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History and Importance of Sympathy Flowers

The Oldest Tribute

The arrangement and placement of flowers around the dead is humankind's oldest tribute, the oldest form of memorialization, the oldest act of mourning. This ancient activity was well documented by Dr. Ralph Solecki in his famous excavation in the Shandiar Cave in Northern Iraq.

Solecki discovered, in 1951, several burial sites in the Shandiar Cave. Eventually his discovery would place the subject of human burial into the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's oldest form of religious activity.

During his dig, Solecki submitted soil samples from the graves for pollen analysis to Arlette Leroi-Gourhan, a paleobotanist from Paris, France. Leroi-Gourhan found pollen and flower fragments from at least eight species of wild flowers. She declared the burials had occurred around 62,000 B.C. and that neither birds nor animals could have been responsible for the placement of the flowers. Therefore, she concluded that someone 62,000 years ago, had roamed the mountainside in the mournful task of collecting flowers for the funeral tribute.

Floral Symbols

Throughout history, flowers have been used to symbolize every aspect of the life cycle, from birth through death. For example, the fragility of life is symbolized by the flowers. To grow and expand, flowers require the proper conditions. The same is true for human beings. In death, flowers are used to symbolize how the beauty of creation is temporary; as surely as the flower must be cut from the stem, so it is with human life.

Flowers also have a particular aesthetic value in the face of death, for the beauty of the flower helps balance our emotional response to the perceived ugliness of death. Flowers help soften the raw imagery death leaves with survivors.

Finally, the colors of flowers have a specific symbolism, particularly in religious thought. For example, purple is a symbol of penitence and royalty, white is the symbol of joyous celebration and shining light, and green symbolizes nature and the freshness of growth.

Contemporary Role of Flowers

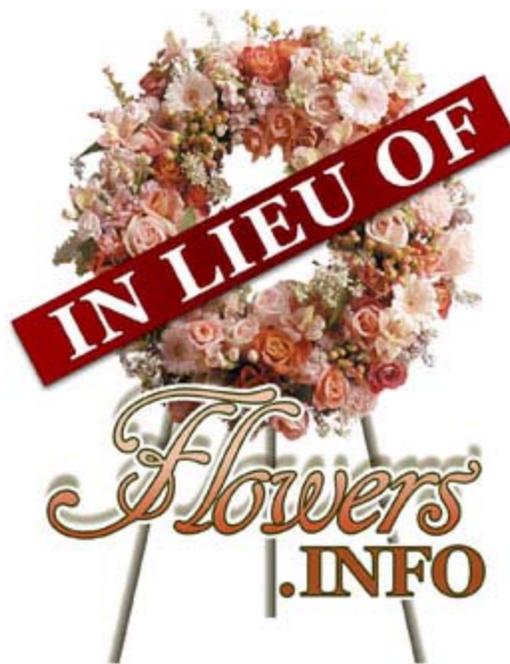
Today, flowers are sent to funerals for a number of reasons. First, they are a means of expression. It is often difficult for those mourning a death to put feelings into words. Flowers are a visual expression of love, sympathy and respect. They are a means of sharing the burden of grief, and they represent community support for the bereaved.

Flowers create a background of warmth and beauty, which adds to the dignity and consolation of the funeral service. Following the service, the bereaved are left with an indelible impression, or "memory picture" of the funeral. The more comforting the memory picture, the more easily it is recalled by the bereaved and the more vivid is the reinforcement of the reality of loss. Flowers do not wither and die in the mind of the bereaved; they are recalled time and again as indelible memories. Conversely, those who have attended service where there were no flowers, have expressed the feeling that something was missing, that the funeral was depressing.

Flowers also have a spiritual significance. They are symbolic not only of love and sympathy, but also of eternity and immortality. The fleeting life of flowers attests to the transitory life of man. There is profound symbolism in the very fact that flowers do not last forever.

Finally, flowers are not only for the living. They are also for the dead. Americans traditionally have expressed their respect for the deceased by sending flowers, which honors the dead and console the living.

Courtesy of SympathyFlowerShop.com



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