

Here is a collection of much loved poems around bereavement and loss. Some are tender, some spiritual, some seek to laugh in the face of death. I hope you find words to move or console you within this personal selection of twenty poems.

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He is gone by David Harkins

You can shed tears that he is gone,
 or you can smile because he has lived.
 You can close your eyes and pray that he'll come back, or
 you can open your eyes and see all he's left.

Your heart can be empty because you can't see him, or
you can be full of the love you have shared.
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,
or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

You can remember him and only that he's gone, or
you can cherish his memory and let it live on.
You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back,
Or you can do what he'd want:
Smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

You can shed tears that she is gone,
Or you can smile because she has lived.
You can close your eyes and pray that she'll come back,
Or you can open your eyes and see all she's left.

Your heart can be empty because you can't see her,
Or you can be full of the love you have shared.
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,
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You can remember her and only that she's gone,
Or you can cherish her memory and let it live on.
You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back,
Or you can do what she'd want:
Smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

Immortality by Clare Harner

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond's glint on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn 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 grave and cry,
I am not there, I did not die.

DEATH IS NOTHING AT ALL by Henry Scott-Holland

Death is nothing at all.

It does not count.

I have only slipped away into the next room.

Nothing has happened.

Everything remains exactly as it was.

I am I, and you are you,

And the old life that we lived so fondly together is untouched,
unchanged.

Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.

Call me by the old familiar name.

Speak to me in the easy way which you always used.

Put no difference in your tone.

Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together.

Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.

Let my name be ever the household word that it always was.

Let it be spoken without effort, without the ghost of a shadow on it.

Life means all that it ever meant.

It is the same as it ever was.

There is absolute and unbroken continuity.

What is this death but a negligible accident?

Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?

I am waiting for you, for an interval,

somewhere very near,

just round the corner.

All is well.

Nothing is hurt; nothing is lost.

One brief moment and all will be as it was before.

How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting when we meet again!

If I Should Go by Joyce Grenfell

If I should go before the rest of you
Break not a flower nor inscribe a stone
Nor when I'm gone speak in a Sunday voice
But be the usual selves that I have known.

Weep if you must
Parting is hell.
But life goes on
So sing as well.

The Measure of a Man – Anonymous.

Not, 'How did he die', but 'How did he live?'
Not, 'What did he gain', but 'What did he give?'
These are the units to measure the worth
Of a man as a man regardless of birth.

Not 'What was his station?' but 'Had he a heart?'
And 'How did he play his God-given part?'
Was he ever ready, with a word of good cheer,
To bring back a smile, to banish a tear?

Not 'What was his church?', not 'What was his creed?',
But 'Had he befriended those really in need?'
Not 'What did the bit in the newspaper say',
But 'How many were sorry when he passed away?'

Gitanjali Ghei: Farewell my friends

It was beautiful as long as it lasted
The journey of my life

I have no regrets whatsoever save
The pain I'll leave behind

Those dear hearts who love and care
And the heavy with sleep over moist eyes
The smile in spite of a lump in the throat
And the strings pulling at the heart and soul

The strong arms
That held me up
When my own strength
Let me down
Each morsel that I was
Fed with was full of love

At every turning of my life
I came across good friends
Friends who stood by me
Even when the time raced me by.
Farewell, farewell my friends

I smile and bid you goodbye.
No, shed no tears
For I need them not
All I need is your smile

If you feel sad
Do think of me
For that's what I'll like.
When you live in the hearts
Of those you love remember
then...
You never die.
Look for me when the tide is high
And the gulls are wheeling overhead.

Look for Me by Iris Hesselden

Look for me when the tide is high
When the autumn wind sweeps the cloudy sky
And one by one the leaves are shed
Look for me when the trees are bare
And the stars are bright in the frosty sky
When the morning mist hangs on the air
And shorter darker days pass by.

I am there, where the river flows
And salmon leap to a silver moon
Where the insects hum and the tall grass grows
And sunlight warms the afternoon
I am there in the busy street
I take your hand in the city square
In the market place where the people meet
In your quiet room – I am there

I am the love you cannot see
And all I ask is – look for me.

When I'm Gone by Lyman Hancock.

When I come to the end of my journey
And I travel my last weary mile,
Just forget if you can any frowns –
And remember only my smile.

Forget any dark words spoken,
But remember the good I have done.
Forget that there ever was heartache,
Just remember the laughter and fun.

Forget that I stumbled and blundered
And sometimes fell by the way;
Remember – I fought some hard battles,
And won some, by close of the day.

So do not grieve for my going,
And don't be sad for a day,
But in Summer just gather some flowers
And come to the place where I lay,

And then in the shade of the evening,
When the sun paints the sky in the west;
Stand for a moment beside me –
And remember only my best.

One at Rest by A J Stanley

Think of me as one at rest,
For me you should not weep,
I have no pain, no troubled thoughts,
For I am just asleep.
The living, thinking me that was,
Is now forever still.
And life goes on without me
As time forever will.

If your heart is heavy now
Because I've gone away,
Dwell not long upon it, friend
For none of us can stay.
Those of you who liked me
I sincerely thank you all,
And those of you who loved me,
I thank you most of all.

The answer to life's riddle
In life I never knew
I go with hope that now I will,
And even so will you.
Oh Foolish, foolish me that was,
I who was once small,
To have wondered, even worried,
At the mystery of it all.

And in my fleeting lifespan
As time went rushing by,
I found some time to hesitate,
To laugh, to love, to cry.
Matters it now if time began,
Or if time will ever cease?
I was here, and I used it all
And now I am at peace.

Funeral Blues by W H Auden

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone.
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone.
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum,
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let the airplane circle, mourning overhead,
Scribbling in the sky, "he is dead"
Put crepe bows round the necks of the public doves;
Let traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my north, my south, my east and west;
My working week, my Sunday best;
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song.
I thought that love would last forever, ... I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now, put out every one.
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun.
Put away the ocean and sweep up the wood,
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

The Dash Poem – Linda Ellis

I read of a man who stood to speak,
At the funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on their coffin,
From the beginning. to the end.

He noted that first came her date of birth
And spoke the following date with tears,
But he said what mattered most of all
Was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time
That they spent alive on earth...
And now only those who loved them
Know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own;
The cars... the house.....the cash,
What matters is how we live and love
And how we spend our dash.

Afterglow by Helen Lowrie Marshall

I'd like the memory of me
To be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an after glow
Of smiles when life is done.
I'd like to leave an echo
Whispering softly down the ways,
Of happy times and laughing and
Bright and sunny days.
I'd like the tears of those who grieve,
To dry before the sun
Of happy memories
That I leave when life is done.

Don't Grieve for Me - Anonymous

Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free
I'm following the path God has laid, you see.
I took his hand when I heard him call
I turned my back and left it all.

I could not stay another day
To laugh, to love, to work to play.
Tasks left undone must stay that way
I found peace at the close of day.

If my parting has left a void
Then fill it up with remembered joy.
A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss
Oh yes, these things I too will miss.

Be not burdened with times of sorrow
I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow.
My life's been full, I savoured much
Good friends, good times, a loved one's touch.

Perhaps my time seemed all too brief;
Don't lengthen it now with undue grief.
Lift up your hearts and peace to thee
God wanted me now; He set me free.

The Journey – A Humorous Tale - Anonymous

Well it's sure been a bit of a week,
But don't sit there
With that tear on your cheek,
As while you've been crying,
Since you heard of me dying,
For me things have never been bleak.

So I wrote you this rhyme
To tell of my time at the Undertakers
Since I've been dead,
I've had so much fun,
Even had my hair done,
And I slept in a nice wooden bed.

They looked after me awfully well
Washed, and dressed me,
And 'boy' I looked swell
Though I felt a bit silly,
Cos their gowns were quite frilly
But they covered my modesty well.

Then they fastened my box,
With a lid and some locks,
On the top was a shiny gold plaque.
Then they lifted each side,
For my final ride
In the hearse with the smart men in black.

In procession we rode,
To my final abode,
in a sparkly black limousine car.
The journey was slow, although not far to go,
and I felt like a real superstar.

When we got to the Chapel,
I listened with glee
Of all the great stories
They all told of me.
So please don't be sad now my journey is done,
But remember my humour, my laughter and fun.

My Father kept a Garden – Anonymous

My father kept a garden,
A garden of the heart,
He planted all the good things there
That gave my life its start.

He turned me into sunshine
and encouraged me to dream,
Fostering and nurturing
The seeds of self esteem.

And when the winds and rain came,
He protected me enough;
But not too much because he knew
I'd need to stand up strong and tough.

His constant good example
Always taught me right from wrong;
Markers for my pathway
That will last a lifetime long.

I am now my Father's garden,
I am his legacy
And I hope today he feels the love
Reflected back from me.

I'll Feel No Guilt In Laughter - Anonymous

I'll feel no guilt in laughter, you know how much I cared.
I'll feel no sorrow in a smile that you're not here to share.
I'd probably grieve forever but you would not want me to,
You'd hope that I could carry on the way I always do.
So I'll talk about the good times, and the ways you showed you cared,
The days we spent together, all the things we shared.
I'll let memories surround me, a word someone may say -
Will suddenly re-capture a time, an hour, a day,
That brings you back so clearly as though you were still here,
And fill me with the feelings that you are always near.
For if I keep those memories, we will never be apart,
And you will live forever, locked safe within my heart.

Footprints in the Sand – Anonymous

One night I had a dream.
I dreamed I was walking along the beach with God,
And across the sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonged to me and the other to God.

When the last scene of my life flashed before us
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at times along the path of life
There was only one set of footprints.

I also noticed that it happened
At the very lowest and saddest times of my life.
This really bothered me and I questioned God about it.
“God, you said that once I decided to follow you,
You would walk with me all the way,
But I noticed that during the most troubled times
In my life there is only one set of footprints.
I don’t understand why in times
When I needed you most, you would leave me.”

God replied, “My precious, precious child,
I love you and I would never, never leave you
During your times of trial and suffering –
When you see only one set of footprints...
It was then that I carried you.”

Extract from **Cymbeline** – Shakespeare.

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Though thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and taken thy wages;
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frown of the great;
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke:
Care no more to clothe and eat;
To thee the reed is as the oak:
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning-flash,
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
Thou hast finished joy and moan;
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust.

When I Am Gone by Mosiah Lyman Hancock

When I am gone, release me, let me go
I have so many things to see and do
You mustn't tie yourself to me with tears
Be thankful for our many beautiful years.

I gave you my love. You can only guess
How much you gave me happiness.
I thank you for your love you each have shown
But now it's time for me to travel on alone.

So grieve a while for me, if grieve you must
Then let your grief be comforted by trust
It's only for a time that we must part
So bless the memories within your heart.

I won't be far away, for life goes on
So if you need me, call and I will come.
Though you cannot see or touch me, I'll be near
And if you listen with your heart you'll hear
All my love around you, soft and dear.

And then when you must come this way alone
I'll greet you with a smile and say
"Welcome Home".

I'm Still Here - Anonymous

Don't mourn for me I'm still here,
though you don't see.
I'm right by your side each night and day,
And within your heart I long to stay.

My body is gone but I'm always near;
I'm everything you feel, see or hear.
My spirit is free, but I'll never depart
As long as you keep me alive in your heart.

I'll never wander out of your sight;
I'm the brightest star on a summer night.
I'll never be beyond your reach;
I'm the warm moist sand when you're at the beach.

I'm the colourful leaves when autumn comes around,
And the pure white snow that blankets the ground.
I'm the beautiful flowers of which you're so fond,
The clear cool water in a quiet pond.

I'm the first bright blossom you'll see in spring,
The first warm raindrop that April will bring.
I'm the first ray of light when the sun starts to shine,
And you'll see that the face in the moon is mine.

When you start thinking there's no one to love you
You can talk to me through the Lord above you.
I'll whisper my answer through the leaves on the trees
And you'll feel my presence in the soft summer breeze.
I'm the hot salty tears that flow when you weep,
And the beautiful dreams that come while you sleep.
I'm the smile you see on a baby's face;
Just look for me,
I'm every place...