

**David C. Brown Funeral Home
Belleville, Michigan**

In late fall 2021, the David C. Brown Funeral Home was able to serve a family whose young adult daughter died by suicide. The parents and sibling lived many hours away while the young lady lived in the area with her fiancé. As was completely appropriate, funeral plans were made by the parents, including the fiancé, but leaning toward the needs and desires of the parents. In the months that have followed, six friends of the deceased and her fiancé have all become clients of Grief Counselor, Patricia Monroe. This original group of eight had become a family of choice, celebrating holidays and occasions together, and was struggling to find their way in life without her. The first to begin counseling with Patricia was the fiancé, but when he spoke with the others about his visits, each of the three other couples reached out for help. At first it was complicated because none of the three couples wanted the others, nor the fiancé, to know that they were visiting. Each couple wanted to appear to be “strong” to be supportive of the others. Finally, with some encouragement, they were all able to speak with each other about their shared pain. Once all seven of them became aware that they were all meeting with Patricia, she began to think about a way for them to have the final goodbye that they all seemed to desire. An interest and activity that they all shared together was participating in a weekly Dungeons and Dragons gaming night. They all expressed how much they all enjoyed it and how important it was to the deceased friend as well. Patricia suggested a memorial service of sorts that would encompass both her as a person as well as her character for the game.

Amy's (not her real name) character name in the Dungeon and Dragon's Campaign was Wyn and she was a Nature Fairy. The Dungeon Master (DM) of the game together with Amy's fiancé decided that the best way to write her character out of the game would be to have her return to “live with her people” in the forest, and the story line was written with that in mind.

When the group gathered at Amy's home there were the typical 8 chairs around the table. The game began just as the last one had ended before Amy's death. The group began as usual, and the DM explained that Wyn had become ill and had decided to return to the forest. Before she left, she wanted to gift her character attributes to the others. Each of the 6 other players were given one of Wyn's physical attributes, Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Constitution, Dexterity, and Charisma. At that point in the game, Wyn's character left and walked into the forest. The DM asked each character to speak a few words – from the viewpoint of their character – in memory of Wyn. After the time of sharing, the group took a break. When they returned to the table, the chairs had been reset with the one empty chair removed.

This event was extremely significant and special for the 7 remaining members of this chosen family. Wyn's (Amy's) absence was felt, recognized, and acknowledged. She was memorialized with a unique ceremony that fit the needs of those in attendance. The ceremony was so meaningful to the other seven people, that they are planning to have jewelry, or another token made for each of them to represent the gift (attribute) that they received from Wyn (Amy).

Because of the unique relationship and interaction between Grief Counselor, Patricia Monroe and the seven clients, a customized memorial was able to be developed and used which allowed a very special friend group to grieve, mourn, and remember a loved one in a meaningful way. The David C. Brown Funeral Home and the Brown Family Center will certainly benefit from this experience because they were reminded that grief looks different for each person and that only when addressing the whole person and whole situation, can we truly meet the needs of those we serve. The community at large will benefit from this service, even though there was not community participation, because the staff of the David C. Brown Funeral Home and the Brown Family Center will be reminded that nothing should be out of the realm of possibility when it comes to helping someone grieve their loved one.