

# Pathways

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## finding your pathway

by Andrea Ruggieri



One of the most difficult transitions we will endure in our life is the path we all must take after losing someone we love to the finality of death. No matter the relationship, it is painful and sometimes feels unbearable and is emotionally draining.

The lesson of death often comes at a young age. Our first experience with death is probably the most confusing. Many times it's the death of a pet that onsets this reality. How can something so full of life one day, suddenly cease to exist the next? As a child and as an adult, the idea of transitioning to a new normal sometimes seems unreachable.

In the grief journey, we make choices as to what path we will follow. Sometimes it is perplexing which path is best, as we will weather many storms that muddy the way and undoubtedly face many forks in the road. The key is making thoughtful choices. Being self-aware as well as accepting the positive helping hands when they are extended to you will help light

the path. You may need to ask for help on your grief journey to find your way. Despite the inescapable truth of death and in the midst of it, we may genuinely believe we'll never get through it, but given time and the resources for healing we can reach a point of happiness and gratitude again.

Every year the goal of Walker Brothers Funeral Home in conjunction with our sister funeral home, Bartolomeo & Perotto is to offer more to the families we serve as they move forward after the death of a loved one. We started an art therapy grief & loss support group which is approaching a 2-year anniversary with four thriving groups in its very successful existence. This fall we hosted two Seminars, offering talks on handling Grief through the Holidays and an informational session on Celebrant Services. At our Funeral Home in Spencerport we had our first Tribute Tree during the winter holidays where families placed tributes to their loved ones on the Christmas tree in our foyer.

We have had great and positive feedback from our families with the onset of these offerings and plan to continue in this vein as the needs continue. Keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for resources and future events to help you on your pathway.

*And as always, thank you to the families who have patronized us and to those considering Walker Brothers Funeral Home.*



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# grief that transcends words...

## death of a child

by Carla Tanguay



The loss of a child is an unimaginable, incomparable grief. It rarely follows the “rules” of grieving, tears apart families, and doesn’t end.

When a child dies, the future itself is lost. Everything that you’ve invested in your child and everything that you’ve hoped and dreamed for is gone. Your role as protector, teacher, nurturer, and parent is over. Losing a child means losing part of yourself. The simple act of watching life go on and seeing other children grow up becomes a constant reminder of what you have lost.

Couples, families, and even communities who have experienced the death of a child are never the same. Couples may end up separating, as their grief is so intense and so personal that it overwhelms their ability to support each other. Surviving siblings carry their own experience of grief, which may be compounded by survivor’s guilt and changes to the family structure. Grandparents suffer the loss of a

precious grandchild, while also carrying the pain of seeing their own child’s profound grief.

The impact of a child’s death is felt throughout the community. Shock and disbelief often follow unexpected deaths. Children are not supposed to die, and the news, even of death after an illness, is crushing, visceral, and devastating. It sends us searching for reasons and grasping for answers. Systems that support healthy grieving can strengthen communities, while fear, blame, and isolation can magnify problems for all who have experienced the loss. There are no words that can make the death of a child better. It is hard to imagine recovering or continuing in the face of this much pain. Yet, there are tools that can help parents, families, and communities survive.

After the death of a child, finding a support network is essential. Family and friends have an important role, as they can provide comfort and familiarity. Faith communities, civic or school groups can also provide resources to help families and communities heal after the loss of a child. Formal bereavement support groups can provide a place where the bereaved have permission to grieve without guilt and expectation. They also grant an opportunity to listen to how others are coping, getting through each day, and how grief changes over time.

Individual, couple, and family therapists are trained to help people cope with the multifaceted impact of the death of a child. Therapists may be more aware of the physical manifestations of grief and the effect that grief can have on daily functioning. Professional support may be needed when there are complicating factors such as suicide, drug or alcohol abuse, disconnection from reality, or a history of loss or mental health challenges.

Parents who have lost a child think about him or her constantly. People love to talk about their children, and many bereaved parents want to continue to share about theirs. Don’t be afraid to mention the deceased child’s name, or to share memories—most parents will welcome the opportunity. Talking about children who have died becomes a way to keep their memory alive, to honor the mark they left on this world, and to witness their impact. Listen patiently and hold a space for parents who want to share their memories.

No one knows what to say when a child dies, so we often share clichés or try to say something positive. “It was God’s will,” “You still have your other child,” or “You should...” These statements are not helpful. It is better to be honest: “I don’t know what to say, but I want you to know that I love you.” More helpful than your words is your presence, your ability to listen, and your willingness to be there for the long haul.

Grief is part of the human experience. It is how we process pain and loss. Grief is not neat, not done in stages, and not something to avoid. Grief is physical, individual, and necessary.

Surviving the death of a child takes courage, dedication, and grit. It takes a commitment to life, amidst all of the pain and sorrow. You will be changed beyond recognition. But survival will happen.



*The Art of Healing*  
Grief & Loss Support Group

# art therapy, it's not what you think!



Maybe you've considered art therapy and this thought popped in your head... "I don't have an artistic bone in my body!" ...Experience not needed!

When Michael & David Perotto, owners of Walker Brothers and Bartolomeo & Perotto Funeral Homes made the commitment to offer "The Art of Healing" grief therapy & loss support group, admittedly there may have been concerns that maybe people may not come. Maybe people aren't interested in artwork or creating it, and would it really help them?

Luckily, Art Therapist and Administrative team player on the Bartolomeo/Walker Brothers staff, Andrea Piccone, MS encouraged this initiative to move forward and convinced them that no one in this group needs to have formal artistic training. The purpose was to help heal, not necessarily to create art for aesthetic purposes.

## Why use art for coping with loss?

- The act of expressing difficult feelings through art helps to diminish the initial resistance and fear that comes with facing our pain. Art allows us to explore our pain without becoming too overwhelmed or re-traumatized.
- Creating imagery out of our emotions gives the opportunity to look at ourselves from a different perspective. Sometimes we cannot see how our pain is affecting us or those around us, this helps us gain

awareness of ourselves which is the first step toward coping.

- Art created therapeutically serves as a "container" to hold onto our most painful feelings and experiences so these feelings do not stay inside, and eat away at us.
- Art assists in verbalizing feelings, especially if participants struggle or avoid discussing their emotions. It gives us the ability to sort out confusion, guilt, stress, anxiety and many other complex feelings that tend to leave us feeling overwhelmed. The end result is more clarity bringing us closer to healing.
- When the death of a loved one occurs, people feel a lack of control which drives anxiety and depression. When art projects are completed, it will give the participants a sense of accomplishing something that is tangible and will give members a feeling of control during a time when they feel they have none.
- Lastly, participants will have the opportunity to create tributes that will memorialize and honor their loved one that can be shared with other family members.



**Andrea Piccone, BFA, MS** is an experienced Art Therapist and Artist. She earned her Bachelors degree in Fine Arts & Illustration with a concentration in Psychology at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), furthering her education with a Master's Degree in Art Therapy from Nazareth College. She worked several years for The Society for the Protection and Care of Children (SPCC) as an Art Therapist and Social Worker. Andrea continues her work as a freelance artist, and is now a full-time employee at Bartolomeo & Perotto/Walker Brothers Funeral Homes in Administration and runs The Art of Healing art therapy groups.



*Evening Group now being offered*

If you have questions about art therapy or our grief support groups, please email Andrea Piccone at [andrea@bartolomeo.com](mailto:andrea@bartolomeo.com), or call 585-720-6000.



# Going “Green” In the Funeral Industry

by M.J. Moyes

While “going green” has been part of the American mainstream for at least the past three decades, the idea of “going green”

as part of the funeral business has only recently begun to make its mark. While Walker Brothers Funeral Home, Inc. stands ready to respond to any requests for “green” funeral services and/or burials, interest from within the Rochester and surrounding communities has thus far been muted. With the expectation that this inclination will change in the years ahead, Walker Brothers has consulted with the Green Burial Council on best practices for this movement.

If the national trends and surveys provide any indication, local area interest will undoubtedly begin to emerge. A 2015 survey by the Funeral and Memorial Information Council determined that 64 percent of adults age 40 and above would be “interested in green funeral options,” compared to 43 percent who reported such interest in 2010. And more than 70 percent of “cemetery” members who responded to a 2015 Green Burial Council survey reported that “demand for green burial has increased.” Meanwhile, the number of funeral homes and cemeteries in North America receiving Green Burial Council Certification grew from one in 2006 to more than 300 today.

The idea of going green in the funeral industry encompasses a broad range, covering everything from the treatment of the decedant’s remains to the flower arrangements. Green funerals and burials are designed to limit environmental impacts, which can be considerable when the 2.5 million or so annual deaths in the U.S. are considered as a whole.

According to various studies, traditional funeral/burial practices in the U.S. have created about one million acres of cemeteries filled with more than 115 million tons of steel (caskets), four million acres of hardwood timber (caskets), and about 2.3 billion tons of concrete (burial vaults). Not only do these represent valuable resources that could have been used for other purposes, but it will take centuries for them to biodegrade and rejoin the natural cycle. Added to this mix is about 800,000 gallons of toxic formaldehyde (embalming fluid) per year that may also compromise the environment.

Cremation has emerged in recent decades as a viable alternative to burial, due to both its lower costs and the belief by some that it is more environmentally friendly. However, cremation relies on significant energy expenditures and releases greenhouse gases and heavy metals into the atmosphere.

Even the benign floral arrangements have been marked for their potential environmental impacts. Among the biggest impact cited by environmentalists is that the majority of flowers used in arrangements for U.S. florists are grown in South America and then air-shipped to the U.S. Along with

the large carbon footprint created by shipping, many South American Growers reportedly rely on unsustainable growing methods and extensive use of insecticides and herbicides.

Instead of embalming with formaldehyde, funeral homes can utilize non-toxic post-mortem fluids such as an all-natural, vanilla-bean-based potion, and rely more on refrigeration or dry ice for the temporary preservation.

To further go green, the next option includes determining the eco-friendly casket, shroud or other container that the body will be interred within. Green Burial Council guidelines for such products call for them to “be constructed from plant-derived, recycled plant-derived, natural, animal, or unfired earthen materials, including shell, liner, and adornments.” Additionally, the products cannot contain finishes, adhesives or dyes that release any toxic by-products during their expected biodegradation. Common containers being used in green funerals are “traditional” pine boxes, shrouds, whicker baskets, and a variety of caskets made out of a wide range of natural and recycled materials, such as sea grass, willow branches and recycled newspaper.



Choices for an actual “green” burial are a bit more limited for the Rochester area, as only two cemeteries currently provide the option. Other area cemeteries are aware of the “green” trend, and are likely investigating alternative options for their grounds as well.

Mount Hope Cemetery has been certified by the Green Burial Council as a hybrid cemetery, which means that it is a conventional cemetery that offers the option of burial in eco-friendly containers without a vault and without embalming. Holy Sepulchre Cemetery has been certified by the council as “natural,” which means (in its green burial section) in short, it prohibits the use of toxic embalming fluids, vaults, and caskets not made from natural or plant-derived materials.

As for floral arrangements, the best advice offered by those promoting “green” funerals is to seek out florists who offer local organically grown flowers.

This article has covered the primary components involved with “going green” within the funeral industry, though there are other elements that can add to the eco-friendliness of funeral services and burials. For example, forsaking the use of a traditional headstone in favor of a flat, natural rock or a tree or other plant.

If you are interested in incorporating eco-friendly elements into your own or a family member’s services, Walker Brothers funeral directors will be glad to discuss available options, 585-352-1500.



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