

LOVE NOTES FROM THE HEART

"The best love is the kind that awakens the soul; that makes us reach for more, that plants the fire in our hearts and brings peace to our minds. That's what I hope to give you forever."

- *The Notebook*

Losing someone you hold so dear is never easy. Working in the funeral industry doesn't spare anyone from the grief and sadness that death brings. However, being able to express the love and memories for that person only affirms one's vulnerability to pain.

The passing of our sister, doctor, relative, co-employee and VP for Operations, Maria Cristina "Ting" Jose last January made us realize that we were not spared from the pain just because we render that service to our client families.

The experience of her death did not cripple us but rather paved the way for us to heal by expressing the memories and love we shared with her. As suggested by one of our employees, we thought of expressing those loving memories by making a scrapbook containing our experiences and wonderful time we spent with her when she was still alive. The moment our family agreed to it, our employees started to decorate the cover and inside pages of the scrapbook thereby sharing their own encounters with Ting as their boss, supervisor and beloved colleague. They passed the scrapbooks around during the wake so that friends, our relatives and people she shared her life with could express through writing their messages of love for Ting also. This exercise gave them the opportunity to remember their special moments with her. It gave us, the family also the chance to know the special moments Ting shared with people who were close to her. The precious moments she shared with other people as well.

What we started as something personal to us, was shared with our client families as well. We showed them the scrapbooks that we made for Ting. If they liked the idea, we would give them a scrapbook for them to decorate and write their own messages to celebrate the life of their loved one.

These were some of the comments expressed by our client families about the scrapbook activity.

"This is good. She loves doing this. She loves decorating albums."

"Maganda ito. Madalas niyang gawin ito para sa amin."
("This is beautiful. She often does this for us.")

"Matutuwa si Mrs. Perez kung makikita niya ito."
("She will be happy if she is able to see this.")

We didn't stop with the scrapbooks as a form of expressing our love for the people who mean so much to us. On special occasions like Valentine's day, mother and father's day we decided to create tarpaulins or big posters where our visitors and client families can express their messages of love for people dear to them. We asked one of our employees to come up with designs for those special occasions where our client families can write their messages of love. These tarpaulins were placed in our lobby where visitors, client families and employees had the chance to write their messages. Client Families felt it was important to remember their loved one on this special occasion. It was able to help them accept that their relative, even if they are no longer with them will always remain in their hearts.

We were happy to see how people enthusiastically scribbled messages of love. More than a hundred people participated. The big surprise to us however were the reactions and smiles of the people who stopped and read the messages.

Being able to express how we feel about an important person in our life through personalized scrapbooks or tarpaulin messages helps us overcome the pain of losing a loved one. It also enables us to acknowledge and express the importance of that person in our lives regardless if they are still with us or not.

As a result, these projects help us to be in touch more with our feelings and learn to value our loved ones. The activities also enhance our values of caring, compassion and commitment to our client families. To the Arlington family, "Working with each one while doing the scrapbooks and tarpaulins doesn't seem like work because we are doing it for someone we love. It inspired us to share our personal experience of coping with grief to the people we serve. We hope that people who go through this activity will share it with others so that more people can benefit from the experience." To our client families and visitors, "It gives us the chance to read and remind us of our own loved ones.

These expressions of love may be simple but for the people who matter the most to us, these messages mean the whole world to them.

"At Arlington, we see to it that every service is rendered with care and compassion. We strive to do everything as One Team, One Family because to us, you are family."