

TURNING THE PAGE:

A Collection of Letters, Stories, Prayers and Poems on Love and Loss

As we ushered in a brand new year and decade, we found ourselves asking how we could enrich our legacy of service, or continue to “turn the page”, so to speak. In what seemed to be the dawn of a new era, we armed ourselves with enough courage and creativity to do something we had never done before—to create and publish a book.

Thus, in commemoration of its 38th anniversary, *Arlington Memorial Chapels* decided to develop and publish a book on grief and healing, all with the purpose of providing comfort, inspiring hope, and fostering solidarity among the bereaved community. Our goal was to gather individuals or families, and to solicit their personal stories, testimonies, letters, poems, prayers and similar literature.

Upon completion, copies of the book will be shared with local hospitals, clinics, centers and communities in need of grief resources and literature, something that seems to be lacking and low in the consciousness of Filipinos, at least in terms of its value in the grieving and healing process. In addition to this, we also intend to share this book with our international affiliates to reach out to as many families as possible.

Amidst the ongoing quarantine and the world at a standstill, we realize how our digital screens may well serve as our window to the world. Apart from the physical copies of the book which are being sold PHP 500 (USD 10) per unit, a digital or electronic version is also available and may be accessed online through donation options. This option is particularly viable in view of the limitations set by the ongoing quarantine and lockdown. Be that as it may, bringing this to a digital platform allows us to reach more readers and families in need.

To access the e-book, one may donate a minimum of PHP 300 (USD 6), the proceeds of which will be used to purchase surgical masks and food for public hospitals in the Philippines. In light of the ongoing battle against the pandemic, the book proceeds have been reallocated for our frontliners in need of sustenance and personal protective equipment as their first line of defense. With over 20 public hospitals in Metro Manila alone, each with an approximate capacity of a thousand beds, our hope is to be able to equip thousands of frontliners in need of assistance and protection.

Although the primary rationale was to serve bereaved families, this project has also been able to shine the light on the funeral industry and the work that we do. Through this artistic endeavor, the industry takes on a more compassionate, more dynamic and more empathetic role in serving the community.

In putting this book together, our hope was to provide bereaved families or individuals with a platform to tell their stories, to express their grief, and to find comfort within a community. With each contributor having a profoundly personal experience of grief, we curated and divided the collection into six chapters.

The book originally had five chapters. Unbeknownst to us, a pandemic was well on its way to sweeping the entire globe, and a sixth chapter would be a necessary addition to the book. Thus, the sixth chapter was only developed and added in the final month of production. Unforeseen as it might have been, we deemed it imperative to create a chapter on pandemic grief. As the world continues to mourn in unprecedented ways—the kind none of us had the foresight or opportunity to prepare for—we found ourselves responding to an evolving need in the *new normal*. With families left to grieve in painful isolation, we considered it even more necessary to provide them a safe space to share their experience, to mourn their loss, and to honor their loved ones, at least in words and images.

The book chapters were divided as such:

1. **Cutting the Cord:** The Unbearable Pain of Losing a Parent
2. **To Heaven, With Love:** Words and Letters for *Lolo and Lola* (Grandpa and Grandma)
3. **Journey's End:** When a Sibling Outruns You In the Race Called Life
4. **Without a Hand to Hold:** Navigating Life Without Your Better Half
5. **Unspeakable Grief:** Returning God's Lent Children
6. **Pandemic Grief:** Love and Loss in the Time of Corona

Invitation letters, emails and messages were sent out by our staff members as early as December 2019 to reach out to as many families as possible. This process allowed our staff members to get in touch with our client families, and provided them with the opportunity to check on the mental and emotional welfare of the families they had previously served.

Some of our staff members, who themselves had lost loved ones in recent months or years, opted to contribute to the book and submit their own entries. In serving others, funeral directors and caregivers tend to forget themselves, thereby neglecting their own grief and mental health. This endeavor rendered them the rare opportunity to process their own experience, to put it into words, and to express what they had long kept on the back burner.

The book contributors or writers were given free rein to share their stories and to compose in their preferred language and literature. We encouraged them to share whatever their hearts allowed and to keep in mind that no journey or story would be any less important. As you will find in the book, there are various kinds of literature, each one with a unique story to tell and a valuable message to share. Overall, it was

quite remarkable and symbolic having thirty-eight (38) entries and contributors—collectively commemorating each year of our service, all while narrating diverse experiences of love, loss, and everything in between.

To our contributors, the book served as artistic and literary expression—a therapeutic endeavor or catharsis of sorts. To us, the book served as a soaring reminder that grief is our collective war—*one that says we have loved, we have lost, and it was well worth the fight.*

Perhaps the greatest irony of this experience has been finding comfort and healing within a community at a time when that seems physically impossible—at least for the moment. These entries, crafted and created for the book, map our shared journey somehow—from collective grief to collective healing. Despite the barriers and shared struggle we currently face because of the global pandemic, technology afforded us virtual connectedness to be able to complete this book. Email correspondences, video calls and social messaging became part and parcel of the creative process and book development.

With full knowledge of the challenges and obstacles we currently face, we hope to be able to continue the book as an ongoing series or annual volume. While the book entries were beautifully crafted and poignant in their own right, we know that there are more stories to tell, more voices to be heard and more families to help in the process. Our sincere hope is that this book serves as a jump-off point for more people to share their stories and to find solace in the arms of a community. With uncertainty at an all-time high, anxiety well at its peak, and loss collectively experienced by the world, we hope to remind our readers that they are never alone in their grief.

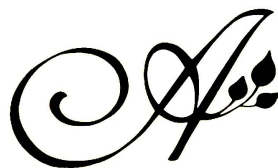
Taking from the book's foreword:

May it provide comfort when your homes feel empty; hope when the world seems still; and light when the debilitating sorrow rears its ugly head.

As you turn each page, may you look forward to the stories that have yet to be told and the chapters that have yet to be lived. Keep in mind that when a life ends, a legacy ultimately begins.

As our company heads towards its fourth decade of service, we forge on with the knowledge that our mission is far from over and our legacy far from complete. For now, we will continue to serve with care and compassion, continue to strive for excellence, and continue to turn the page.

Grief knits two hearts in closer bonds than happiness ever can; and common sufferings are far stronger links than common joys. — Alphonse de Lamartine



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