

Bereaved Families of Cape Breton

Remembering Deceased Loved Ones by Starting a Memory Book

The Question

I received an email from someone asking for advice on starting a memory book. Her younger brother had died six months earlier at the age of 43. Her brother's first grandchild was born shortly after his death. She wanted to create the memory book for her own sake and also so the granddaughter would be able to know something about her grandfather. I thought this was a good question and that others might benefit from the answer as well, so I decided to create a page about starting a memory book for remembering deceased loved ones.

My Response for starting a memory book

My thought is that you will have better success if you start with something that feels natural to you. If you start with a goal of a big, beautiful scrapbook when you have never made one before, the project may become overwhelming. So before starting a memory book spend some time thinking about the type of project that fits your personality and style. Here are some points to think about:

1. Paper and Glue or Digital books

They both have their pros and cons. The paper and glue scrapbooks allows for much more creativity and gives an intimate feel. The digitally produced books are much quicker to produce (the software is quite easy to work with). Another benefit is that you can buy as many copies as you want--when other members of the family start raving about how wonderful it is to have all the memories so close at hand. A variety of companies make scrapbooking software for this purpose.

2. Stories or Reflection on Personal Loss

A book of stories would be about your memories of your loved one's life. "I remember when my brother and I were in grade school, we loved to . . ."

A book of reflection on your loss would have more of a journal feel. "Today I was reminded of the way my brother always . . . It made me miss him and wish we could go back to those times."

3. Actual Life Photos or Metaphorical Photos

By a book using actual life photos, I mean photos that were taken of your loved one throughout his or her life. If these are going to be your focus, they can actually help outline the book for you. In this case you can work chronologically selecting the best photos and writing stories to go with the photos. Family members can also help in adding stories.

A book using metaphorical photos uses photos that portray the emotion of a story or reflection. You can see many examples of this in the "Photo Reflections" section of this website.

4. Life Chronicle or Theme-based Book

Remembering deceased loved ones through a life chronicle book generally follows the chronological events of a person's life. It can cover the whole life or a certain portion of his or her life.

A theme-based book takes one theme that was typical of a person's life and focuses the stories and photos on that theme. For example, my aunt created a book about my cousin's love of hunting. So all the stories and photos focused on his hunting trips.

Examples for Starting a Memory book

Finding focus is important in starting a memory book. Once you have a focus that fits your personality and style, the process should become more clear. Here are two examples of different options that could develop into beautiful books.

The writer of the email said she loves to journal and do photography. She wants a book that is both for herself and her brother's granddaughter.

One Option

She may decide that she loves a handwritten feel using actual photos, chronological stories from her brother's life. A simple way to start would be to buy a book of blank paper and start adding photos and writing stories. Start with her and her brother's parents. Tell something about what they were like, tell where the family lived when her brother was born, then stories about their growing up years, etc. For a chronological memory book, a book set up for adding pages is important because you will remember things later that you wished you had added earlier.

Another Option

She may decide that she wants to do a digital book reflecting on her personal loss, using metaphorical photos with a garden theme (if per chance her brother or she enjoyed gardening). She might take photos from her garden and write about how the various images remind her about the cycle of life. She might write about how digging reminds her of how her brother was a hard worker throwing his heart and soul into his projects. Or she might write about how the seeds being planted in the dark soil reminds her of how she feels the darkness of life in her grief, wondering if the seed will produce anything. In this case she would upload her digital images into the software, type her reflections as she goes. When the book feels complete, she orders a copy and receives a professionally bound and printed book

With endless options it is hard to know how to get started. Finding focus is an important first step.

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<http://www.journey-through-grief.com/Starting-a-Memory-Book.html>