

# Funeral for a baby

*The following closely follows a funeral I did for a very young baby, whose family I know quite well as I'd done the funerals for all four of his mother's grandparents. It was a gathering of about twenty-five or thirty at the parents' home. The names and details have been changed.*



As you know little Mark died on Thursday. He had arrived, in a bit too much of a hurry, on Wednesday the week before.

So today we will celebrate the life of Mark John Miller—we will say farewell, before we have even really been able to say hello.

Victor Frankl once said:

We cannot judge a biography by its length, by the number of pages in it; we must judge by the richness of the contents. Sometimes the “unfinished” are among the most beautiful symphonies.

In his brief life Mark touched each of you in his own way as baby son, or a grandchild, or the child of someone you care for dearly.

Today must affirm the love  
which Mark was and is  
and commit his body to be cremated.

We are here in sorrow at Mark's death  
and to comfort the people closest to him.

We understand that things sometimes go wrong.  
We understand...  
But we are still hurt.

We know that everyone did everything they could,  
We know that Mark had the very best of care,  
We know that everyone has been wonderful.  
Nobody is to blame,  
But we still hurt.

Beside the hurt, however, there is also love.

And besides the mourning

we are also here to celebrate Mark's life.

That may sound strange, but as we think about this tragedy, we will find in it a short life that is worthy of celebration.

The facts are simple.

Mark had been growing for 26 weeks.

Mary had some routine tests, and suddenly on Wednesday, nearly a fortnight ago now, it was necessary to do a Caesarian.

He weighed 592 grams—a pound and a quarter.

On the Friday there was an emergency. Things looked very bad.

But he stabilised. It looked as if it was going to be OK. And then he died, quite suddenly, the following Thursday.

He was with us for a week

But he has been so important in Mary and John's lives for some time.

There was so much hope for him

so much care for him

so much love for him.

And while we say goodbye to Mark today

we also say hello to the love that is the meaning of Mark's life.

Because love may change its form, but it does not die.

We will all have memories of Mark, and of the stir that he was starting to make among the people in Mary and John's lives.

And today we will try to strengthen those memories

And say hello to the Mark who lives on within us in our hearts and minds.

Our thoughts are particularly with Mary and John.

We think of Mark's big brother, Gary.

We think of the older generation.

*It seemed right here to name all the baby's grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other important figures—to properly enrol him in the family.*

We think of those who can't be here.

We think of all the people who are close to this family,

And we think of the other people who have been important—friends, doctors, nurses.

*One of Mark's aunts, and one of his grandmothers then read pieces written by other members of the family, and a piece from Winnie the Pooh We then sang together,*

Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.

*And then I went on:*

You who are Mark's family are deeply sad right now  
That is as it must be.

Try to remember that sadness comes out of love  
and all love is completed in sadness.

Sadness then is a kind of terrible privilege.

We thank you, Mark, for this privilege of sadness.

We thank you, Mark, for the special months before your birth.

We thank you, Mark, for the wonder of your growth.

We thank you for your few days with us in this world,  
and for allowing us to know you as a real person.

We thank you, Mark, for that little piece of human perfectness you were.

There are no words to take away the hurt when you are faced with unexpected  
death, especially the death of a baby.

There is no meaning or sense in it;

We feel anger, sorrow, pain,

But there is also love.

Mark centred the love of this family for a time  
and that is why we celebrate his life.

Mark's short life came out of love,

and was the focus of love,

and it can kindle greater love.

And now, while we play a little music you might like to put a flower in Mark's basket  
*[a casket was not necessary]* as a way of saying goodbye

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There is a North American Indian prayer:

Do not stand at my bier and weep,  
I am not there, I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow,  
I am the diamond glints on snow,  
I am the sun on ripened grain,  
I am the gentle autumn's rain.  
When you awaken in the morning's hush,  
I am the swift, uplifting rush of  
Quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my bier and cry;  
I am not there, I did not die.

In the rising of the sun and in its going down  
*we will remember him*  
In the beginning of the year and when it ends  
*we will remember him*  
So long as we live, he too shall live  
for he is now a part of us  
*as we remember him.*

So now we must take another step in this kind of goodbye.

Shall we stand?

Today is a closing and an opening—  
a saying goodbye and a saying hello again.  
So while we say *farewell* to the Mark we were starting to know  
we *greet* the Mark who has become a part of us  
the Mark who lives on with us  
as the love which is in our hearts.

*Mark John Miller*

Your life we honour  
your departure we accept  
your memory we cherish.  
In grief at your death  
but in gratitude for your brief life  
and for the privilege of sharing it with you  
we commit your body to be cremated.

Earth to earth  
ashes to ashes  
dust to dust

Rest now  
at the end of your few days with us  
your part is played.

Rest in the hearts and the minds of those who love you

May you find comfort  
and richness and example in your memories.  
May you find support and strength  
in your love for one another.  
And may you find peace in your hearts.

So now, Mary and John,  
you will take your son  
to Karori Cemetery,  
to be cremated.

Our thoughts go with you;  
We wish you good courage  
And the protection of your love.

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