general. Part of the outcome is the absolute loss of interpersonal trust. Two generations ago, when people were asked how many others they could share their deepest thoughts and secrets with, the answer was three. Today, it is predominately zero. We are losing connection with family, community and church. Just think about that and the effect it has on society. How it impacts your work, and the impression of the person on the phone or walking through your door.

Thus, the term “conflict entrepreneurs.” It is easy to create conflict in a society that has no trust.

Think politics. We in the western world have become extremely divided. Left or right. The distrust of who we do not follow is incredibly high. As Brooks describes, “We have understanding nowhere and judgment everywhere.” Think climate change.

Again, take this to your business. If you were afforded the opportunity to have every family who comes through your door truly understand the value of the funeral service (in terms of recognition of loss, community involvement and acknowledgment, support, emotionally accepting what has occurred, etc.) would that not make your career much more fulfilling and rewarding? Kind of like generations gone by when people just seemed to know these things.

This is not an easy trail, but it is a necessary one in every community and every service held every day in order to preserve the good work that is done. The trend is not to be ignored as it will affect your future.

Today, the conflict entrepreneur does everything possible to tear down what you do and build up what they do. Every news story, Marketplace article, every chink in the armour of funeral service is illuminated to catastrophic levels and to what purpose? Every time one entity loses ground, another one gains it. Perhaps it is an alternative service, perhaps it is the regulators riding in to save the day, perhaps it is just to sell newspapers and viewership or perhaps for reasons beyond my comprehension ... but rest assured, there is a reason and it plays on the human characteristic of mistrust.

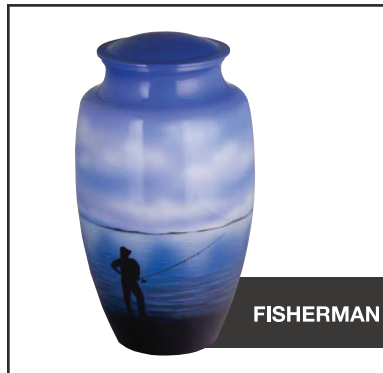
Shelley Challenger of New Haven Funeral Centre shared a post that read “Market Yourself, Brand Yourself, Promote Yourself.” I believe she is on track with the sentiment: the only way to fight the mistrust that is coming our way as a profession is to rise above and prove it wrong. When you come to know a person, the ability to trust compounds exponentially over the words or thoughts from an unknown source.

This is not an easy trail, but it is a necessary one in every community and every service held every day in order to preserve the good work that is done. The trend is not to be ignored as it will affect your future.

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ALWAYS LEARNING ALWAYS LEADING

THE PASSION BEHIND OFSA PRESIDENT JOHN CUNNINGHAM

by Lisa Johnston

From his commitment to the Peterborough community to his involvement in funeral service associations, John Cunningham has always been one to step up to the plate, share his knowledge and give back to others. It's a driving force in how he conducts his business and personal life, which also makes him the perfect person to lead the Ontario Funeral Service Association (OFSA) as president.

Cunningham answered the call when former OFSA president Scott MacCoubrey approached him about a board opening in 2022. With an abundance of knowledge and expertise behind him after serving as chair of GFD, chair of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario's aquamation sub-committee and with the Bay of Quinte Funeral Service Association, Cunningham happily accepted the vacant eastern Ontario director's seat. The next year, president Brett Denning needed a vice president. Cunningham again volunteered, knowing full well he'd be president the following year.

"There was a need and they were looking for someone from the eastern region," says Cunningham. "With the exception of a three-year hiatus, I had been a member of OFSA since I was first licensed in 1985, but I hadn't served on the board, so I thought it was the perfect time to step up. I've seen a lot of leaders come and go in the past 40 years, and I've learned something from all of them. Each one has given their time and expertise to make the profession better."

Cunningham has never been one to shy away from challenges and the opportunity to learn. From starting his own funeral home in 2004, to



John Cunningham

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Ashburnham Spirit Award winners with John Cunningham.

buying a church to open a second location in 2011, to being one of the first to offer alkaline hydrolysis in the province of Ontario, he knows from experience, things don't come easy. As a result, he is happy to share his knowledge to help the profession and others succeed.

"Any time a high school student, a Trent University forensics student or a Fleming College student wants to come to the funeral home to learn more about the profession, or complete a placement, I'm happy to comply," says Cunningham. "I know it was a life-changing experience for me and I certainly want to pay that forward."

Although funeral service extends back five generations in Cunningham's family, he initially began his post-secondary career pursuing a geography degree before deciding to enrol in Humber College's funeral education program. Even though funeral service had skipped his parents' generation, something was pulling him to the sector.

"The college required me to complete a placement for 40 hours before being accepted to make sure it was a good fit, so I went to Comstock Funeral Home in Peterborough and within 30

minutes, my whole understanding and thinking about funeral service changed," recalls Cunningham. "I knew that morning it was the right career for me."

Forty years later, he still backs his decision, "Every time you sit down with a family in the arrangement office, you know you are helping them through one of their most difficult days. Most families have no idea what to do. Others know what they want, but don't know how to get there. You're providing the answers to the difficult questions they have."

Twenty years into his career, Cunningham decided to open his own funeral home, Community Alternative, in 2004. What started as a one-man show, working on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, evolved into a flourishing business with additional staff and eventually the need to expand. The search for a new facility led him to the doors of a half-built church that had run into financial trouble. The property had been deemed unsaleable, but Cunningham had a vision he believed could work.

"We were on the verge of being unable to cope with the volume of families we were receiving in our little 3,300-square-foot funeral home," says Cunningham. "I had been looking for



Peterborough + Kawartha Chamber of Commerce 2023 Business citizen of the Year John Cunningham with presenter Adam Heersink of Nexicom.



John Cunningham attending OACFP's annual conference.

about 18 months when I came across the church. I knew right away it had the perfect layout for a funeral home.”

While the church might have seemed ideal on paper, zoning ended up being an issue for Cunningham when new legislation came into play in 2011. After being told by the inspector, “Congratulations, everything is in order, but you can’t hold a funeral service in your class two facility,” Cunningham faced bankruptcy. Never one to give up, he pursued the issue with both the Board of Funeral Services and the City of Peterborough and nine months later, through some creative thinking and negotiations, was granted permission to operate Ashburnham Funeral Home as a full funeral facility.

It seemed the bad luck was behind him, but that wasn’t the case when Cunningham hit another roadblock when he introduced aquamation to his community.

When asked what advice he would bestow to others planning new business ventures, Cunningham stresses to always be willing to learn and adapt in the face of challenges. “No matter how prepared you are, expect the unexpected. You have to be resilient, put your head down and persevere, driving forward every minute of the day to achieve your goals.”

“We were at the point where we could support our own crematorium, but knowing the Ministry of the Environment and the City of Peterborough would have issues with me operating a flame crematorium in city limits, I began researching aquamation. I thoroughly investigated it and believed it would appeal to many in the community. I built the aquamatorium to the highest standards in the province and then got selected for a moratorium, which stalled the opening.”

Cunningham once again persevered and eventually opened the doors to Kawartha Aquamation, providing flameless cremation to the Peterborough community and leading the way for others to pursue alkaline hydrolysis in the province.

When asked what advice he would bestow to others planning new business ventures, Cunningham stresses to always be willing to learn and adapt in the face of challenges. “No matter how prepared you are, expect the unexpected. You have to be resilient, put your head down and persevere, driving forward every minute of the day to achieve your goals.”

The always learning, always leading mindset is the perfect combination as he now finds himself serving a one-year term as OFSA president. With the recent success in negotiating new rates with the Office of the Chief Coroner, the biggest challenge facing the board is helping members deal with the shortage of qualified funeral directors. “This has become a huge concern, especially in northern communities where it has reached critical levels,” says Cunningham. “OFSA is doing everything we can to address this situation and we are working closely with the BAO to look at alternatives.”

Cunningham says his leadership style is that of a mediator. He tries to listen to all sides to understand the issues brought before him and the board. “In addition,” he says, “I’m not quick



John Cunningham at Kawartha Aquamation.



John Cunningham with Northumberland Symphony.

to judge, and I do bring a historical perspective with close to 40 years of funeral service experience.”

Cunningham credits his staff for allowing him to seek more involvement, whether that be helping with OFSA tasks or serving numerous volunteer roles within the Peterborough community. “Our staff, both present and past, are equally responsible for



Community Alternative Funeral & Cremation Services Ltd.

our success,” he says. “Starting in the early days with funeral director and respected community leader Gary Stewart to the current succession of excellent team members, they have each played a significant part in the success of the businesses.”

For Cunningham, having that strong team in place creates the opportunity to serve on boards and committees with groups such as Rotary, 100 Men of Peterborough and the Showplace Performance Centre. Volunteer activities over the years have included everything from a Cub/Scout leader to a Sunday school teacher and leading weeklong canoe trips for the YMCA National Leadership Training and Conference Centre. The father of three grown children also plays the tuba in three ensembles and played electric bass in a local blues band. Music is a huge part of his life but he also enjoys many outdoor pursuits including wilderness canoeing.

In October of 2023, Cunningham’s dedication was honoured when he was named the Peterborough + Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce Business Citizen of the Year. In addition to thanking his team, partners and the community, his acceptance speech centred on mentorship – the reason behind everything he does, whether in the community or at OFSA. This coming spring, he will be inducted into the Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame.

“Mentoring is not about merely passing down knowledge and experience, it is about creating a legacy of leadership and stewardship,” Cunningham said to those in attendance at the awards gala. “It’s about nurturing the potential in others, helping them navigate the often complex and challenging landscape of the business world, and instilling in them the principles of ethics, responsibility and community involvement.

“Mentoring is an investment in the future,” Cunningham concludes. “It’s a powerful means of ensuring that our values and ideals continue beyond our own contributions, leaving the world a better place.”



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Michael Brooke

IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT YOU'RE THE RESOURCE

by Michael Brooke

Let's acknowledge that as someone who plays a role in the death-care profession, you are often called upon to answer some challenging questions about life, death and consciousness. Chances are you are asked to provide insight for those overwhelmed with grief, sadness and fear. As I wrote in my first column, words matter, and the information you share with your families can make all the difference in the world.

Whenever I encounter something that will be of valuable support, my first instinct is to share it. While doing research for another project, I happened to find out about a truly precious resource that helps those coping with death and dying. I am gratified to share it with you, and I hope you share it with others.

When Johanna Lunn was 19, she had the misfortune of encountering three significant deaths, all within the span of three years. "I lost my mother tragically, along with my best friend. I was at the scene of a car accident when an older man died in my arms."

As Lunn explains, she was fresh out of high school and didn't feel she had the confidence to deal with this amount of grief and death. This was at a time when society was utterly death-phobic. But coming out of university, her first job was as a researcher on a documentary for PBS. "I had an opportunity to interview some early death pioneers like Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and anthropologists like Margaret Mead."

Lunn put together a proposal for the network about death and dying in the community context. They thought it was interesting but said, "It's too taboo, and our audience won't go for it." The idea was shelved indefinitely, and Lunn moved on to a successful career in both film and television.

After about 20 years, Lunn started her own production company. Her business partner was receptive when she talked to him about the idea of a film on death and dying. Together, they decided to make it happen.

Whenever I encounter something that will be of valuable support, my first instinct is to share it. While doing research for another project, I happened to find out about a truly precious resource that helps those coping with death and dying. I am gratified to share it with you, and I hope you share it with others.

As Lunn explains, they wanted to explore the subject with fresh eyes. This meant they weren't precisely sure how things would turn out. "We wanted things unscripted. I wanted to talk to people who had spent their careers at the deathbed in hospices and done research in the field of palliative care." The result of their efforts is an extraordinarily compelling documentary trilogy entitled *When You Die*.

The first film, *In the Realm of Death & Dreaming*, explores stories of near-death experiences and deathbed visions. The documentary does an excellent job of examining challenging questions. As Lunn states, "Exploring what happens after death not only helps us decide how we want to be cared for at the end of life, but it reduces our fear of death and helps us live more fully." Lunn says she has received hundreds of responses about how peaceful the film made them feel and gave them a sense of being less afraid of death.

In *Saying GoodBye*, Lunn asks viewers to think about what they want when they die. Although the conversations can be difficult, they are crucial to ensuring people have their wishes followed. Viewers are carefully guided on these challenging topics as with the first part. The film presents honest conversations about how we talk about death and what

constitutes a good death. Many thought-provoking ideas arise when discussing quality of life and where we want to die. This film is a remarkable catalyst for getting people to reflect and take action. It acknowledges the harrowing decisions families must make concerning end-of-life wishes. Framed throughout this film is a generous amount of humanity and thoughtfulness.

The final instalment, *Architecture of Death*, has just been released. It examines what happens in the last days, hours and moments leading to death. It shows how the body breaks down and what emotions come into play. These emotions include the changing family roles and the potential for reconciliation. It also examines deathbed visions or dreams, messages to loved ones from the dying and other types of phenomena. It casts no judgments and presents concepts in a matter-of-fact way.

When it comes to producing high-quality documentaries, budgets can be the one thing that can derail even the best idea. Fortunately, the films were made while the production team did other paid gigs. When Lunn found herself in England, she put together key people to interview. The films cover a lot of ground, but one doesn't feel overwhelmed by them despite their heavy subject. As Lunn explains, "The series comes from a place of real strong love and desire to be helpful to others."

The films are accessible for a nominal fee through the website whenyoudie.org. The site contains a large amount of death resources. Lunn acknowledges that attitudes toward death are changing. "People are learning more about what happens in the body and the emotional and spiritual realms." But she believes there needs to be a broader openness, particularly around what might occur on the deathbed.

The films do an excellent job of explaining both scientifically and spiritually what many of the dying experience, but it has, up until recently, been a subject that is off-limits for most. What exactly is that subject? It is the feeling of communicating or having a spiritual experience with a dead relative while on their deathbed.

As Lunn tells me, 80 per cent of the dying encounter a visitation from a deceased family member or friend. "The dying person will be quite unresponsive and sleeps frequently. Then, all of a sudden, they become animated and happy. They converse with someone that no one in the room can see. This is a deathbed vision or dream."

Lunn acknowledges that this is a widespread experience, but it remains taboo and rarely discussed publicly. Those who are in mourning may not understand what has happened.

"They just don't know if their loved one was hallucinating or there was a real kind of spiritual connection that was going on."


The film devotes time to featuring scientists who have conducted a tremendous amount of research on what is happening to the dying in hospitals. "These are places where you can clinically say what was going on with a person during a deathbed visitation," explains Lunn.

As a funeral director, this is where you can significantly help. No matter where you are on the belief spectrum (believer or great sceptic), just pointing out that resources are available can alleviate some of your family's process of what they have experienced.

"I think these three films taken together are kind of the backstory for families who are either preparing or in the middle of someone getting a diagnosis," says Lunn. "People have thanked me because they now understand better what was happening and didn't before. This is the highest compliment I can get as a filmmaker."

The one theme that kept coming up was that these deathbed visitations are enormously helpful to the dying. For this reason, Lunn feels it is essential to validate them. "The last thing you want to do to your Uncle Harry, who's having a deathbed vision, is to say, 'Oh, Harry, that's just a hallucination.' Why would you screw up a great moment for Harry?" For Lunn, it's all about permitting people to validate what the dying are experiencing.

The films contain many images of nature going through its seasons. They produce a calming effect, and Lunn acknowledges it's how she finds peace. "I take great solace in the natural world. I love being in the woods. Nature is our greatest teacher and the greatest metaphor for being human. When someone has passed, we mourn them but must re-arise. And we do. The grief process leads us into spring."

An extraordinary feature of the films is how they draw out all kinds of conversations and insights. "A woman told me her father died alone in the room, and she was upset because she had wanted to be there by his side as support. But in this case, they left the room, and the person died." Lunn says that sometimes a person can't die if a loved one is in the room. "It's too hard to let go because they love you too much, so they wait till you leave. And that can also be seen as a gift to you." 

Michael Brooke is both a writer and former publisher. He now turns people's memories into magazines. Contact Michael at mbrooke@timeformystory.com.



Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP



TWINS

by Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP

Do you remember the old Certs' breath mint commercials? A pair of twins would tap two rolls of Certs together and say, "It's two, two, two mints in one" at which time the two rolls magically merged into a single roll to the tinkle of a bell. It was cool special effects back in its day. That was the 1960s.

How about the "Double your pleasure, double your fun" ads? Wrigley's Doublemint Gum really capitalized on twins in their ads too. Lots of companies have. Twins can be mesmerizing. That was back in the 1970s.

Recently, while testing a new chemical formulation with one of our research partners, I was asked if I have ever embalmed a pair of identical twins before. "Why do you ask?" I inquired? My associate had binged a Netflix "documentary" over the weekend. It followed numerous pairs of identical twins through a dietary and exercise experiment for a couple of months. Basically, it documented some physiological and metabolic effects comparing a vegetarian versus omnivore diet on overall health and function. Sounds pretty cool, right?

Imagine identical twins with the same DNA; they should easily be able to see the health benefits and detriments, and finally prove what is the ideal healthy diet, right? Well, as a researcher, the study depicted in the show was pseudo-scientific or anecdotal at best. Why? There were far too many variables, insufficient controls and no "double blind" comparatives.

Don't get me wrong, there was some good stuff to be gained from watching this. It was entertaining and somewhat informative. But the sizzle came from the hypnotic effect brought on by watching the twins, not the science. Just like the advertisers of yesteryear, the filmmakers knew how easy it was to mesmerize people with the right imagery. Imagery is a powerful tool. Who could forget Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwar-

zenegger in the 1988 film *Twins*? Well, they were fraternal, not identical, and as Stephen Leacock, a famous Canadian writer, said, "Advertising is the science of arresting human intelligence long enough to get money out of it."

Getting back to our twins discussion, in my career I've embalmed identical twins on at least five occasions totalling six remains. In two of the situations, the twins died in different places, at different times and of different causes. Their deaths were not separated by many years and I keep quite detailed embalming reports, so it was an interesting educational opportunity for my team and myself.

I was able to pull up embalming reports of their siblings. Seeing the medical certificates, their condition report and the summary of fluid and techniques and final photos was fascinating. One twin had more endocrine disease, while another suffered more vascular disease. One pair both had cancer and while one responded well to chemotherapy, living a few years longer, the other twin was knocked down and out by the treatments.

One pair of male twins shared exactly the same suit, tie and casket about two years apart. We all paused in an eerie silence as we experienced a shared *déjà vu*.

The pair of identical twins that I had the privilege of preparing side by side, on the same day, was a great learning experience for our team and here are some details and takeaways.

Case 1: White male, 75 years of age, 95 kilograms. Medical certificate claimed sepsis, respiratory failure and COVID-19. Length of time dead, 36 hours. Remains very cold stiffened from FEMA refrigeration truck being set too cold.

Case 2: White male, 75 years of age, 90 kilograms. Medical certificate claimed acute myocardial infarction, hypertension and long-term tobacco smoker. Length of time dead, less than six hours. Remains was room temperature.



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Both cases had airways and IVs left in place. Both had thick, crumbly toenails. Both had a good-sized beer belly, and both had yellowy discoloured fingers from years of smoking.

Both remains were undressed, bathed and a pre-embalming case analysis was performed. We were struck by how identical they were. Case 1 had been in the hospital a few days before death and had a lot more IV bruising and some edema in the hands and lower legs compared to his brother. Rigor was involved. Case 2 had paddle burns, bruises and some broken ribs from the paramedics. His rigor was just beginning to form in his face and arms.

What did we do?

Case 1 was far too cold for best results, so we needed him to warm up for the products to work their best. The lines left by the airway and nasal tubes were easily removed with a repeated topical application of Trioxin for Restoration. Simply spray the Trioxin on the affected area and allow it to absorb. In really cold cases, it is helpful to use Webril to hold a Trioxin pack on the face to improve the action of softening and moisturizing ingredients.

In Case 2, the Trioxin began to reduce the lines left by the airway and tubes almost immediately. Three sprays over 10 minutes and some gentle massage and the lines disappeared.

Case 1 needed to warm up for about two hours before the cold stiffening diminished enough to massage and reshape and remove the tape lines. That was perfect timing because we'd finished his brother.

Any time a remains has visible complications affecting the feet and abdomen, I pay special attention to the injection points. As an example, when the toenails resemble Fritos or Doritos corn chips, I find it very helpful to inject from below the heart and drain from above the heart. In addition, if there is a distended or discoloured abdomen or heavy belly fat or internal abdominal and thoracic surgery, injury or pressure as in from a tumour, the same injection and drainage style is preferred.

This reduces neck and feature swelling and almost eliminates the experience of arterial solutions purging from the mouth and nose following the vascular rupture that often occurs after a few litres of injection in these types of cases.

These signs tell us the person had circulation problems during life and influence our fluid choices, too. These cases respond better to a vascular flush and cellular conditioning to neutralize drug residues and toxins before adding preservatives.

Case 1 had green abdominal patches and Case 2 has chest trauma from the CPR. They both shared a tummy and bad toes, so they both received the same point of injection and drainage. It was the fluid, pressure, flow and drainage technique that was significantly different between these identical twins.


Case 1 was septic and slightly endemic. We pre-injected with Gold, Neutralize, Veloxin for Edema, Eck-O-Lan, Sanifectant and Kosme-Tint Tan. This mix starts treating all conditions. We injected at 100 psi and averaged a flow of 10 to 12 ounces per minute, injecting about two litres into a closed system to allow pressure to build. Once his colour and texture was natural, we added NuOxin 24 to the mixture, opened drainage and alternated injection and drainage until eight litres were depleted.

Case 2 was treated in a similar fashion but because he was a "cardiac case," our pre-injection mixture contained Dyno-Tone Pre-injection, Neutralize, Trioxin and Kosme-Tint Tan. The preservative, when added, was Dyno-Tone 20 arterial. It's my favourite in cardiac cases. Because he was not as long dead, cold or medicated as his brother, we injected at a slightly faster rate of flow, about 15 ounces a minute and used continuous drainage.

At the end of the day, as we looked at these brothers, lying side by side, it had the twins effect. We were all mesmerized. Same DNA, different products. Our contract beautician, the owner of an expensive salon, taught us a lot that day that really relates to embalming when she saw our brothers looking good together.

She commented on how much health care can affect people's hair and skin. How perms and colour treatments don't go as well because the buildup of medications and toxins in the hair and skin interfere with the chemical reactions that produce colour or stiffen the hair shafts. She had personally observed differences in products and applications with her clients as they aged, as their illnesses progressed or as they quit smoking or drinking.

Quite simply, she stated it takes a lot of experience to "develop intuition" into which products will perform the best with different hair conditions. She went on to toot her own horn and said, "This is why my shop has such a loyal and committed client base. We seldom 'fry' anybody's hair because that can cause an 'emotional trauma' and it's 99 per cent preventable." She said how she loved to lavish her "twin" clients with greater care and creativity because twins are an amazing advertising tool for her beauty brand.

Is it time to abandon the one-fluid-fits-all approach to embalming? Is it time to lavish our customers with greater creative care? If you answered yes, give us a call. You'll be glad you did! 

Jeff Chancellor serves as director of education, training and research for Eckels and welcomes your opinions.

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Grief

the unwelcome journey

Dr. Bill Webster has written a new 40-page booklet designed for people in the early days of grief after bereavement. "Grief: The Unwelcome Journey" is an ideal resource to include in a stationery package or as a personalized token of your support to your families.

After a mere three months, the booklet is already in second edition in the U.K., and has been described as "... a masterpiece, covering all aspects of grieving in a most practical and helpful manner." (J. West, West & Coe, London)

Dr. Bill will introduce this product to the Canadian market in the fall of 2023, at less than the cost of a sympathy card.

To receive a complimentary copy for your consideration, please email Dr. Bill Webster (info@griefjourney.com) with your name and funeral home details.

Visit www.griefjourney.com for more grief support resources.





Dr. Bill Webster

THE SYNERGY OF FUNERAL SERVICE

by Dr. Bill Webster

I want to talk about death and dying ... but it's not what you think! It's about the death of "business as usual," or at least "as we have known it."

I went shopping at a local mall a week or so before Christmas, anticipating that it would be bustling with people. To my surprise, the mall was almost empty with an obvious absence of enthusiastic shoppers. Turns out, the anchor tenant had closed its doors and moved elsewhere. As a result, with little to attract shoppers, smaller retailers had gone out of business leaving half the shops closed and empty.

Yet, just two days before Christmas, for somewhere to walk out of the rain, we visited another, newer mall. What a difference. People everywhere, all kinds of activities, places to sit and congregate, coffee and drinks, light shows, music, a children's playground and merry-go-rounds, and even a skating rink made it all a fabulous experience. We didn't buy anything that day, but we will go back there next time.

It's easy to point to COVID-19 or to the rapid expansion of online shopping as the final nail in the coffin for shopping malls, but there is a more significant reason.

I read a quote by an executive of a major mall that has just undergone a massive renovation: "It is a time for creativity. In the mall business, you always have to be fresh. You always have to think about what your customers are after and remain relevant for the customer. But it's important to create experiences that the customers will find unique, different and something that they can't do anywhere else.

"So, while some malls are full of empty stores, others are thriving like never before. The ones that are successful are those that offer fresh takes on retail and expanding the mall experience beyond simply shopping."

In other words, retail is not just about goods and services; it has to evoke something more visceral.

Over 25 years ago, the *Harvard Business Review* introduced a concept called the Experience Economy which stated: "A new emerging economy is coming to the fore; one based on a distinct kind of economic output ... experiences. Goods and services are no longer enough."

The concept of the Experience Economy, where businesses must form unique connections in order to secure their customers' affections and loyalty to ensure their own economic vitality, is alive and well, and flourishing.

Now, you may ask, what does this have to do with funeral service? Everything! With the concerns that have been expressed about the effects of direct cremation and people opting not to have funerals, I would have thought the answer was obvious.

The principle is this: those who are not moving with the times by responding to what people want will be out of business. The contrasting mall experiences teach us that it's not just about retail; it is more about people's experiences surrounding the marketing and merchandising.

In short, it's not just what you are selling, but the atmosphere you create to encourage people to do business with you ... to come to your "mall." Now, obviously, I am not suggesting you build playgrounds or offer entertainment while customers shop or browse. But we need to be proactive in following some of these trends.

In 2008, I wrote an article entitled "The Circle of Service" in which I stated: "Imagine you could create a circle of service that would ensure an ongoing influx of satisfied clients long into the future. At a time when client loyalty is something that

Many businesses have seen huge benefits by investing in the experience of aftercare, providing positive emotional and social support to individuals and communities through their grief. Such assistance to people after a loss provides an “experience that they will remember” ... and one that will bring them back to your “mall” next time.

can no longer be taken for granted, this concept could be crucial to your business.”

I suggested three components in this Circle of Service: pre-need, at-need and aftercare. Funeral directors know the importance of providing excellent at-need service and have learned the beneficial results of pre-need planning. Many are doing both these components well ... and yet, for some, their market share is falling.

So often I hear FDs say they are so busy with at-need and pre-need that they don't have time for aftercare. Others just don't see aftercare as part of their mandate. Be careful. The circle of service does not comprise three distinct and separate parts. These elements have to form a synergy because they all have a combined effect and interaction on the overall experience of death, dying and grief.


As a grief counsellor, I have grave concerns these days about the lack of closure that results from not having (or making) an opportunity to say a meaningful goodbye in a funeral or ritual experience. Counsellors are seeing an increase in unresolved

grief which inevitably leads to prolonged grief disorder which was recently added as a mental health disorder in DSM-5.

How can we assist people to have a better experience enabling them to see the therapeutic value of holding funerals and celebrations of life?

Many businesses have seen huge benefits by investing in the experience of aftercare, providing positive emotional and social support to individuals and communities through their grief. Such assistance to people after a loss provides an “experience that they will remember” ... and one that will bring them back to your “mall” next time.

My friends and colleagues, it's time to use your imagination. You don't have to “beat down” the competition. You just need to find new and creative ways to give people a better experience than they do.

Put simply, it's the significance that the experience holds for the individual or community that determines the worth of what you offer and the value of the work you do. 

Dr. Bill Webster is the director of the Centre for the Grief Journey, and can be reached at www.GriefJourney.com, and on Twitter @drbillwebster.

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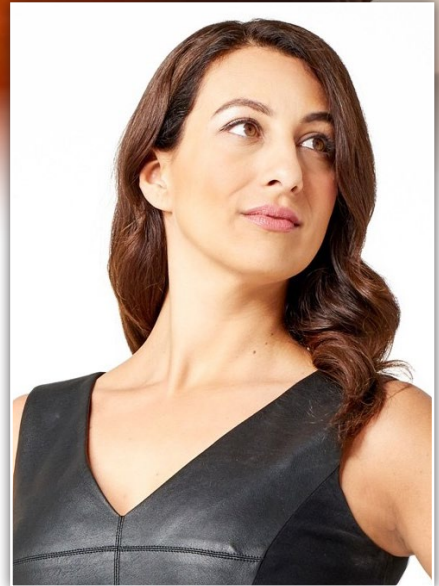
OACFP'S PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S SYMPOSIUM IS BACK FOR 2024



Siobhan Calderbank



Professor Maja Jovanović



Andrea Sanche

The Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals (OACFP) invites members and non-members alike to embark on a transformative journey for International Women's Day 2024. With an aim to create a powerful platform for dialogue, empowerment and advocacy, this year's annual Professional Women's Symposium is taking place in person on March 6 at New Haven Funeral Centre in Mississauga, ON.

The symposium will delve into the importance of fostering an inclusive world for women, featuring an array of speakers headlined by Andrea Sanche, Professor Maja Jovanović and Siobhan Calderbank. Seminars will cover a variety of rel-

evant topics, ranging from Calderbank's *Myths and Monkeys of Change Transitions* to Professor Maja's *How Allyship and Gender Bias Influence Women's Confidence*.

The full day of education is open to all bereavement sector professionals. Although the symposium will focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women, everyone is welcome to attend. "We are all in this together and gender equality requires all of us," notes the board and management of OACFP.

For a limited time, OACFP is offering member pricing to all non-members. For more information, visit www.oacfp-womens-symposium.com. 

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VICTORIAVILLE MAKES \$50,000 COMMITMENT TO FUNERAL SERVICE FOUNDATION

PLEDGE TO SUPPORT U.S.-BASED AND CANADIAN-BASED PROJECTS



Alain Dumont (centre) presents a \$50,000 ceremonial cheque at the Funeral Service Foundation donor reception with Chantelle Bilodeau-Seton of Eternity's Touch (left) and foundation trustee Thomas Pontone of Matthews Aurora (right).

Wooden casket manufacturer Victoriaville & Co. has pledged \$50,000 in support of the Funeral Service Foundation to invest in people and programs that strengthen funeral service in Canada and the United States over the next five years.


A fourth-generation family business employing hundreds of people in Canada, Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, Victoriaville & Co. has become the third-largest manufacturer of wooden caskets in North America.

The visionary pledge is well-timed as the foundation continues to grow its connections north of the U.S. border. In addition to the foundation's first Canadian chair, Allan Cole, presiding from 2021-22, the foundation has seen an increase in the percentage of applicants and winners in its professional development and academic scholarship programs.

Additionally, the foundation continues to support programs in Canada like Humber College (which is conducting a resiliency training study in their funeral director program), provide

outreach and resources in Canada, and assist foundation representatives to attend select events such as the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine Conference in Montreal (2023) and the Funeral Service Association of Canada Annual Conference this past June.

"Social responsibility is central to our values," says Alain Dumont, president of Victoriaville & Co. "Contributing to the Funeral Service Foundation's work in Canada and the United States is an investment in the well-being of our profession where we live and work. We are honoured to add the foundation to the list of organizations that we support."

Foundation executive director Jedd Lapid shared his appreciation in return. "The foundation looks forward to continuing the partnerships and outreach in Canada that our friends at Victoriaville & Co., emeritus trustee Allan Cole, and trustee Todd Lumbard of Anthem have helped make possible. Building this extended network to strengthen funeral service is truly a gift, and we are grateful to Alain, Charles-Olivier and the entire team at Victoriaville & Co." 

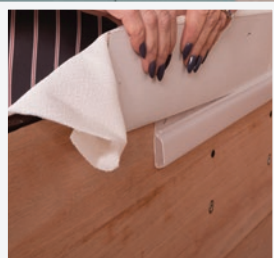
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Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

COMPLICATED GRIEF: IDENTIFYING SYMPTOMS AND CATEGORIES

by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

After a significant loss, it's normal for people to experience a wide range of thoughts and feelings. We call these thoughts and feelings grief. They also exhibit a dizzying variety of behaviours. We call these behaviours mourning.

Not only are there many different thoughts, feelings and behaviours in grief, there is also a continuum of nuance and amplitude for the thoughts, feelings and behaviours. For instance, many grievers feel angry at some point, but the degree of anger ranges from mild irritation to full-on rage – sometimes within the same individual. And even for an individual griever, feelings routinely come and go, wax and wane.

Similarly, in different mourners the behaviours associated with a feeling may run the gamut from complete inexpression to, again using the example of anger, violent acting-out – and the magnitude of the outward presentation, or mourning, does not always align with the magnitude of the inner feeling. In other words, some people express their feelings proportionately to what they feel inside, and some do not. In fact, many grievers suppress the outward expression of intense inner feelings altogether or temper them significantly.

When you are supporting a grieving family member, it's important to keep all of this in mind. I've emphasized that grief is always complicated. It's multidimensional and constantly changing. The fact that it's both inward and outward, proportionate and disproportionate, as well as ever-changing, only makes it more complex.

This normal and natural complexity is the backdrop against which we will review the common care-eliciting symptoms and presentations of complicated grief in this article. Whether the griever is aware of it or not, these normal and natural symptoms I will outline are signals that the griever requires our special care and compassion.

Shock, numbness, denial and disbelief

It's normal for people to feel a sense of shock and numbness when someone they love dies. In complicated grief, these symptoms often persist beyond the early days and weeks and stretch into months and even years. In essence, complicated grievers may be "stuck" in shock and denial. It's common for them to say that they still can't truly believe or accept what happened.

Disorganization, confusion, searching and yearning

Grievers often feel distracted and befuddled. They describe not being able to focus, concentrate or think straight. They also yearn and search for the person who died. Some risk factors can make this dimension of normal grief longer or more severe, including (but not limited to) challenging death circumstances and extreme dependence in the relationship. As you can imagine, ambiguous, violent or surreal loss circumstances often result in chaotic and disorganized thinking. And the stronger the attachment, the more intense and frequent the griever's searching and yearning is likely to be.

Anxiety, panic and fear

Death naturally arouses anxieties and fears in all of us. Grievers who struggled with anxiety, panic and fear before the death are, of course, predisposed to be more challenged by this dimension after the death. In addition, violent or otherwise frightening death circumstances may give rise to a traumatic grief response that in essence splits the grief into two components: post-traumatic stress and grief. The traumatic component serves to complicate the grief and may benefit from professional trauma processing.

Explosive emotions

While explosive emotions like anger, hate, blame, terror, resentment, rage and jealousy in grief are normal and common, pronounced, prolonged and/or acted-upon explosive emotions should be considered facets of complicated grief.

WHEN
Grief
IS
Complicated

A MODEL FOR THERAPISTS TO UNDERSTAND,
IDENTIFY, AND COMPANION GRIEVERS LOST IN
THE WILDERNESS OF COMPLICATED GRIEF

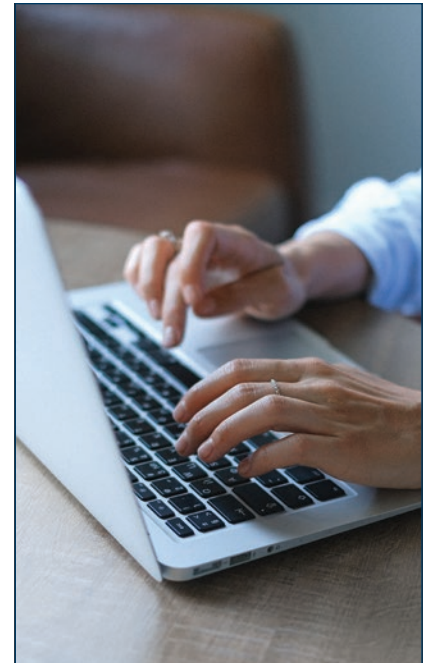
ALAN D. WOLFELT, PH.D., C.T.

This article is excerpted from *When Grief is Complicated: A Model for Therapists to Understand, Identify, and Companion Grievors Lost in the Wilderness of Complicated Grief*. To order, visit www.centerforloss.com.

Explosive emotions that find expression in destructive ways are also red flags for complicated grief. Self-harm, extreme risk-taking, harm to others and harm to property all cross the line.

Guilt, regret and self-blame

In complicated grief, guilt and regret may dominate, and they may not soften over time. In short, they may act as a quicksand in which a griever gets stuck. In my com-



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panioning experience, the more complicated grief risk factors a griever possesses, the more likely he or she is to harbour profound guilt and regret that are responsible, at least in part, for causing normal grief to balloon into complicated grief.

Sadness and depression

Even in normal grief, it often takes weeks or months before griever arrive at the full depth of their sorrow. I have observed that the pain almost always gets worse before it gets better. And so, profound sadness and depression may be considered normal and necessary. But as with the other dimensions we've been reviewing in this article, sadness and depression may be sufficiently debilitating or prolonged in some griever to be considered markers of complicated grief. Clinical depression, of course, is also a serious consideration.

COMPLICATED GRIEF CATEGORIES

Over the years, in my clinical practice and through my experiences as a grief educator, I have broken down complicated grief into categories as a helpful shorthand for discussing typical complicated grief responses. If you see these types of grief responses in your arrangement room, you will know you may be witnessing complicated grief.

Unembarked grief

Unembarked grief is grief that has never been allowed to depart from the trailhead and enter the normal and necessary wilderness of grief. Similar to what others have termed absent, delayed or inhibited grief, unembarked grief is simply uninitiated or unlaunched grief.

Impasse grief

People experiencing impasse grief remain stuck in a particular location. Not only can they not seem to get past the obstruction, they may not even recognize it as an obstruction. In my counselling experience, the obstruction often comes in the form of a pronounced and prolonged encounter with anger, anxiety, sadness or guilt.

Off-trail grief


Off-trail grief behaviours are essentially avoidance patterns. They are habits and obsessions that replace the work of grief and mourning. Common off-trail grief behaviors include: displacing; replacing; somaticizing; overworking; shopping; overeating; substance abusing; other addictive behaviours; traveling; and crusading.

Remember, all of the symptoms are normal in grief, but when you notice they are pronounced or extreme – particularly in conjunction with several of the risk factors we discussed in the last article – you will know you may be bearing witness to complicated grief.

Encamped grief

Sometimes on the journey through grief, people stop moving – forward, backward or sideways – and instead step off the trail and set up permanent residence. They build themselves a shelter, unpack provisions and settle in. These griever are not so much stuck at a particular impasse as they are entrenched in the grief experience in general.

Others have called this complicated grief category “chronic grief.” Its hallmark is unending, unchanging distress, usually but not always with depression. Chronic griever are typically preoccupied with the person who died, choosing this preoccupation over nurturing relationships with living family and friends. They may also be obsessed with objects that belonged to the person who died, and are prone to depressive brooding. Essentially, encamped griever attempt to keep the person who died alive, or their acute grief alive, under the misconception that if they really loved the person who died, they must maintain – even cherish – their intense grief.

I'm guessing that in your work with bereaved families, you have seen all of the grief symptoms and behaviours we have reviewed in this article. Remember, all of the symptoms are normal in grief, but when you notice they are pronounced or extreme – particularly in conjunction with several of the risk factors we discussed in the last article – you will know you may be bearing witness to complicated grief. In the next and final instalment in this article series, we will cover tips for compassionately supporting complicated griever both during the funeral process and beyond. 

Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt is a noted author, educator and grief counsellor. He serves as director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado, and presents numerous workshops each year across North America. Perhaps best known for his companioning model of caring for people in grief, he is the author of *Companioning the Bereaved*, *Companioning the Grieving Child*, and *When Grief is Complicated*, from which this article is excerpted. For more information or to order Dr. Wolfelt's books, visit www.centerforloss.com or call 970.226.6050.

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Annual Conference & AGM
April 30 – May 2, 2024
Westin Wall Centre, Vancouver Airport
Vancouver, BC

CREMATION ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA (CANA)

Cremation Symposium
February 14-16, 2024
The Linq Hotel + Experience
Las Vegas, NV

Cremation Innovation Convention

September 11-13, 2024
Fairmont Chicago Millennium Park
Chicago, IL

FUNERAL AND CREMATION SERVICES COUNCIL OF SASKATCHEWAN (FCSCS)

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FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (FSAC)

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July 19-24, 2024
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Leadership Summit
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The DeSoto
Savannah, GA

Embalming & Restorative Arts Seminar

May 2 & 3, 2024
Pittsburgh Institute of
Mortuary Science
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Leadership Conference
July 29 – August 1, 2024
Ponte Vedra Inn & Club
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

International Convention & Expo
October 20-23, 2024
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New Orleans, LA

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Professional Women's Symposium
March 6, 2024
New Haven Funeral Centre
Mississauga, ON

Cremation Symposium
April 16 & 17, 2024
Best Western
Cornwall, ON

Trusted Advisor Training and Certification
May 15, 2024
Capital Funeral Home
Ottawa, ON

Educational Conference and Trade Show

October 8-10, 2024
Caesars Windsor Hotel & Casino
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Established funeral home available in Eastern Ontario. The funeral home is in a bilingual community that is located outside of the Ottawa area with future growth of 350-plus new homes in the next few years and is the only funeral home in the community. The funeral home itself is modern having been renovated and modernized over the years with virtually nothing to update and is welcoming, charming and tastefully decorated. The funeral home chapel seats 75 with overflow or celebrations of life going to one of the several churches of various denominations in the community whom the funeral home has great relationships with. Large detached garages for the vehicles. The funeral home does 85-plus calls per year (four-year average with a lot of traditional and/or cremation services).

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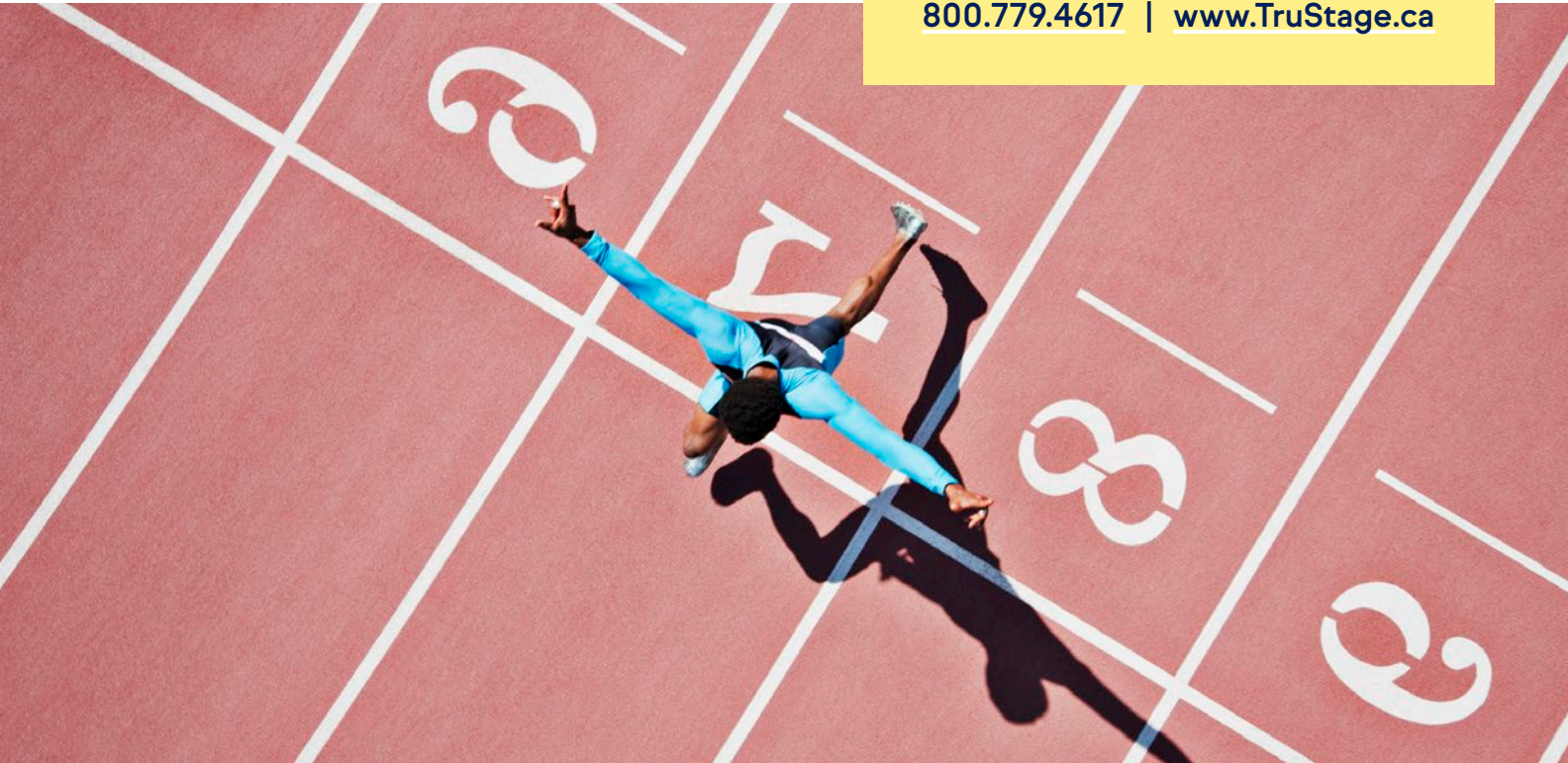


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TEAR DROP PENDANT
- STS 



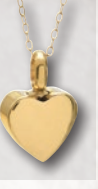
REMEMBRANCE TABLET
- STS 



CIRCLE
PENDANT
- STS 



HEART PENDANT
- STS 



PAW PRINT PENDANT
- 925SS



HEART
PENDANT
- SS 



PASSAGE HEART PENDANT
- STS 



DIAMOND CUT EDGE
ROUND PENDANT
- 925SS



ETCHED SWIRL
PENDANT 



LOTUS
PENDANT
- STG 



CIRCLE PENDANT
- STS 

