

## Anniversary Celebrations of Remembrance



Offered as a gift from Pauline Mitchell, Laura French, and Nancy Bauer-King

*Grief is a flame that never dies.  
Over the years showers of blessings  
will lessen the flame, but it will continue  
to flicker within your heart until the day  
you are with your loved one again.*

These words about grief point to the ongoing memories and deep sadness that may be carried within our hearts for years after a loved one's death. Certain dates - a birthday, a death date, an anniversary - may intensify the loss.

For those who would like a ritual to give significance to an important date, the following discussion and outline are provided to help mark the occasion.

Before planning a ritual one may consider these questions:

- How many people will participate? Who? Or just do something by oneself?
- Where will the ritual take place? home? cemetery? favorite outdoor spot?
- Will there be food? a restaurant? home? church?
- Will there be something to say or read? What? a poem, favorite story? letter?
- What stories will be told? Events remembered? Difficult situations?
- Will there be music? What to play or sing? a favorite song? hymn?
- What visuals could be used? Photo? Object belonging to loved one? Symbol that was important to the relationship? Candles? Flowers?
- Are there symbolic actions that have meaning? a gift given? physical action? i.e. hugs? holding hands?

As is evident, a remembrance can encompass a wide range: a ritual can be as simple as lighting a candle by yourself, or as involved as planning an event to include others, such as situations where grief is a result of multiple losses.

The following template is a guide - suggestions only. The idea is to feel free to create an event that is grateful for the gift of life of those who have died and is meaningful for you and others who may gather.

# Template

**Symbol** - to set-aside significant time

*light candle; ring bell; play favorite song; have flowers*

**Opening** - to include reason for gathering.

*We are here to remember (name) on the anniversary of his/her/their death or birthday.*

*or*

*We have gathered on the anniversary of the death/birthday of Name. We are grateful for his/her/their life and remember how their presence graced our lives.*

*or*

*We have gathered to lift up those who have died in this past year (from Covid, in a natural disaster, etc.)*

**Prayer** - to offer comfort for those gathered and words of thanksgiving for the life of the loved one.

(Change pronouns and point of view as needed)

*Holy One, this day reminds us of (name of loved one - or situation of loss) Months and years have passed and still we feel his/her/their presence near. Though grief has softened, a duller ache remains. The place he/she/they once stood is empty now. We see now through the eyes of memory. We thank you for the gift he/she/they were in our lives and the love we shared. His/her/their life is bound up with ours forever. Amen*

**Time** - to remember the loved one(s) through stories, poems, readings, songs, photos, (photo albums), videos, etc.

- to plant a tree, bush, and/or dedicate a bench, marker, walkway, etc.

**Closing** - to bring set-aside time to an end

*Holy One, we thank you for life - both ours and the ones who have gone before us. May we continue to be surrounded and supported in this life by the on-going love you show us through each other. Amen.*

\* \* \*

## Additional suggestions

Greeting cards are an important gift. On the first anniversary of a death, Laura French sends a card to the person remembering the loved one's loss. Because so many cards at the time of a death may be overwhelming, Laura sometimes sends cards weeks or months later. She also sent a card to her father on the first Mother's Day after her mother's death. Pauline Mitchell sends cards to her husband on important dates and includes a place for him at the table on special occasions.

Pauline Mitchell's *Memorial Anniversary Celebration* for her daughter, Cheryl Veronica Mitchell, included a gathering of friends at Cheryl's gravesite on the occasion of the first anniversary of her death. Friends took part in readings, a balloon ceremony, and the offering of white roses, each one symbolizing a characteristic that Cheryl embodied throughout her life. The ceremony concluded with a quote: *Treasured in our hearts you'll stay, until we meet again someday* and a verse from 1 Thessalonians 4.18: *Therefore encourage one another with these words*. Pauline will provide a copy of this service at your request.

Charles Bauer-King's children sifted his ashes into Lake Michigan on July 31, the day after Charlie's birthdate. At the lakeside Nancy said a prayer of thanksgiving to the One who brought us together, read his favorite Bible verse (Romans 14.8), a quote of his, and two readings. On the first anniversary of his death, she walked alone to the spot at the lake and read silently one of the readings at his interment:

*Let it not be death, but completeness.*

*Let love melt into memory and pain into songs.*

*Let the flight through the sky end in the wings folding over the nest.*

*Let the last touch of your hands be gentle like the flower of the night.*

*Stand still, O Beautiful End, for a moment and say your last words in silence.*

*We bow to you and hold up our lamps to light you on your way.*

*Rabindranath Tagore*

Other suggestions to mark these occasions are welcome. Contact (Nancy Bauer-King - [cnbauerking@gmail.com](mailto:cnbauerking@gmail.com)) if you have rituals and/or ideas to offer.

