

WHEN A FRIEND IS DYING...

Don't wait. Call to let the person who is dying know that he or she is in your thoughts. Visit if possible, even for five minutes. Hold a hand. Offer to read aloud. Share the news of the day. Sit in silence. And even if you have done all of these things, take a few moments to write a note.

Writing to a friend or loved one who is terminally ill is a challenge, one for which many of us feel unprepared, but it's worth it! Your note or letter can be read and re-read, saved and cherished. It has the power to extend your message of compassion into those quiet times when visitors have gone home.

The following format will help you organize your thoughts and feelings. It isn't intended as a rigid formula, rather as a set of guidelines to help you send a message from the heart. Including these elements allows you to let your friend or loved one know that you are thinking of them and that you will remember them as a healthy, vital being, one whose life has touched yours in a positive way.

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Dear David,

1. How has this person's situation touched you?

When I saw you today I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It's been like that a lot these days.

2. Recount a positive memory.

You were carrying a huge pile of books as you came up the stairs into the office and I recalled that first time we met. Do you remember the dark corner at the "Rathskellar" in the old Student Union where we literally bumped into each other? So cocky we were, so bold. We thought the smoke-covered walls reeked with atmosphere. Actually, they probably just reeked of stale beer and politics, but what a place and what a time we had.

3. Note admirable qualities.

Your love of learning has been such an inspiration to me. Through you I came to know what it meant to dig for the truth and settle for nothing less. Strong convictions always held you on the path of what you believed to be right and, to my continual surprise, it usually was!

4. For what are you grateful?

I will always be thankful for our friendship. You have been a support to me in so many ways. More times than you may know, your humor and good spirits have brightened my days.

5. Offer specific assistance.

When I come over this week, maybe I can help with that garden of yours. We can dig for truth among the tomatoes.

6. Close with a thoughtful word or phrase.

Until then, you are in my thoughts and prayers,

OPTIONS

- Offer a guiding principle or brief statement of your philosophy.
- Include a meaningful quotation, reading or poem.
- Send along a gift, (e.g. music, a book, journal, massage gift certificate,) or offer to provide a service such as taking a child on an outing.

Hilary Stanton Zunin
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