

## **Flowers, Plants and Things**

### Some Words About Funeral Flowers

by  
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Why flowers in sympathy? Why do we bother? Why don't we just omit them?

Flowers are sent to funerals for several reasons. They are a means of expression. So often it is difficult for those who have friends or relatives who have had a loss to express their feelings with words. Flowers are a visual expression of love, sympathy and respect. They are how our society lends support and shares the burden of grief.

So often we hear that "funeral flowers are such a waste." "The deceased can't see them" or "they just go to the cemetery and are a waste." Not true. They are a celebration of a life. They are sent to comfort the living and show respect for the deceased. They are there to ease the burden of grief. They brighten the saddest of days. Flowers create a background of warmth and beauty that adds dignity and consolation to the service. Don't believe this? Then go to a wake where there are no flowers. It is sadness personified. It is dark and gloomy. Flowers do not wither and die in the mind of the bereaved, they are recalled time and again as indelible memories.

And, no, most flowers sent to a funeral home do not end up in a pile at the grave site. Certainly a few very significant pieces do. But many are taken to nursing homes where they brighten the days and lives of the aged and the disadvantaged.

In earliest days, before embalming became the norm, flowers were sent to the service to help control the offensiveness of body decomposition. One of the most famous funerals where flowers were used for just this reason was that of President Andrew Johnson. The body was not embalmed, and by the day of his funeral, his body was in such foul condition that the funeral director (undertaker in those days) closed the casket and heaped loads of fragrant flowers on and around it. The flowers hid the odor effectively.

Every 10 or 15 years we see a spate of obituaries that use the phrases, “in lieu of flowers” or “please omit flowers. It has always been a trend that rises sharply and then falls just as quickly. While well intentioned, the phrases can be misleading. At a time of loss, people express their sympathy in a variety of ways; attending the wake, sending a personal note or making a hot meal. They offer to tend young children during the services, send flowers or contribute to a charity. We should not deprive them of any thing they want to do.

There are some wonderful phrases that carry the message more softly, more delicately. Consider, “memorial contributions may . . .” make memorials to the charity of your choice,” “flowers and contributions to \_\_\_\_\_ are both welcome,” Do not deprive friends and family their choice.

Today there is a trend toward sending home style arrangements to the service so that they may be taken home to brighten the families lives for days to come. Sometimes they are given to friends at the close of the services. In the south at the close of the services, the family takes handfuls or single flowers from the bouquets and gives them to friends as a remembrance, as a thank you for being there in time of need. And, today many florists, suggest home style arrangements that can be taken home to brighten the grieving family’s day or they are often give to visitors at the end of calling hours with thanks for visiting, to enjoy for how ever long as those flowers will last. Waste? Not hardly.