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Can We Put the Fun in Funeral?

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Friday March 1, 2024

By Julie Cole

I recently turned 62 and according to Social Security life expectancy projections, I will die when I'm 89.5. With 17.5 years left, now seems like the perfect time to take up extreme sports. Reaching this conclusion was easy. Skydiving, ziplining through the Amazon or something more altruistic like becoming a Red Cross International responder in a war-torn area sounds much more appealing than spending my final years in a nursing home, which is how all my grandparents died. Nursing homes have always felt like a sad return to freshman year... sharing a small room with a stranger, sleeping on a twin bed and eating cafeteria food. We could live like this when we were 18 because we also had endless beer, sex and

interesting classes to balance the crappy accommodations. But the thought of eventually moving into someplace called Sunnybrook Center and slowly fading to black (pun intended) is just not the ending I imagined for the life story I've created.

As a writer, it's only natural to want our life to be like a good book that builds momentum and has a satisfying conclusion. Whether I choose mountain climbing, traveling to Pamplona for the running of the bulls or swimming with sharks, I know these things will shorten my life expectancy, but that's why I am assuming the risk now when I am best equipped to handle it. My kids are grown, the retirement accounts are healthy and if I slip and fall off the mountain, at least my grandchildren will remember me as adventurous instead of a bed-ridden person who looked forward to *Wheel of Fortune* each night.

Whenever I do finally die, I'd like to put some "fun" in funeral by turning the traditional, solemn, predictable service on its head. First, save black for black-tie affairs and break out your neon green or Barbie-pink clothes. My funeral needs to be bright and happy. Second, absolutely no organist or overused hymns like "Amazing Grace." I want a DJ and a dance floor and the hum of "Uptown Funk" to get things started and then maybe a compilation of my favorite 80s songs like "Jungle Love," "Super Freak" and "It's Raining Men."

And third, every funeral needs a popcorn machine. I have always loved buttery popcorn so there will be one of those cute little carts constantly churning out red and white striped boxes for everyone. But for the final real ending, I want the last word at my own funeral. Call me a control freak, but I'm planning a personal video, wearing an evening gown where I give an Oscar-type acceptance speech thanking my cast and crew for a beautiful life.

—Julie Cole

From page to stage, Julie Cole likes to write and tell stories. Whether it's publishing essays in print and online publications or entertaining audiences at story slams or comedy clubs, Julie loves to make people laugh. In 2024 her essay "Can We Put the Fun in Funeral?" received an honorable mention in the Erma Bombeck Writing Competition's local humor category. She has an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts and can be found at www.juliehallcole.com.