

A.J. Desmond & Sons Funeral Directors, Troy, MI

A.J. Desmond & Sons Funeral Directors - Vasu, Rodgers & Connell Chapel, Royal Oak, MI;

A.J. Desmond & Sons Funeral Directors – Price Chapel, Troy, MI

How to celebrate the life of an artist?

The family paints the casket and sets up a gallery walk in the visitation space.

The deceased was a teacher, an artist and a world traveler. The family wanted to celebrate their mother and grandmother in ways that were authentic to her and to them. During the arrangement conference, they talked often of the importance of family, of creativity and her hands-on approach to life. They shared that she often interacted with her young grandchildren through various creative projects. With her grandchildren, she baked, she crafted and she painted. It was important to the family to create memories during the funeral services that the grandchildren would cherish going forward as they also came to understand more about their grandmother.

As the family met with the funeral director, the funeral director listened. In particular, they came back to her creativity and activities she did with her grandchildren. After retiring from her teaching career, the deceased became much more serious about painting, becoming skilled and prolific. Her house was decorated with her paintings and her family had numerous paintings, many with subjects from her travels. The deceased shared the paintings and the travel stories with anyone who showed interest.

Eventually, the funeral director offered two suggestions to the family. The family wanted to do both.

First, before the visitation began, the family painted the casket. The funeral director and staff moved the chapel furniture to the side of the room and covered the furniture with plastic sheets. The floor was covered with plastic sheets, the casket was set up and a table with poster paints was placed in the center of the room. The pine casket became a multi-sided canvas for about one dozen family members to paint scenes and designs with lots of bright colors as they laughed, cried and created together. This engaged and private time was very personal and meaningful to all who participated.

Second, the family set up and displayed their loved one's artwork to share with visitors during the visitation. The family chose about a dozen works of art and displayed the paintings on easels, arranging them to be a gallery walk spread out throughout the visitation chapel. This enabled family and friends to see her artwork and reminisce about her world travels and all her stories. The family felt great comfort having the artwork present during the visitation, visitors especially liked the invitation to walk through the gallery and many found it beneficial to share the travel and creation stories behind each painting. The gallery walk gave the young grandchildren a space to wander and they too heard the stories.

The family greatly valued both activities. Through painting the casket, the younger children and their older relatives participated in the preparation of the casket before the visitation began. Doing this together created a unique bonding experience for each of them. Later, walking through the gallery provided another way to celebrate their loved one and her talents. The paintings prompted travel buddies to share their stories, stories they likely would not have heard otherwise.