

## **H. Essay - Including Best of the Best Supporting Documentation**

### **Embracing Grief Video Production Project**

#### **2013-2014 Pursuit of Excellence Essay**

Worlein Funeral Home is located in Austin, MN. Austin, a rural community with a population of 25,000, is home to Hormel Foods Corporation/Spam and the University of Minnesota Hormel Institute for Cancer Research. Worlein Funeral Home is a third-generation funeral home and has been part of this community for over 65 years. At Worlein Funeral Home we are committed to providing service to the bereaved beyond the funeral, and support and education to all.

As part of this commitment to the families and communities we serve, we embarked on a very exciting project partnering with KSMQ Public Television to produce a very special video production entitled 'Embracing Grief'.

Paul Worlein, owner of Worlein Funeral Home, began thinking some time ago about the idea of a video which would help survivors and would become a grief resource for all. Paul decided now was the time to explore the idea further.

Austin is also home to KSMQ Public Television and Paul is an advocate and supporter of public television. A meeting was held with Eric Olson, president and CEO of KSMQ, Charles Czech, KSMQ Production Manager, and David Hagen, KSMQ Account Manager to begin the discussion. Several brainstorming sessions were then held with the staff of Worlein Funeral Home and KSMQ to discuss the purpose, content, subject matter and title.

The staff of Worlein Funeral Home agreed that we wanted this production to be an easily accessible resource for all who are grieving and a teaching tool for others in our community, such as churches, clergy, hospice programs, schools and youth programs.

'Embracing Grief' explores one of life's most difficult challenges - the loss of a loved one. This film addresses all of these issues through personal stories shared by people who have lost loved ones. All of these families were served by Worlein Funeral Home.

When asked if they would be willing to be part of this project, all of the individuals were very receptive to the idea and expressed a desire to help others through their grief journey as a way of honoring their deceased loved ones.

Interview appointments were scheduled and Worlein Funeral Home community services director, Mary Kittelson visited each home the day of the interview to thank them for participating, answer any questions and leave a "goodie bag."

"Lights, Camera, Action!" KSMQ staff Eric Olson, Chuck Czech and Jeff Gould set the background lighting, conducted the interviews, and shot many hours of film footage.

Each participant admitted to being rather nervous, as the filming experience was new to all of them, but they told their stories of loss with courage, honesty and dignity. They told of how they

confronted their grief, are adjusting to their “new normal” and are approaching the future. They told of the many ways their loss had defined them and the many ways they have found to honor their lost loved ones.

We were told that the editing process is a slow and tedious one. Finally on October 2, 2013 we were invited to KSMQ studios to view a rough draft. The producers had taken more than six hours of film and reduced it to approximately one hour, meaning that another thirty minutes still had to be cut. Paul made many visits and spent many hours at KSMQ, making many agonizing decisions until the content was just right and the time was the allowed 28 minutes.

In late November we received a call telling us the production was now ready for viewing. Paul Worlein was very pleased with the outcome and announced it was now time for a private premier.

Invitations were sent out to our “stars” and a premier party was held on Friday, December 12 with the staff of Worlein Funeral Home. Prior to the showing, the participants enjoyed meeting and visiting with each other – some for the first time. Refreshments were served and then it was time for what we had waited for – the first showing of ‘Embracing Grief.’ With popcorn and plenty of Kleenex, each one watched this uplifting, engaging and informative presentation.

Each “star” was given their own copy of ‘Embracing Grief.’

‘Embracing Grief’ was shown to the participants of the winter Austin Area Grief Support group and aired on KSMQ on Sunday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> and Thursday, February 27<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. On March 25<sup>th</sup> the video became part of the Worlein Funeral Home website. To best appreciate the impact of this valuable video, please consider viewing it at [www.worlein.com](http://www.worlein.com).

We began to publicly promote ‘Embracing Grief’ and it has been well received. Feature articles appeared in the Austin Daily Herald, the Blooming Prairie Times, the Blooming Prairie/Ellendale Leader, and the Owatonna People’s Press.

Patty Urlick, Administrative Assistant, designed business cards for all of our staff to distribute, directing everyone to our website for easy access to this grief resource.

Our entire staff is excited to offer this video as a wonderful addition to our Worlein Funeral Home continuing care program. The video is offered to the families we serve and is available in our lending library. The video has been distributed to many area churches, Mayo Clinic Health Systems-Austin Hospice, Austin Public Library, Blooming Prairie Public Library, area care centers, Riverland Community College, and the Philomathian Book Store.

‘Embracing Grief’ takes us on a journey no one welcomes, and no one can avoid, but ‘Embracing Grief’ is more than a story of death and loss. It is a story of life and hope.