

# Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc.

Pushin' Up the Proverbial Daisies

as seen in:



Reprinted with permission from the December 2017 issue of American Funeral Director.

# Viewpoint

By Ann Marie St. George

## Pushin' Up *THE PROVERBIAL* Daisies

As the holidays fast approach, I find myself – as many others do – remembering those who are no longer with us. How many times have each of us lost someone close and had to take care of their final wishes? While everyone close to you is looking for you to make him or her feel better, or have the magic words that will make the pain go away, you are struggling with your own grief. Been there, done that, one too many times. Not one of the greatest benefits of coming from a very large family.

Most of us can remember very distinctively where we were when someone significant in our life died. Me, well I was in a batting cage hitting balls from a machine that had jammed after collecting my \$1.25 in quarters. As I hit ball after ball after ball, I could hear my father's voice in my ear, "Come on Red, hit it out of the park!" – a phrase I often heard when he came to watch me play. Funny, I was never embarrassed, just excited that he could break away from work. It was his

way of letting me know that he was there. That very same sense of feeling, that he was there with me, is what made me stop mid-swing. As a 65-mph curveball just missed my head, I realized that I had been in the cage too long and needed to find my mom and head up to the hospital to visit Dad.

My dad suffered from Alzheimer's and had been in the Jay Robert Lauer Hospice and PC Unit of JFK Medical Center in Atlantis, Florida, for over six weeks. We were on a first-name

basis with everyone, from the elevator operator to the amazing staff who took care of him. On this particular day we were later than normal, just for the record, not truly my fault. I had an odd feeling of anxiousness as we walked through the double doors into the unit, something to which my mom seemed oblivious. The six-person wall of concern we ran into on the other side of those doors only confirmed my rising suspicion: My dad, my personal cheerleader, was gone.



**A young Ann Marie St. George with her dad. (Photo courtesy of Ann Marie St. George)**

Turning to my mom, I reached out to forewarn her, only to be blocked by one of the nurses who wrapped her into an unsolicited emotional squeeze. My mom's small blue eyes became large and wet with emotion with the realization as to why this hefty woman had her arms wrapped around her.

Though I had been very aware that my father was in his final days, it still came as a shock. The dad I knew, who was now physically gone, had been mentally gone for years. His good day/bad day struggle with Alzheimer's for the past 10 years had come to an end. As I nervously strode toward my dad's room, I struggled with my emotions. Should I be feeling more relief than sadness? His good-humored voice resonated in my head, "If I ever get like that, please take me out back and shoot me!"

As I came through the doorway of his room, I glanced over to where he lay peacefully on his bed holding a bountiful bouquet of daisies. What came next were tears streaming down my face, not from grief but from the uncontrollable laughter escaping my lips. Apparently, by the look of dismay on everyone's face, no one else saw the humor in my dad holding daisies. So as subtly as I could, I asked, "I guess no one else looks at this picture and thinks 'Pushin' up daisies?'"

It was at that point that one of the nurses threw the musical therapist under the bus, "Courtney said your dad loved the song 'Daisy Bell,' the daisies in your dad's hands were because of the song." Um, yah OK ... hee-hee. The poor nurse couldn't apologize enough until, of course, I broke the ice letting her know my dad would have loved the gesture, and yes, he would have gotten the joke.

"So, do I put the flowers in water or let them go with him?" Going into immediate funeral director mode, I started asking the delicate questions the staff were not used to being asked by a family member. I believe it confused them more than the "laughing at the daisies."

As a fellow funeral director, you know that it is a part of our brain we are unable to turn off, especially while stand-

ing next to a dead body. I am not sure it helps us in our own grieving process. For me, it often delays it. How many times has each of us lost someone close and had to take care of their final wishes? Are you your family's funeral director? Yes, everyone we know finds this amusing until, of course, they need us.

We are in a genuinely unique position that can in some ways be silently stressful. In performing our daily grind (I mean profession), we need to be aware of how we are affected when losing someone close. A perfect example can be seen in one of my favorite HBO series, "Six Feet Under." The episode that resonated most with me was the one where the father/owner of the funeral home is killed by a large truck while driving the hearse. In one scene, the family gathers in the funeral home after identifying their dad at the hospital. The argument that ensues is over why someone hadn't taken the funeral cot to the hospital to bring his body back with them. We witness a funeral family's unique perspective on how they struggle between taking care of the deceased and those mourning his loss while also trying to come to grips with one of their own dying. For those of you who are internet savvy, go to YouTube and put in the search box: "Six Feet Under father dies." There are several other episodes that show a similar struggle. Be advised some of the language is a little explicit.

I realize we all know we function the best we can in a stressful environment. However, what I want you to think about is the importance of taking care of your funeral director self. If you are what I call the "predictable" funeral director, you have an amazing sense of humor. In keeping with this trait, I'd like to pass along a few stress relievers I pulled off of the [superheroyou.com](http://superheroyou.com) website. Yes, it is an actual website.

1. Listen to music that inspires you.
2. Laugh.
3. Perform a random act of kindness.
4. Dance like nobody's watching.
5. Have sex.
6. Cuddle with an animal.
7. Break something.
8. Swear.
9. Play with bubble wrap.
10. Fill-in something that puts starch in your collar\_\_\_\_\_.

The message I am trying to share is that life and what we do is hard enough. Don't forget to do something for yourself. My dad's final stress reliever was listening to one of his favorite songs "Daisy Bell (On a Bicycle Built for Two)." For those of you who may not know the song, check out Nat King Cole's version on YouTube. Personally, I enjoy hitting the ball out of the park. Wishing everyone a happy, healthy and safe holiday season! •