



*Guide*  
to Creating a Memorable  
Celebration of Life Service

by *Christiane Bristow*

*Dedicated to my late husband,  
Captain (retired) Alfred Thomas Bristow*

*I dedicate this eGuide to my late husband, Alfred, who was always present and supported me in all that I have attempted and achieved. He was my "knight in shining armor." He was my best friend and my champion.*

*He never missed a morning or a night to say,  
"I Love You Munchkin!"*

*Alf was so generous with his love, his understanding and compassion for others. His circle of friends was endless. He was always ready to lend a helping hand, to listen and support them in any way.*

*I know he would be so very proud of my accomplishments in publishing this eGuide. He has been my inspiration.*

*I have always said: "If at the end of your loved one's life, all you want is more of what you had, that's everything!" All I ever wanted, was more of what we had. I miss him every day!*

*I will never walk alone!  
I love you to the moon and back my baby!*

*'Til we meet again, continue your flight Captain Bristow!*

*Your Munchkin*

*Christiane*



## *eGuide to Creating a Memorable Celebration of Life Service*

My heart is filled with compassion for your loss.

You have been asked to create a Celebration of Life Service – but what does that entail and why is this role so important? My intent in creating this eGuide is to help and support you throughout the process of creating a Celebration Service and give you confidence and guidance.

This eGuide will provide valuable information necessary to create, plan and execute, a memorable and meaningful Celebration of Life Service. The information contained throughout, is a collection of personal knowledge gained throughout my journey as a Celebrant (Celebrant being the person who creates and officiates the service) and through my own experiences of loss.

Being asked to deliver a Celebration of Life Service, is an honour and a privilege. As such, it means someone trusts you to help them feel loved and less alone on this day. By creating this Celebration of Life Service, you are giving this family a lasting treasured gift. It's a day when they will feel so much loss, yet at the same time, so much love. Through your efforts, you will provide them with peace and comfort, while creating treasured moments by sharing sweet memories.

**Remember, these memories will be their “forever”!**



# *eGuide to Creating a Memorable Celebration of Life Service*

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## Section 1

### Questions to Ask the Family

One of the most important things to determine up front, is the *style* of Celebration Service the family envisions i.e., religious, spiritual, non-denominational, formal or casual, etc. Equally important is establishing the *tone* and *feel* of this Celebration Service.

The questions below, will generate a conversation with key participants, to ensure that the wishes of the family are appropriately represented.

#### **Questions to ask the family**

1. What type of celebration service do you envision?
  - Religious/Spiritual
  - Non-religious
  - The feeling and/or vision (casual/formal)
2. How many family members and/or friends will be speaking?
  - Time allotment for each person
  - Poems or readings
  - A Eulogy
  - Speech(s)
3. Will the family want to include a video montage during the Celebration Service?
  - Playing on a loop throughout
  - Special collage of pictures as a segment
  - A still picture throughout
4. Will the family want to include songs during the Celebration Service?
  - Musicians – live music
  - Vocalist
  - Recorded music
  - How many pieces of music (the deceased's favourites)?

5. Will the family wish to prepare and include personal touches such as:

- Framed pictures, photo albums, sports items etc.
- Creating a Memorial Card / Bookmark Card
- What was their (deceased) favourite thing(s) to do / hobbies

6. Logistics

- Name of deceased (Full name and any nickname)
- Date of Birth / Date of Death
- Date of Celebration of Life Service
- Location of Celebration (in person, virtual or combination of both)
- Family Names and relationship to the deceased
- Number of guests invited/expected
- Duration of the Celebration Service
- Will there be an interment?
- Will there be an in-person reception?
- Is there an Obituary? Where?
- Consider including sections of the Obituary in the Service.
- What stories, if any, would the family like to share (these may be told at the beginning of your service)
- What would the family like you to know that you may not? (i.e., about the deceased and/or family dynamics etc.)



## Section 2

### *Creating and Planning the Celebration of Life Service*

Here are some notes for you to consider as you help to guide the family in the planning of the Celebration of Life Service.

#### **Words of Welcome**

As you welcome everyone, it would be appropriate to acknowledge family members (e.g., grandparents, godparents). The family may also want you to acknowledge those that have travelled from afar. In addition, you may want to take the time to acknowledge certain family and friends who have worked together to plan and organize the Celebration of Life. Let the family guide you with their preferences.

It would be comforting to the guests and family for you (Celebrant) to take a few moments to talk about the deceased. You may want to consider regaling them with one or two stories you have been personally connected to or that the family have shared with you.

#### **Speakers**

When you are asking “Who will be speaking?” keep in mind the duration of the Celebration Service. You may want to suggest that each speaker be given a time limit of 3-5 minutes. As well, a speaker may want to limit their storytelling to one or two narratives they know guests would relate to. You might suggest that other stories could be told during the Social Gathering following the Celebration Service.

You may have attended services where guests are invited to speak during, or at the end of the service. I have seen this work very well in a casual style of service where guests are gathered in more of a cocktail setting. In a more structured setting, you may want to maintain control over the length and flow of the Celebration Service. In this case, you could be specific to the number of speakers and the order in which they will present. At the end of the Celebration Service, you can still invite the guests to share their memories and stories during the Social Gathering. You will then have ensured everyone has had their time to share, which is so essential at this time.

As the Celebrant, to best facilitate the speakers, it is essential to be prepared for different situations that may arise during their speech. Here are a few examples I'd like to share with you...

- In the case of someone who wishes to speak, but is feeling vulnerable to nerves and emotions, you can invite them to have someone stand beside them that will help them feel comforted and supported.
- I have often been asked in advance to read remarks from someone who is not able to attend; or would prefer to not speak directly during the Celebration Service. The key to emotional impact here, is to take the time to talk about the "writer," and the relationship they had with the deceased. You will want to explain that he/she is taking comfort in having their words spoken for them.
- It is also possible that a speaker starts and cannot continue. You will want to be prepared to invite one of the family/friends to come up and stand with them, or perhaps even finish their speech. As the Celebrant, you may also step in to complete their speech if they feel unable to do so.

### **Introducing Speakers**

As you are planning and creating your script, your introduction of the speaker is very important. It's meaningful to the guests attending, because they need to be able to relate to who the speaker is, in relation to the deceased. This sets the tone and mindset for the guests prior to listening to the speaker(s).

It's an honour to be asked to speak or read a poem. A warm introduction will help the speaker feel less nervous and help them to deliver what is an emotional and passionate speech or reading.

### **Obituaries**

Most obituaries will list the names & relationship of the immediate families. You may want to ask the immediate family if they would like this section acknowledged during the Words of Welcome. There is no right or wrong way here. It's a very personal choice and often made based on the dynamics of the families.



## **Personal Touches**

I feel personal touches are very important when it comes to planning for the Celebration of Life. It can range from simple to elaborate, depending on the wishes of the family. It can be a theme that carries throughout the Celebration from the Service to the Gathering with the print materials, colours, wording, food, and music. A simple memento (“*a memory of the deceased*”) could also be suggested, all intended to influence atmosphere, emotion, memories, and comfort.

Let us take, for example, the following:

- In the case of someone who loved cars/racing, the family may want to add personal touches, such as a display of some of their car collection and memorabilia. Perhaps the pallbearers, each have a checkered flag handkerchief in their breast pocket or a checkered lapel pin etc.
- If the deceased was a carpenter, perhaps having carpenter pencils for guests with the deceased’s name engraved.
- In the case of an avid reader or librarian, creating a bookmark for guests may be meaningful.
- If the deceased were an avid chef or baker, a recipe card with ingredients and instructions for their signature dish, would be a nice touch.

## **Memorial Cards**

A memorial card is a keepsake and a way of capturing the essence of who their loved one was. Most cards will contain their picture, their story, a related or favourite poem, an acknowledgment of thanks and the Order of Service (Tribute). This card can be created in many formats. They can be given to each guest as they arrive and/or displayed in a reception area. Again, here it could follow a particular theme.

## **Photos/Video Montage**

The family may want to prepare, both photographs, as well as a video montage. Both are always a lovely touch for any style of Celebration.

Photographs can be a collage of pictures on picture boards, various framed photos that the family may have, as well as photo albums that can all be displayed around the room. This can help with the flow of guests throughout the room(s).

A Video Montage is lovely for the guests to watch. The choice of music becomes very important, as it carries the emotion and memory of each picture. You may be limited to the placement of the video based on the technical set up available at the venue.

Check with the family to ask if they would like to incorporate a video (without sound) at the front of the room during the Celebration Service. I have had this experience. Again, this a personal choice made by the family because it could be viewed as a distraction. However, I have found the family know their guests, and as such, the silent video can be a comfort while listening to the Service. I do not believe there is a right or wrong here either.

## **Venue**

The venue is a special choice for the family. They may want to customize the Celebration of Life and pay tribute to their loved one in keeping with their hobbies, personality, or any other interests. In choosing the venue, the family could consider for example, a yacht club for a boater, a bowling alley where friends gathered weekly, a local favourite restaurant, a family garden, a special park, etc. (a special license may be required for some parks).

You may also be preparing for a virtual Celebration of Life Service. This is meaningful for those who cannot travel and attend in person. If this is the case, and you are planning a virtual Celebration, you will need the required technical resources. Here, you may want to ask for an audio check/rehearsal. The sound amplification is important because you may be broadcasting from various areas such as: a podium, online speakers, other areas within the room/venue etc.



## **Section 3**

### **Order of Service - Script Sections**

The order and the sections of a Celebration Service are optional and personal to the family. This Order of Service is created to provide you with options and ideas to help you with the flow and structure for a beautiful Celebration of Life Service.

#### **Celebration Information**

*Name and Dates of the Deceased*

*The Place of Gathering and Tribute (date, time, venue & address)*

*Social Gathering (time, venue & address)*

#### **Order of Service**

##### **The Processional**

*(outline the order of entrance & music selection)*

##### **Welcome - Address to the Guests**

*(your words of welcome, who you are, statements and/or stories about the deceased)*

##### **Gift of Song**

*(a song selection to remember the essence of the deceased)*

##### **Honouring of Loved-Ones**

*(invite the family members who will be speaking)*

##### **Eulogy**

*(a family member, or friend, may want to give tribute to their loved one)*

##### **Gift of Song**

*(a song selection that would help everyone in their moment of remembering)*

##### **Words of Remembrance**

*(introduce speaker(s) that the family has chosen)*

**Reading(s) or Poem(s)**

*(introduce the reader or it may be yourself as the Celebrant)*

**Video Collage**

*(a 3–5-minute photo collection with music is a beautiful way to share their life)*

**Blessing - Remembrance - Sending Forth**

*(Celebrant's words of comfort, closing remarks, blessing and any announcements)*

**Recessional Music/Song**

*(introduce audio selection)*

*(here is an appropriate time to acknowledge and thank participating musicians and vocalists)*

**Interment / Reception**

*(either or both may follow the celebration)*



## Section 4

### *Text Samples – Suggested Remarks*

#### Sample Words of Welcome

Welcome Everyone! I would like to ask everyone to gather. We will be starting our service shortly.

\*\*\*\*\*

Welcome Everyone! If I could ask everyone to gather around and ensure you have a beverage in hand as we will be starting our Tribute to *(name of deceased)* in a few minutes.

\*\*\*\*\*

*(Name of deceased)*, we are all gathered here today at *(location)* with family and friends to celebrate your life. *(You may want to name the members of the family and their relationship as was published in the Obituary)*

\*\*\*\*\*

My name is *(name of Celebrant)* and I am so honoured to be asked to participate and officiate the celebration of *(first name of deceased)*'s life and to welcome you all today.

I had the honour and privilege of meeting *(first name of deceased)*, etc.

\*\*\*\*\*

We sometimes wonder why we meet certain people along our life's journey. We meet for various reasons, and sometimes those reasons are unclear to us. Sometimes we meet for a short period of time, sometimes a lifetime, but always for a purpose.

\*\*\*\*\*

All of us have been touched by *(name of deceased)* in some way: family, colleagues, and longtime friends. Some of us here today may not have had the chance to know him/her personally, but we are here to support his/her family. We've all been touched by *(name of deceased)* in different ways.

\*\*\*\*\*

These past couple of weeks, as I was thinking of *(name of deceased)*, an image came into my mind and that was of *(your descriptive word)* *(this could be utilized as an introduction to a reading or poem as well)*

## Sample Introductions for Speakers

The most precious gift that anyone can give us is the gift of “*memories.*” They last. They never wear out. They never get lost. Memories are a beautiful thing. Memories are our “forever”!!!

I would like to invite (*name of speaker*) to take us on a trip down memory lane with stories of his/her (*relationship of the speaker to the deceased*).

\*\*\*\*\*

(*Name of deceased*) had many long-time friends. This group have been friends for over (*number of years*) years. They have shared many memories together and I would like to invite “*some of the gang*” to share their memories.

\*\*\*\*\*

I would now like to invite (*name of deceased*)’s confidant and close friend (*name of speaker*) who wants to share his/her stories and memories with us.

## Sample Closing Remarks

At the end of this Tribute to (*name of deceased*), please join the family for refreshments and an opportunity to share your memories, your laughs, and your stories with them, and each other.

As we close this tribute and Celebration of (*name of deceased*)’s life, I’d like to share this poem of whom the author is unknown, but who’s written words to support us all.

\*\*\*\*\*

As most of you know, (*name of deceased*) had a fabulous selection of “gadgets”. I would like to take this time to thank (*name*) for bringing a supply of (*name of the gadget*) for us. There will be one for each family, please enjoy this lovely memento.

\*\*\*\*\*

(*Name of deceased*) we wish you were not gone, but we are grateful that you were here. Let us go and let our memories lead the way into a brighter and less troubled day. We bid you safe journey (*name of deceased/nickname*)!!! ‘Til we meet again!!!

## **Other Suggestions**

After each speaker, you (the Celebrant) may want to say a few words about their speech; how they moved you or reminded you of a time that made you feel emotional. This will show that you listened and were moved by their words. To the speaker, on such an emotional occasion, this is special.

If you are able, ask for the speakers notes/speech in advance. This way, you would be able to prepare your words of acknowledgment ahead of time.

When you are introducing a song or video/picture section, give a frame of reference to the guests. This is a time for you to share the reason this song/picture/video meant so much.



## *My Personal Note For You*

My wish for you, is to experience the warmth and love you will give a family at their time of loss and grief. Writing this eGuide was extremely personal and important to me. I will always remember the feeling and sense of love I felt from my Celebrant, my family, and friends, who surrounded me on the day we Celebrated my late husband's life. That day of love carried me all these years. Now, I want to share it with you!

I am humbled you have taken the first step in purchasing my eGuide and taking the time to read through it, so that you can create and deliver a heartfelt Celebration of Life Service of your own.

*A Humble Celebrant*

*Christiane*





*I would like to thank my friends and family  
who have shared their gift of time,  
their wisdom and expertise to help me create this eGuide.*

*I dared to dream!  
You supported and encouraged me to achieve that dream.*

*You embarked upon this journey with me,  
because you believed in me.  
You gave me the confidence to believe in myself.  
Thank you for your unconditional love!*



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## Testimonial

*When someone dear to you passes away, in my case my mother, you're then dealing with the emotion of their loss and how to fittingly memorialize them. It was important to me, that mom's Celebration of Life, being my final act of love for her, be as awe-inspiring as she was.*

*Christiane, a confident speaker, set a positive tone while she took attendees on a journey with her words. Her meticulously prepared service was a personalized and relevant legacy of mom's life.*

*Meeting Christiane is like running into a ray of sunshine. Her compassion, inherent kindness, caring nature, and unwavering support is not only comforting, but translates into her service.*



*If you aren't as lucky as I was, to have Christiane as your Officiant and you've been tasked to facilitate a service yourself, you'll find this step-by-step book invaluable. As I read through the pages, it's as if Christiane is gently taking your hand, as she guides you through the service details. Christiane, through her experience and direction, will help ensure that your service is meaningful, individualized and a wonderful lasting gift for the family.*

*Karen K*