

It's Okay to Talk About Funeral

Sharon ([00:02](#)):

So, the other day I was watching the news and I heard a newscaster say on the day we are born is the day that we start dying. And that was so interesting to me because I don't think we ever think about ourselves as dying. And I say this quite often, Erica, I know I say it to Tony a lot. And sometimes it says a joke, but it is such a serious statement that everybody wants to get to heaven, but nobody wants to die to get there. And what I mean by that is that we're all going to die at some point in our life. And just like grief where no one wants to talk about grief. I think the second taboo subject is death, your own death. But this other thing happens is that people are intrigued when they hear about death. I think it's that part where you're really trying to figure out what's going on or what's going to happen to us in the end, which is a total podcast all into itself. Today. I want to talk about before the grieving even starts, just really preparing ourselves, being opened to talking about it, our own personal death, our parents' death. And as you know, our children's death.

Erica ([01:30](#)):

Those are definitely some heavy conversations right there that you want. People will just start engaging in. Hello, holiday season, let's start talking about death, but no, this is very true. This is very true. The only thing we have guaranteed in life, what are they? Death and taxes, but everybody would rather go talk about their tax isn't ever, ever talk about their own death or their death, the death of their family members. It just brings up so many emotions that becomes so overwhelming that we quickly want to run away from these conversations and change the subject to something happier because no one wants to think about that. It's even painful for me, you know, considering what we've been through already to think about what my death would mean for my children, for Lewis, you know, or vice versa. I don't want to be left here without any of them. So yeah, very, very heavy.

Sharon ([02:28](#)):

So, I want to ask you a question. Do you and Lewis talk about what it's going to be like when you two are not on out here and I'm going to preface this with, this has the experience that you've been through made this conversation about you, your final arrangements easier or is it still non-existent? What is the truth there?

Erica ([02:53](#)):

It's so funny is just yesterday. Lewis was he's driving. He was driving to Louisiana, go visit his mom. And he called me. It was very early in the morning, and you know how I am sharing when I'm on my first cup of coffee. I am a firm believer of the soft wake-up. Well, he called me kind of in a tizzy because I guess he had tried to send Danielle and Kayla a text

and the text bounced back. And for whatever reason that said his mind spinning to what's going to happen. If something happens to them because we are not biologically their parents and they are adults, you know, who can do, make the funeral arrangements, who can make the decisions if they're in the hospital and they need, you know, medical decisions made. And he just is like rambling and spinning. And I said, well, I don't know how it works, you know? And I was just kind of offering up some suggestions and he's like, that's not true. Do you know that to be true, that you know it for a fact? And I said, I said, what, why is your brain on this this morning? And he said, Erica, you never know what's going to happen. We know this and they need to start planning and making sure they have something in place. And I was like, you know what? He is absolutely 1000%, right. We never know what's going to happen. And it is smart to be prepared. So, he delivered the message to be, and then I delivered it to the girls, which both of them thought was so sweet that their dad, you know, was so worried about them and something happening. But we do have the conversations in that regard. But when I try to have conversations with him about like what he wants, he's always, you know, smartassy and not really ever taking it seriously. So, I get both sides from him.

Sharon ([04:43](#)):

So, I have sat at the feet of so many people doing the funeral plans and not knowing what the other person would have wanted. So, this happened way before Donovan and Austin, we lost [inaudible] in Austin, but I, Tony and I always talk about what we want. We always talk about what we want, and we openly talk about it to our children. We have a living trust of course in place, but they actual here's where you're going to go and pay for it and all that we don't have. But I will tell you also this, I just found out that you can have your ashes made into coral reef. Did you know that?

Erica ([05:28](#)):

I didn't know. You could do coral reef. I knew you could do jewelry. You could plant trees with them and have them made into some sort of like globe type deal. That's as far as I got with what you could do with ashes, but that's cool. You could be coral reef.

Sharon ([05:46](#)):

So, I'm going to be coral reef with Charlene our system. That's about it. And so, because I'm going to be coral reef, Antonio has to be coral reef, but I do need to do the next stage of that. So here, here, here, here, where we're going, friends, we've got to start having this conversation, even if you're like me and you have not put anything down on paper, I want to share with you our Eric and I are going to share with you what it was like planning a funeral for our dad. Now, a lot of this will be taken out of your hands. If the death is a tragic, unexpected death. However, if the death is tragic and unexpected, like with Austin and Donovan, the more we talk about it, then we know what the person would have wanted. We know that they would have wanted to go this way. I cannot even tell you how many times families fight, argue, yell, scream. And it just, this you're already in a situation

where your emotions are on high. And now you're trying to figure this out for the family. So, our father was diagnosed with bone cancer, and it was around March of the year that he passed away. And I was at the house and my parents were there and I broached the subject myself. And I said to my dad, do you know what things you want? At this point, we knew what was coming down the pipe. Do you know what things you want? And I just looked at him and I said, these exact words, daddy, I'm not going to fight with anybody. Just tell me what you want, and I'll get it done that way. And I, he just started talking and I grabbed out a piece of paper and I started writing things down. So, this is around March around April, the end of April. He called me one day and said, hey, I want to do a family meeting, get everybody together. But he never told me what it was about. Just so happened. I grabbed that notepad set up the family moving, grabbed that notepad. And we all sat around the dining room table. And we asked him, we all got to ask questions. And I wrote everything down that he wanted. He, including the song that he wanted played at his funeral, he was open about scriptures to be played, who he wanted sharing about his life. It wasn't an amazing emotional time.

Erica ([08:31](#)):

Well, and we even reviewed it, right, like a few days or not few days. Cause a few days before he died, he wasn't even able to talk. So maybe that week before when everyone got there and we, you pulled out the notes and we just verified and confirmed with him, that that's what he wanted. And it was crystal clear. I mean, there was no disputing. It, it came right from his mouth. At point in time, we knew it was just a matter of time until he passed. And it took all of the emotional charge out of what goes into funeral planning, which creates families to bicker and fight. It's not, you know, the planning of it it's that everyone is broken and sad that they have to do it but doing it this way with the person while they're still alive, takes all of those emotions off the table. And you know that you're delivering a service that they specifically requested. And that makes a huge, huge difference.

Sharon ([09:34](#)):

So, I even, I still have that pad to this day. I'm preparing to write some of the stuff in there for my mom. She pulled it out the other day while we were packing and, and we, we reviewed it. So, I kept it, we carry it around with us the whole time we were doing the funeral preparations because everything was written on that pad. And I'm here to tell you this, and this is Eric. And I tell in our truth, we still fought with our mother because she tried to change some things that were on the pad that she wanted done a certain way. And it became the five of us against her. And not that it was bad, but it was like, no, that he didn't say that, no, he doesn't want that. And so, we made some we took a stance and said, we're doing what's on this pad. So, but could you imagine if we didn't have that?

Erica ([10:29](#)):

Well, no, that's what I'm saying. That's where all, a lot of the fighting comes in, because then you have, let's say in our case, the five children, the surviving spouse and the surviving

spouse's sisters who are weighing in and then everyone has an opinion, and everyone has an emotion. So yeah, that would have been, that would have been an absolute nightmare. Just knowing us, our dynamic as a family, how we operate, it would have been a nightmare because we have a lot of strong personalities in our family, and everybody thinks that they're doing what's right. But in actuality, everyone is doing just like we always share grief is unique and individual. So, each one of us, five children had a different relationship with our father. So, our opinions would have been a reflection of our own personal relationship and our own personal grief. So that's five opinions right there with a different emotional connection. Then you factor in the spouse, the surviving spouse, her emotional connection, and then the surviving spouse's support group, which was her sisters and their emotional connection, their opinions that would have been a recipe for disaster. Our dad did as one of the biggest favors, but I think he really knew us by really letting us plan that out with him.

Sharon ([11:51](#)):

Exactly 100%. And I think that that statement that I made to him about not wanting to fight with everybody, that you could see the look on his face, that he really got it. But I think that at that time we're here and I were just having the conversation and needed to settle with him. Also, he needed to prepare himself for having this, but it was almost like we had the playbook for the funeral. I can't even tell you guys, like he said, we said, well, what song do you want to play at? And he said, I want black limousine by Elvis Presley. We didn't know what the heck he was talking about. We had never heard that we had to go Google it. And the day at the funeral, when that song played at the very last processional I smiled from ear to ear, it was almost like he was sending us a message at that time because I knew this was the song he picked to play at his funeral. So, when I, we actually walked out, I was actually smiling and it just, it felt good. And I'll never forget that for as long as I live. I want to also say that there's no wrong or right way to plan the funeral. There's no, there are no rule books on how the funeral should be done on how the celebration of life should be done on who should attend. There's no rule book you get to do what feels right to you, the person who is dying, or if you're the one planning it and you're the mother or the father or the spouse you get to do what feels right to you also. So don't think that we're giving you a set of rules that should be done. And you grab out a piece of paper where we're really trying to implore upon you to be having the conversation, having the conversation. So, you know, that's the most important thing.

Erica ([13:36](#)):

And I think just from being on the side of, like you said, we had two tragedies with Donovan and Austin and having to plan their funerals. And with Donovan, it was a little more, you know, we had a little more leeway because we didn't do it at a place. We did it here at our home. But Austin, we had to go to the funeral home. It is the most miserable experience being on that side of funeral planning when there's not a plan. And he was 10 years old, how are we going to ever think that we would, should have had a plan for him, but it felt

like that day was 16 hours long sitting in that office, making those decisions, trying to pick the little funeral cards wanting to know they want, I know, do you want one flower holder or two? And then of course, you know, as the parent, you just like, you want just the best for your baby. I will, how many, you know, is acceptable and you know, you just don't ever want your, your child to go without, but that stuff is expensive.

Sharon ([14:44](#)):

Yes. Oh gosh, you got to price shop. And I don't, I think a lot of people don't realize that. And this is something that I've learned over time. Not just with these three funerals. You guys, you also understand because we're great specialists, typically someone we've already worked with or someone we're working with or people that we know will call us in and get advice from us all the time on how to do the funeral and so, or what to do here, what to do there. And so, we know, and I'll just give you an example. When Austin died, I believe it was about the whole bill. I'm just going to throw a number out here was around \$12,000. When my dad passed away, I started shopping because he was going to be cremated. And I found prices from \$600 up to \$12,000 for the cremation. So, there is an array in between. You can also price out the caskets. They even sell them at Costco down. So, a lot of people think, oh, I have to go to this, this funeral home. And I have to buy everything they have there. Well, they're going to, they're in the business of burying people. They are in the business of burying. People she'll know that you can shop around, and you can get prices on things. One of the other things that I want to add in here also is we need to know answers to questions. Like one of our uncles passed away and I was at the house moments after they had gotten back from the hospital and they got a call and the call was, was he a donor? Is there anything of his body that you would like to donate? And they didn't know the answer to that question. And so, I looked at my aunt and I said would knowing him, what do you think he would do? And she said he would donate. And so, she was able to donate some parts because of that. But you never, if you don't have the conversations, you don't know how to answer that question or a ton of other questions.

Erica ([16:47](#)):

Right. And there's so many, there are so many that come up during the planning. And I think if you, if you know, you're, you want to be cremated, or if you know your family member's going to be cremated. You can rent the cascade for the service. Correct. You can rent, put one in.

Sharon ([17:05](#)):

And like, if you're doing a cremation, you mean.

Erica ([17:09](#)):

Yeah. So that also is something, a lot of people don't know that you don't have to create, have them cremated by the time of the funeral service, you can rent one. Even if you keep it like empty, but just as a something with maybe a picture up on the alter or wherever you

have the service. But yeah, there are so many different things that come up and you don't realize it until you've been on that end of funeral planning. And like we said, without a plan, it's absolutely miserable and your brain is not there. You can hardly think, but there's so many decisions you have to make. And there's so many people who require so much information from you. So, it's best to go in. It prepared.

Sharon ([17:53](#)):

So, I personally, this is just for me, everybody I meet when this conversation comes up, I always tell them know I just decided I wanted to be coral reef the other day. But prior to that Erica, Charlene and I just had the conversation like three weeks ago. But prior to that, I always said, I want to be cremated. I want my ashes dumped in Catalina near Catalina. And which is a place that we spent the summers that I love. And I do not want a funeral. And my daughter was like, you don't want a funeral? I said, no, come to the water shores, release me and celebrate me there. But I don't want to feel, I don't want that. That's not something that I want. So, I let everybody know. So, I have the conversation all the time, because I can't even tell you when people don't know, they just don't know what to do. So, let's talk about Erica how to start having the conversation. So, let's start with this. If you're having the conversation with your children or your significant other, the best place to start is to start talking about your health. Even if you're in good health, reassure them, that everything is okay, but you know that at some point you are going to die. It is a great a bridge to go into the conversation.

Erica ([19:14](#)):

Yeah. It's a little more challenging for me with Lou. Cause like when I, we try to have these conversations, he's like, I don't care. I'm not gonna, I don't care what you do. I'm not going to be there. So, it's like, you know, of course it's easy to joke now, you know? Cause it's like, no one thinks that they're going to die tomorrow, but you never know, you know? So, you definitely like, okay, make room for the jokes, but then take it back to an actual, serious real conversation.

Sharon ([19:41](#)):

So, the other thing is, you know, and I love that. You're saying that because that leads right into acknowledge that this conversation isn't easy. I wanna have a conversation. That's not going to be easy and let them know that we can take it light. At first, we can share whatever we want. Try to make it a two-way conversation where they're also talking about the things that they want, like 100% Tony and I talk about because he has so much junk. Like I know for a fact, I already know I'm supposed to call Jason and I'm supposed to call Uncle Lou because at one point before we move, we have the safe that there was no way I could get open. He videotaped how to open the safe. And the combination is there to send to all of his children. And I'm supposed to give it to Uncle Lou upon his death so that they could get in there and get out the things that were in their wants. Like he's I get Uncle Lou and Jason to sell all the stuff, you know, they'll know what the value is like. I was like, don't leave me

with all this. And he like, let me know, okay, this is what I want you to do. Like, we've that far in the conversation. So, I feel like, and he definitely a loner. He, you know, as on his license plate and he's a donor, so we've talked about that. So, have we sat down and made up paid for all the plans? No, but we're both being cremated. And our ashes will be put together

Erica ([21:09](#)):

Well. Yeah. And the reef, but even though is that technically fair? Cause it's in the words of Al Bundy it's death, till you part you're married until death, you part, but when you're dead, you're free to date. So

Sharon ([21:31](#)):

And then you also need to share why you want to please preplan the funeral. Talk about that. Highlight the reasons why you want to talk about it. I want to make this easy on you. I want you to understand what I want so that this is easy on you because you also want to share the things that you don't want equally. As you want to share the things you want, you want to share the things you don't want. Like I know for a fact, our mother does not want to be buried in white because she says it all the time. Do not bury me in white, which I think she should be buried in one of her house dresses that she wears all the time.

Erica ([22:05](#)):

Oh yeah,

Sharon ([22:07](#)):

I mean, don't you want to be comfy?

Erica ([22:14](#)):

You better pick it. Right. I know I want to be cremated. Absolutely. I, at one point I was really, really big on being turned into jewelry, but I can't give you any takers on who's going to wear me. So, I struggled there. I want my high school picture, my senior class photo. Cause it's my best. I don't even care if I die when I'm 99, I still want this photo on the altar. And I don't want a funeral either like a somber. Like I want a party. I want a big party with like, you know, just lots of people in good food. And I want more of a celebration of life than a funeral.

Sharon ([23:05](#)):

So, one of the things that you need to be prepared for, if someone Roche's broaches the conversation with you and they're having the conversation with you, allow them the freedom to talk and share as much as they want without freaking out. This is such a sensitive subject. It can send us into this like crazy tizzy, but I want to share another experience with you guys. My best friend of 15 years, Sharon passed away some three years ago and she was diagnosed with glioblastoma, and we knew that she was going to

die. And one day I was in the hospital and she, this is all she said, so cute. She's like, I want to have fried chicken at my funeral. I was sitting on the bed with her, and I said, okay I'll get Keith, my brother and we'll work this out. She's like, no, I want Keith to be there enjoying it. Just, I want to have fried chicken. And then another time I was there, she said, I want to have a DJ, which she also told to her son that was the instructions that we got. She wanted fried chicken. And she wanted a DJ from that. We knew what she was saying. She wanted a celebration, and we plan the most amazing celebration. People were literally coming up to me saying, this is what I want. When I die. I want this. We had a DJ; we had a photo booth. We did the fried chicken. We also prepared her favorite recipe, spicy garlic shrimp. We danced. We had a cake bar, a dessert bar, an ice cream bar, kid. You not kids were there. There were at least 500 people there. It was a true, true celebration, a celebration of her life. And that's what she wanted. And that's what she got.

Erica ([24:52](#)):

And I think it's important that you share that story because that's amazing. It is amazing. And that's definitely what I want to, but I think you guys, we got to go back and remind everyone, there are no rules. There are no rules. You can do whatever you want. It doesn't have to be the typical somber event where everyone's wearing black. When Austin died, Louis was adamant. We were not, we were not wearing black. And that came from him. He said, it's he was too young and too full of life for us to be wearing black and moping around. Even though we were absolutely devastated, we were. And when you, no matter if you're, you're going to have a celebration of life or a traditional funeral, your heart is going to be broken, but it's, it's still possible to celebrate someone's life and honor them with a party and have the people showing up all holding space for one another, but still honoring that person in the best way possible. There's no rules. You can make it what you want. And if you have these conversations early enough, you can make it what your loved one wants

Sharon ([26:02](#)):

And leave this space. If you're the parent for the children to ask questions, leave this space for the children to put in their 2 cents of what, what they will be able to handle and what they can handle. I think that's so important. The other thing is you need to talk about the money of how this is going to be paid. How is this going to be paid for? Because that is extremely important as well.

Erica ([26:26](#)):

Yeah, because it is very, very costly. I would not, I didn't even have a thought about it in my brain about how much the funeral costs when Austin died. Because I wasn't even thinking about having a plan, a funeral. I was blown away by how expensive it is, especially for a child. It's crazy.

Sharon ([26:46](#)):

And I wanted to leave this too on this final thought, if you are at the time, planning the funeral. And your part of the support staff, family members, friends, that's around there gathering the information, putting it all together. That's why I'm going to take a step back really quick. One of the things that I do when I find out that someone has died or there's been a tragedy in a home, or it was, they knew something was happening. When I go to someone's house the very first day, I always bring the same thing. I bring a case of water. I bring a notepad and I bring a pen. One, people are going to start showing up at the house and at least the homeowner will be able to offer them some water. It's right here. You may not have a case of water at your house to the notepad is going to be the Bible for the next few weeks, all phone calls that come in, all food, that's delivered all funeral plans. That's going in there. It's going to go into that one. Notepad. It should stay in the common area where everyone is. So, anyone who comes in can look in that notepad and find information out in that notepad. I still have to this day, the notepad for Austin Donovan. Just because they're personal to me. But if you are gathering the information, you that does not mean you get to make the decisions. The whole time that I was gathering information, I would walk up to Eric and Lewis, and I would say yellow or blue, big or small Monday or Tuesday, they made all the decisions. What I did was gather the information and Erica and Louis in their broken hearts, didn't have to be bothered with being on the phone, trying to figure out how to get this stuff done.

Erica ([28:29](#)):

That made a world of difference. And honestly did, especially after having the first experience with Austin and having to come up with and really try to Fink and make your like focus, okay, wait, what is she asking me? You know, you just can't even hardly get through it, but that made a world of difference. Just like you are bringing it and having us pick one or the other was so much better.

Sharon ([28:55](#)):

Oh yeah. The other thing is remember getting through the funeral is not the hardest part. Once the funeral is over, I almost have it down to a science. It's about three weeks later. Almost everybody has gone that loneliness that sets in after the funeral is probably the worst part of it.

Erica ([29:16](#)):

That is absolutely the worst part because you just, so it's so easy to get used to that commotion of family members and friends being around you every day for an extended period of time to then silence. And then you it's like the, as soon as the silence starts, then you're, you could really start hearing your heart, speak to you about how broken it is and how You miss your loved one.

Sharon ([29:44](#)):

So, I want to reassure you I want to say this reassure your family members, why you're having this conversation. One person has to start talking that's it. And this conversation will seem almost normal and it's okay. What you want to do, what you want to have done. Even if you only leave them with one thing that you know, or two things fried chicken and a DJ, they can work with that. But please friends have the conversation with your family. Thank you so much for allowing us in. We hope this helps.

Erica ([30:20](#)):

Thank you so much friends. Goodbye.