

Fresh Rosaries

Create Lasting Memories

Sympathy work now provides the inspiration that inspires Julia Miller's passion for floral design.

By JANE DeMARCO
PHOTOS BY P. MARTIN MILLER



“You’re catching me as I’m heading out to the wholesaler, **Washington Floral Service**, to get flowers for Grandpa Joe’s funeral,” gasps **Julia Miller** of **Julia’s Floral** and **FreshRosary.com**, in Orting, Wash. “He’s the grandpa of a previous client and was quite the character. He died having a good time in Reno. He led a plain life — other than a six-karat diamond cluster ring, a penchant for high-performance vehicles and his gambling trips. His family tells me that he always gave his lady friends a dozen red roses, so I’m doing glitzy gold urns with masculine white and green flowers and foliage, but I’m putting in a dozen red roses, too!”

Julia, like many floral designers, is discovering the professional and personal rewards of creating flowers for bereaved families. “As florists, we get to interpret the person in flowers. It’s like “Bouquets to Art” at the de Young Museum in San Francisco, but instead of paintings and sculpture, we are interpreting people. We should never discount our ability to look into the lives of the people our flowers are to honor, and we have to remember that we are the only people who can bring a touch of healing to the friends and family of the deceased.”

As with other floral designers interviewed for the *Florists’ Review* sympathy series, Julia’s trajectory into funeral floral design was a personal launch. “My mom died when I was 24, my dad three years later and my favorite brother followed soon after. I was no stranger to the family pew. My very first floral tributes were for my dad. During that awful time, my sister was getting married, and I did some of her flowers. The wedding photographer asked me what flower shop I worked for. That was it; I knew I had a calling, and out of all of that grief came my great career.”

Florists, skilled in the art of personalizing sympathy flowers, are detectives sleuthing clues from family and friends to be resolved in color, shape and scent. “The key is not only listening but also poking around a bit. Grieving people are shut down, but with a few questions, the stories do come. The stories are key to finding the elements to interpret.”

Julia was hired to do the flowers for the funeral for Tami, the mother of a previous bridal client. Knowing Tami, Julia purchased flowers in intense jewel tones, determined to produce a wedding look without the bouquets.

“One thing I do, which you might think is odd, is that while I’m designing

funeral flowers, I talk to the person,” she laughs. “Tami, what do you think? Do you like these? Are you happy with these colors?”

When Julia’s bother died in 1997, she did lots of red, white and blue because he was in the Navy. “Like me, he was a Catholic, and I created my first fresh rose rosary to be placed over his casket.”

Over the years, she has offered these floral rosaries to families doing Catholic funerals. “I use 50 large red roses, which, when strung together, make a lovely statement on a full-sized casket.” One local funeral director has contracted with Julia and purchases her original fresh rosaries to give as gifts to families planning Catholic funerals.

Julia is expanding her fresh rosary business (www.freshrosary.com) to ship rosaries anywhere in the country and is energized to grow her sympathy floral business “I’ve been doing flowers for about 30 years, mainly weddings. I’m feeling that I’ve become an order filler rather than an interpreter of a bride’s vision. Imagination seems to have left today’s brides and grooms, replaced by the latest trends on social media,” states Julia, sadly. “I know I have to stop doing weddings and focus on the



work that connects me with people and fuels my creativity once again.”

I reflect back to Julia her connection, energy and skill that she employs in creating sympathy floral tributes, adding that her clients get more from her than just gorgeous flowers. Julia acknowledges that her committed personal service not only results in great sympathy floral design but also rounds her out as a fully-fledged human.

“I have known deep personal grief, and when I’ve completed the floral work for a family, I encourage them to make friends with their grief, too. Grief will be their long-term visitor.”

With her visitor in tow, Julia heads out to the wholesale flower market to purchase flowers to celebrate Grandpa Joe. ■

Fresh from the Pacific Northwest



Centerpiece Display

Santa Sack Arrangement



Coal Bucket Centerpiece

www.hiawathacorp.com
sales@hiawathacorp.com
P.O. Box 1227, Shelton, WA 98584



Phone: (360) 426-4562
Toll Free: (800) 421-4791
Fax: (360) 426-9987