

GRIEVING FROM AN ACTIVITY PROFESSIONAL'S PERSPECTIVE

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Yes, activities can be fun and games, but in a long term care facility, activities become much more in the last days of life's journey. The following speech was prepared for an in-house Memorial Service. This was not only a community event, but an activity for current residents and their families.

Your loved ones were given to us in trust that we would care for and respect them as you did. We thank you for this. The Activity Department tries to replace what was lost as they come to live a new life with us. We do this through activity assessments, meetings, and consultations with others. We try to do everything in our power to provide meaningful, person-centered activities. To replicate the flower garden they meticulously tended for many years, the church they visited regularly, the pets they adored and pampered, and even the children they raised. The Activity Department tries to make this facility a real home for them, with all those wonderful past memories coming alive again!

When your loved ones were not feeling well, activities provided the diversion they needed to alleviate the physical, mental, and emotional ills that the medicines couldn't. And when they lay in their beds, we visited. We rubbed scented lotion on their frail hands and talked to them, even when they didn't answer. We knew they were very ill. We quietly waited, hoping, but knowing what the outcome would probably be. Then when we found out, sadness set in yet again. We lost our friends. Our hearts break, and then it is us doing the reminiscing and remembering certain celebrations or days, the music that was enjoyed, the fun we had together. Mostly, we remember their smiles, the twinkle that was always there in their eyes, the hugs that really meant something. We were friends, almost family.

Later, we may be asked to sort through their belongings. We understand that it can be difficult. It sometimes is tearful for us, too, but it is our job. We may find a treasured rosary, perhaps held in the last days, or a favorite sweater or hat. Maybe even a craft project that we worked on together or a bowling ribbon that was proudly worn.

It's the circle of life. But we remember, cherish, and forever keep in our hearts the memories of those that we have been fortunate to meet. We learned about their unique and interesting lives. We provided a continuity that helped ease them into their last days on earth.

We are thankful to the families that have trusted us with this important responsibility. We hope we have also provided comfort to you in letting you know how much we loved and cared for your loved ones. Thank you! CF