

# FLOWERS COMFORT

*Study reveals the importance of  
funeral flowers*

By Jean Adamczak

**F**UNERALS ARE UNPLEASANT. WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES are that lead to the death of a loved one, no one wants to say goodbye forever. Yet, during a survivor's darkest hour there is often one bright spot, one expression of sympathy that comforts when all others fail—flowers. □ It's a fact: Flowers and plants play an important part in the bereavement process. The findings of an extensive study conducted by Dr. Candice Shoemaker and Dr. Diane Relf when both were faculty members at Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (VPI) Blacksburg, Va., proves it. Jointly funded by the American Floral Endowment and the Society of American Florists' (SAF) Florist Information Committee, the study substantiates what florists and funeral directors have known for a long time—that flowers and plants play important roles at funerals and in the grieving process.

"We weren't surprised at the findings of the study," Relf, extension specialist in consumer horticulture at VPI, explained. "But I think it is useful to quantify and document once and for all that flowers do play an important role, versus the 'Well, gee I think so, maybe I feel better, but I don't know,' sort of thinking."

The purpose of the research was twofold, Relf said:

- ◆ To understand the value and role of flowers and plants in the funeral service and bereavement process.

- ◆ To determine who sends flowers, and when and why they are sent. Determining why flowers are sent, including the perceived value of sending and receiving flowers, was also a critical objective.

To achieve these goals, Shoemaker and Relf canvassed funeral directors, grief therapists, consumers and people who'd experienced the death of a loved one prior to the survey.

## **Flowers and plants play important roles at funerals and in the grieving process.**

Focus group interviews were also conducted. All research took place in the United States in 1989 and 1990. The findings were published in July

1990 as *The Role of Flowers and Plants in the Bereavement Process*.

The results of all the surveys and interviews reveal one overriding fact: Sympathy flowers and plants provide a tangible way for people to let the bereaved know they're being

thought of. According to the study, 85 percent of consumers surveyed said sympathy flowers are sent to comfort the survivors; 82 percent of the bereaved agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Sending flowers is a way I show someone I care;" and 56 percent of the funeral directors queried said flowers are sent to comfort the survivors.

## **RESULTS**

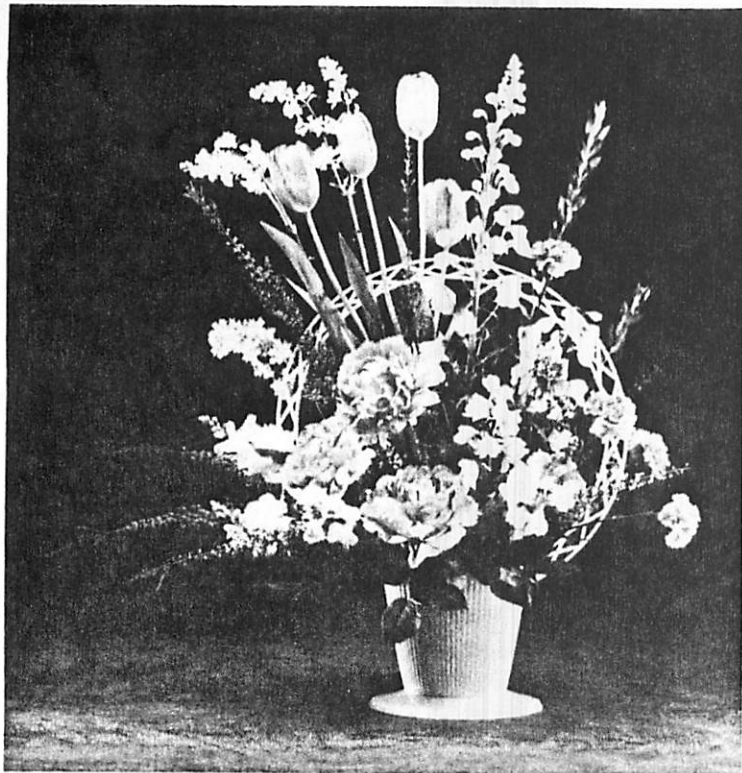
**H**ERE ARE SOME OTHER interesting results revealed in Relf and Shoemaker's study:

- ◆ Sending and receiving flowers and plants aids in the grieving process.
- ◆ Flowers and plants provide a diversion during the visitation and help brighten the funeral home's somber environment.
- ◆ Flowers play a functional role after the funeral. Many of the deceased's family members take green or blooming plants and small floral arrangements home from the funeral.
- ◆ Although a majority of those surveyed think flowers are sent for the survivors, they also think flowers should reflect something of the deceased person's life. Suggestions on how to accomplish this included using the deceased's favorite flowers and colors to reflect his/her personality. (See related story, p. 55.)
- ◆ Family members and close friends send and receive sympathy flowers and plants most often.
- ◆ Most survey respondents said



Funeral directors and consumers agree that flowers provide comfort to the bereaved.

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they send flowers as a sympathy gift immediately after hearing of the death.

◆ Flowers are a comfort to the bereaved as well as to the funeral director. Having flowers at a funeral makes a director feel he or she can provide comfort and warmth to the deceased's family.

◆ All the funeral directors surveyed said flowers are discussed and/or looked at during the funeral/visitation. A majority (74 percent) of the directors said people want to know names of the flowers and plants they see at funeral homes.

◆ Eighty-eight percent of the grief therapists surveyed said receiving flowers aids in the grieving process.

◆ Results of focus group interviews revealed flowers were a comfort during the week of the death and during the funeral.

◆ Flowers were selected as the fourth most important funeral tradition that funeral directors said should be preserved. Open casket viewing, funeral service and visitation were their first three choices.

◆ When funeral directors were

asked which three items are most often cut when funeral costs need to be reduced, flowers did not make the list. Cost of casket, limousine and cost of vault were cited as the three most-likely cost-cutting items.

◆ If it were up to them, 77 percent of the funeral directors said they'd prefer floral tributes and memorial donations for their funerals.

◆ Approximately 47 percent of the consumers said they'd rather receive memorial contributions to acknowledge the loss of loved ones. Only 17.3 percent noted they'd prefer to receive flowers or plants.

◆ Half the consumers surveyed said they'd like both flowers and memorial donations for their funerals, while 42.7 percent said they'd like memorial donations in lieu of flowers.

#### 'IN LIEU OF'

"IN LIEU OF FLOWERS" IS a phrase that's been a thorn in the side of florists and funeral directors for a long time. In the study, Relf and Shoemaker asked

funeral directors why they thought people were using the phrase more often in obituaries. According to study results, 60 percent of the directors thought clients use "in lieu of" automatically when requesting memorial donations.

"'In lieu of' is perceived as a synonym for memorial donations," Relf and Shoemaker noted in the study. "Several of the funeral directors said they felt most people wanted both flowers and memorial donations and were not aware that 'in lieu of' meant no flowers."

However, a majority of the consumers questioned about the use of "in lieu of" seemed to understand the phrase's meaning. Seventy-two percent of consumers said when they see the phrase used in an obituary they assume the family doesn't want flowers, and so a contribution to a charity is made instead. Only 4 percent said they still send flowers anyway. Seventeen percent said they acknowledge a death by doing something other than sending flowers or making a charitable contribution, and would do so even if giving to a charity was requested. A mere 5 percent do both—send flowers and give to charity.

#### EDUCATION NEEDED

WHILE MISINTERPRETING the "in lieu of" phrase can discourage floral sympathy tributes, the real culprit may be the floral industry itself, Relf said. Sympathy flower sales are declining not only because of the use of "in lieu of," but because the floral industry is not adequately educating the general public about flowers, she opined.

"Overall, the horticulture industry primarily talks to itself," Relf noted. "They do not communicate effectively with the 'big world.' They spend most of their dollars—what little they put together for education and communication—[on] their trade meetings, their trade maga-



#### FIGHTING 'IN LIEU OF'

- Florists and funeral directors should coordinate efforts to help consumers understand the meaning of "in lieu of."
- Promote sending flowers in addition to giving memorial donations.
- A simple phrase like "contributions may be made to..." encourages donations without discouraging flower sales.





**FLOWERS COMFORT**

Why people send flowers and plants as sympathy gifts:

- To comfort survivors
- Respect for the deceased
- Socially expected
- To acknowledge the death
- To comfort the sender

zines and talking to themselves.”

What’s really needed, said Relf, is to educate the general public about flowers, including sympathy work. “What I would perceive as the kind of thing to do is to get free-lance writers, not garden writers who only like to write garden things, but regular free-lance writers to say, ‘Wow, you mean the Shanidar [an early species of man] actually put flowers on graves?’”

“Mankind’s been doing this forever,” Relf said, referring to the use of flowers in the bereavement process. “To trace that out to this kind of research and put it in local newspapers, appropriate consumer magazines and general interest kinds of vehicles instead of just trade magazines, that’s what’s needed.”

“The florist industry has had a strong tendency to go toward flowers are for funerals, weddings and special occasions, instead of flowers

are part of life quality,” Relf continued. “The industry needs to look at the total consumer: How flowers benefit the total consumer and making them [flowers] integral to life. What we need to do is promote the positive part, the importance, the value of flowers and how flowers are part of our lives.”

**A WAY OF THINKING**

**R**ELF SAID FLORISTS COULD use her study as a basis for consumer education. Getting The information contained in the study to local media would be a good start, she said. To do this, florists could volunteer to be interviewed on local television talk shows, by newspaper reporters, or set up interviews with free-lance writers whose articles are published in consumer magazines. The point of all this publicity is to make con-

tact with consumers *before* the need for sympathy flowers arises.

“I’m talking about more than just educating customers in a flower shop,” Relf elaborated. “There, all you’re doing is telling people that come to buy flowers for funerals that other people buy flowers for funerals.”

“Who you want to get to are those people who are not buying funeral flowers. Get to them *before* they have to buy those flowers, before it’s even published in the newspaper that the family just wants money sent to such-and-such charity. It’s a way of thinking. We’ve got to think a new way.”

**FTD CAMPAIGN**

**T**O HELP CONSUMERS change their way of thinking about funeral flowers, Florists’ Transworld Delivery Association

# MYTH:

“Rebates pay more than FTD® Value Plus.”

Rebating wire services show claims of what they MIGHT pay...

- IF you meet their sending minimums,
  - IF your orders qualify, and
  - IF your account is not overdue by even one day.
- Promises are easy. But, it’s performance that counts.

The next time you hear what rebates MIGHT pay - ask what they have ACTUALLY paid? How many of their subscribers ACTUALLY received the promised rebates? What have rebate wire services ACTUALLY done to increase your sales?

(FTD) launched a public relations campaign last month. The highlight of the campaign was a media tour during which etiquette expert Marjabelle Young Stewart visited Tampa, Fla.; Seattle; Houston; and New York. She was interviewed on nationally and locally produced television and radio talk shows, promoting sending flowers as expressions of sympathy and recommending consumers contact FTD florists for help in choosing appropriate floral tributes for relatives, friends and business associates.

FTD also developed an informational brochure for consumers entitled "Sympathy For Today" which provides advice on expressing sympathy with floral tributes. Consumers may obtain a free copy of the brochure by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Sympathy For Today," c/o FTD, P.O. Box 2227, Southfield, Mich. 48037.

Media kits containing informational news stories about floral tributes and appropriate floral memorials are available to FTD florists. Contact Paul Gallagher, associate manager/sympathy, FTD Headquarters, (800) 788-9000, to receive the media kit. According to Gallagher, FTD will be coordinating more promotions concentrating on sympathy sales in 1993.

**SALES BUILDERS**

**F**OR NOW, TO HELP FLORISTS change their way of thinking about sympathy sales and aid them in better serving the needs of the bereaved, Relf and Shoemaker offer these pointers:

- ◆ Promote the sale of green and blooming plants for funerals. While cut flower arrangements usually are a person's first choice when sending sympathy flowers,

the study revealed people use green and blooming plants they receive as living memorials to the deceased. Funeral directors surveyed estimated that 65 percent of family members take blooming or green plants home from the funeral. Many grief therapists said the bereaved often mention green and blooming plants they took home from the funeral and were caring for.

- ◆ Florists and funeral directors should work together to help the bereaved fully understand the phrase "in lieu of." According to the study, consumers generally honor requests asking for charitable donations instead of flowers. However, there seems to be some misunderstanding of the "in lieu of" phrase.

Some funeral directors surveyed said they felt most people would like to receive flowers and memorial

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**PERSONALIZING FUNERAL FLOWERS**

- Use the deceased's favorite flower.
- Use the deceased's favorite color.
- Include an item the deceased made, such as an embroidered pillow or ornament.
- Create a design that represents the deceased's career, hobbies or affiliation with a club or school.

# FACT:

FTD Value Plus paid over \$15.5 million in 1991.

- Only FTD tells you what we DID pay...
- More than \$15.5 million in Value Plus points in 1991, with payments on EVERY order sent through FTD.
  - More than \$5.2 million redeemed for local advertising - bringing more customers into Members' shops.
  - More than \$3.1 million redeemed for FTD educational seminars, products and shop merchandise.
- FTD also supports your business with over \$23 million in national advertising and publicity.

As always, FTD is helping to build YOUR business AND the industry.

Before you play the rebate game get the facts Call 1-800-788-9000 for a detailed brochure



Only  has everything.

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donations for funerals and were not aware that "in lieu of" meant no flowers at all. To combat this, funeral directors and florists should promote sending flowers in addition to giving memorial donations. A simple phrase such as, "contributions may be made to the American Heart Association" would encourage charitable donations without discouraging floral sales.

◆ **Suggest post-funeral flowers and plants.** During the focus group interviews conducted for the study, several people mentioned receiving a lot of support the week of the death and funeral but very little in the weeks and months that followed. Those people said just receiving a flower and a short note saying they were being thought of would have helped. Some also mentioned they'd like to receive flowers on the anniversary of the death.

Obviously, there are many ways florists can use Relf and Shoemaker's study to help increase sympathy sales. Although no further research on the topic of sympathy flowers is planned, Relf said other studies concerning people and how they interact with flowers are in the

University Cooperative Extension Service, the symposium will be held April 24-26 at the Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel, East Rutherford, N.J. For more information, contact Joel Flagler, Rutgers University Agricultural Extension Service at (201) 599-6162.

### SYMPATHY FLORAL GIFTS HELP THE BEREAVED

Percent of respondents from a national survey of bereaved who said receiving sympathy flowers, cards, food and memorial donations helped them deal with their grief:

**60.3**  
Receiving sympathy cards

**53.9**  
Receiving sympathy flowers

**49.3**  
Receiving memorial donations

**46.1**  
Receiving food

works. A symposium titled, People-Plant Relationships: Setting Research Priorities is scheduled to be held this month. Sponsored by the People-Plant Council and Rutgers

To obtain a copy of The Role of Flowers and Plants in the Bereavement Process, contact the SAF at (800) 336-4743. Approximate cost of the paperbound study is \$25.



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

• To obtain a copy of *The Role of Flowers and Plants in the Bereavement Process*, call the SAF at (800) 336-4743.

• FTD members may also contact Paul Gallagher, associate manager/sympathy, FTD Headquarters, (800) 788-9000 for more information on the sympathy market.

## CEMETERY FLOWERS

### NATIONAL CEMETERIES LISTED

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#### LOUISIANA

Chalmette National Historical Park,  
Chalmette

#### MARYLAND

Antietam National Battlefield Site,  
Sharpsburg  
Battleground National Cemetery,  
Oxon Hill

#### MISSISSIPPI

Vicksburg National Military Park,  
Vicksburg

#### MONTANA

Custer Battlefield National  
Monument, Crow Agency

#### PENNSYLVANIA

Gettysburg National Military Park,  
Gettysburg

#### TENNESSEE

Andrew Johnson National Historic  
Site, Greenville  
Fort Donelson National Battlefield,  
Dover

Shiloh National Military Park,  
Shiloh  
Stones River National Battlefield,  
Murfreesboro

#### VIRGINIA

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania  
County Battlefields Memorial  
National Military Park,  
Fredericksburg  
Poplar Grove National Cemetery,  
Petersburg  
Yorktown Battlefield, Yorktown  
—E.F.S.