

In death, laughter is allowed!

We think of death as this solemn time. Picture in your mind a family gathered around the death bed of a loved one at home, or the scene at a funeral home during calling hours. In these settings, words are spoken in whispers, and voices that are too loud draw withering looks from others who are present.

There are times when silence or whispers are proper, I grant you that, but it is also okay to laugh when laughter is a natural response to the circumstances. I am talking especially about those situations where someone has lived a full life and they are (or were) ready to die.

I hope you can join in laughter over a corny joke with the person who is dying, or laugh at the odd situations you find yourselves in. Yes, I am asking you to please laugh with your friends, with family, and with caregivers during the death process and after a death. Seriously, it's okay when experiencing death to acknowledge situations or statements as funny, ironic, or just plain odd.

Laughter is a gift in this life, so why shouldn't it be a gift we share at the time of death and after a death?

We have science that proves laughter releases tension from our bodies, it lightens the mood, and it can help us heal. I think laughing brings us closer to each other as human beings when we share a moment in time that inspires us to laugh together.

I bet your best friends in this world are the people who can make you laugh in the bad times, not just the good. The people who can lift your spirits with laughter when you are feeling low are the ones you keep close in this life. At least, that's my wish for you.

I offer the following "real death" examples from experiences in my own family to illustrate when laughter is totally proper. Believe me, this is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg on funny moments in and around death.

My Dad loved to tell stories that made people laugh, and he would love knowing that his dying process was punctuated with moments of hysterical laughter. These moments with my Dad at the time of his death and after his death are offered to help you see that you are not alone in thinking some of the stuff that happens at the time of a death is just plain funny.

1. If Only Our Parents Had Been Drugged All Along!

When my Dad was dying at home, he was on morphine to ease his pain, along with Ativan, a muscle relaxant. My mother had just been diagnosed in the early stages of dementia when Dad was dying and she was having major anxiety attacks in the weeks

leading up to my Dad's death. To solve her anxiety issues, we had a prescription for low dose (2 mg) Xanax, a muscle relaxant, to help her stay calm. Mom's Xanax bottle sat on the kitchen window sill, ready for us to deploy if she started to become anxious.

At the end of each home health visit during those last two weeks of my Dad's life, whoever was there caring for Dad would gather in the kitchen with Dad's nurse, Andy, after he had assessed Dad's status. Andy was, by the way, a gift from God/Allah/Buddha/the universe and hospice! At these gatherings with Andy we would talk about how we thought things were going, and share any issues or concerns we had with caring for Dad at home.

During one of these meetings, my brother Michael shared his observation that with Dad on morphine and Mom on Xanax they were actually getting along with each other, and he went on to say that if we had just put them both on these drugs 25 years before, how different life would have been in our home. While Michael was making this statement, our Mom was actually nodding her head in agreement! We all burst out laughing, because it was a funny and brutally truthful observation to make, and our Dad would have been laughing too, if he hadn't been asleep at the time.

Our parents had survived 3 wars, raised 5 kids, had a 57-year marriage, and made it through my mother's long battle with a serious autoimmune disease. Believe me, anti-anxiety medications would have been totally appropriate for both of them!

2. Mom, Dad can still hear you even though he's in a coma!

Four days before he died, my Dad went into a coma. My mother found these last days particularly stressful to cope with, and, after 2 months of Dad being in a phase that is termed "actively dying," we were all getting to the end of our capacities to care for him 24/7 at home.

During these last days, early one morning around 4 a.m., while I was sitting vigil with my Dad, my Mom came into the room to talk with me because she was unable to sleep. She asked me where I thought Dad's soul was while his body was in a coma.

I told her that some people believe that when the body is in a coma, the soul is in a spiritual place where they review their life, assessing what they did well, what they learned, what they might still need to learn, and the body remains in coma while this review is done. Upon hearing this, my Mom exclaimed, "Oh, he'll be there FOREVER!"

I leaned toward my Mom and said calmly, "You know, Mom, we believe that even though Dad's in a coma, he can still hear you." "Really?" she said. She got right up, tottered over to my Dad, leaned down to his left ear (the good ear he could hear with) and said quite loudly, "John, hurry up!" Then she turned on her heels and left the room without another word.

And I sat there with my knitting and my cup of tea, thinking to myself, “you can’t make this stuff up.”

3. **Dad always loved that garbage disposal.**

The morning we were to take our Dad’s cremated remains to Massachusetts for burial in the family plot, I walked into the kitchen in time to see my oldest sister, Cindy, streak toward the sink and blast the water to rinse her hands. I thought she had cut herself and asked her what was wrong. Through teary eyes she said, “I think I just shook hands with Dad! I went to add a memento to his box on the mantle and I stuck my hand directly into the ashes!” I looked at her washing her hands in the sink, watched the water run down into the drain and said, “Well, he always loved that garbage disposal, so now I guess he’s one with it.” Cindy looked down at her hands, realized she was washing some of Dad’s ashes down the drain, then gave me that older sister look and replied with the standard line in our family – “Don’t tell Mom!”

And folks, those are just a few of the highlights from what could be a nonfiction comedy book about my Dad’s death process and funeral. We all loved our Dad and our parents had a marriage that lasted nearly 60 years, but he was very ill, in great pain, and it was his time to leave us. I miss my Dad every day, but remembering these odd moments and continuing to laugh at them helps me heal and yet keep the memory of my Dad close.

Yes, there are many situations in which there is no humor in a death. I am talking about the deaths of students at our schools, deaths of soldiers serving near and far away, deaths of young people from diseases we cannot conquer or from accidents we cannot wrap our brains around, or the acts of suicide that take our loved ones.

But there are times when life is well and fully lived and it is time to let go of this physical body that no longer works. In those situations, I hope you will remember this post and know that laughter can help ease everyone’s pain, if only for a brief moment.

Personally, my goal for my own death, whenever it comes, is to hear peals of raucous laughter around me while I am on my death bed. Granted, it might just be my own laughter I hear, but I plan on laughing out loud as often as I can, and I hope that those who are with me at that time will join me.

Adapted from: <https://onthewaytodying.com/in-death-laughter-is-allowed/>

