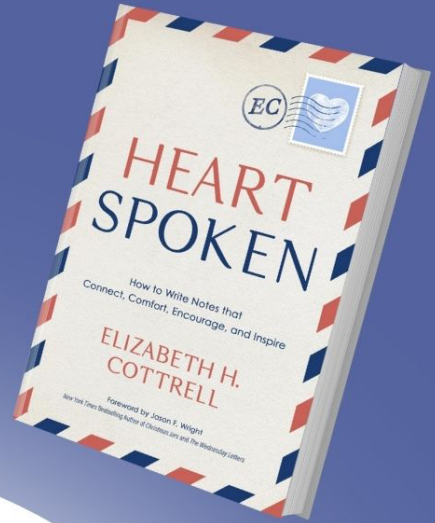
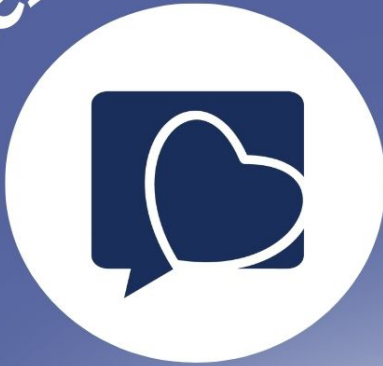


# Heartspoken's Little Guide



## Guide #1

# How to Write a Heartspoken SYMPATHY NOTE

Elizabeth H. Cottrell

Author of *HEARTSPOKEN: How to Write Notes that Connect, Comfort, Encourage, and Inspire*

***Heartspoken's Little Guide #1:  
How to Write a Heartspoken Sympathy Note***

By  
Elizabeth H. Cottrell

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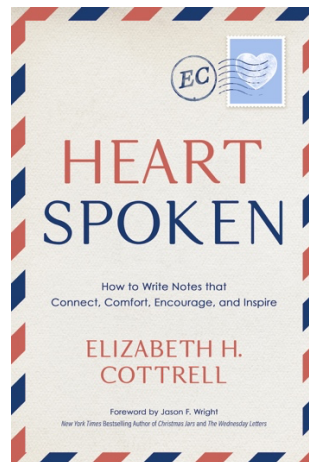
- Connection with God
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**Heartspoken's Little Guide Series  
Guide #1**



**How to Write a  
Heartspoken Sympathy Note**

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## The Power of a Sympathy Note: “Indelible Comfort”

*“This is not a good letter, Charlie. But I feel too sad to write a good one.”*

~ Ernest Hemingway

As a boy of fifteen, *Washington Post* columnist Steven Petrow was so moved when he heard about the deaths of then-Senator Joe Biden’s wife and infant daughter in a tragic accident that he wrote a note of sympathy. Much to his surprise, he received a personal response that he had saved all this time. That reply from Biden included these moving words: *“Now our life has been completely torn apart by an event I shall never understand.”*

Forty-three years later, in 2015, the journalist penned another letter to Biden after learning about Beau Biden’s untimely demise from brain cancer. Reflecting on this, Petrow made a poignant observation that expresses why it’s so important to reach out to those who have suffered loss with a personal, handwritten communication:

*“... Such a lost art can be a deliberate way of feeling and remembering. Not because it’s more ‘proper’ to hand-write a note than to use e-mail or post thoughts on social media, but because a death is so concrete and so permanent and so, too, should be the means of how we express our loss.”*

In a later article, the journalist said when he sends an expression of sympathy, he hopes it will provide *“a measure of indelible comfort in these dark times.”* This captures the essence of my message so well: when we send notes of empathy, we are offering “indelible comfort.”



## The Secret NOTES Formula

Personal, handwritten notes are powerful. The intimacy of knowing the sender touched that page—and penned its words as an outpouring of compassion—can only be matched by being in the same room with them, holding their hand, and speaking in person. A simple piece of paper can touch the heart and soul.

I enjoy acronyms, so when I was writing my book *Heartspoken: How to Write Notes and Letters that Connect, Comfort, Encourage, and Inspire*, I thought an acronym might be a helpful memory hack to keep on hand as a quick refresher.

Let my formula be your easy-to-remember shortcut for finding the right words for your expressions of condolence, regardless of the circumstances. You won't need every point for all your notes. I've also provided a Sympathy Note Checklist later in this guide.

### **N for Natural:**

Write the way you speak. Flowery words are neither necessary nor effective. Think about what you would say if they were sitting across the table from you, and use words with a personal touch. This warm, intimate style will serve you well.

*Susan, how I wish I could just reach out and give you a great big hug.*

*Joan, what you're going through just stinks, and I am pounding on the gates of heaven for you to get some relief.*

### **O for Open:**

Before you begin, take a few seconds to *open* your heart and mind to inner guidance. Even if you're not religious in the traditional sense, this spiritual, meditative practice aligns you with the person who will receive your message. Try to imagine where they are, what they are going through, and what they might need to hear from you. Become clear about your intention and trust your heart's deep and innate wisdom. Then start writing and expect the words to flow. You can always edit later, but the more you do it, the easier it will be.

### **T for Tell:**

Don't beat around the bush; *tell* them what you want to say. It's okay to acknowledge how helpless you feel, but you wanted to reach out to them after the death of their loved one. You can often use this "Tell" sentence as the first line. Sometimes the very best connection you can make with someone is to let them know what you're feeling.

*Joe, I was shocked to learn of Jason's death and had to touch bases with a hug by mail to express my sadness and sympathy.*

*Sherry, words are inadequate to convey what's on my heart in the face of your loss.*



## **E for Empathize:**

In your mind's eye, put yourself in the receiver's situation and visualize them reading your note. Think about what your desired impact on them might be. Do you want to comfort or encourage them? Do you want them to know how much their deceased loved one meant to you? Do you want them to know they are being thought of? When you identify and feel what you want the outcome to be, the words will flow.

*Mary, anything I am inclined to say feels so inadequate, but my heart is breaking for you. I just wanted you to know love is beaming your way.*

*Helen, I had hoped we would have a lot more time before I would be writing this note.*

## **S for Share:**

Share a memory or experience with the deceased. Be as specific as you can. Impart something you admired about them. Humorous memories can be comforting, even in times of loss.

*I remember going fishing with Uncle Jim when I was a teenager, and he always made me feel so grown up. He loved the time I snagged an old shoe and thought I had the biggest fish in the lake.*

*After reading John's obituary in the paper, I so wish I had known him. Clearly, he impacted his community and the world in his time on this earth.*

There you have it. The secret's out. Learn this easy NOTES acronym and start using it to unleash your inner note writer!



## Crafting the Heartspoken Sympathy Note

Next to thank-you notes, sympathy notes are perhaps the ones we're called on to write the most often, yet for many of us, they are the hardest to do. What do you say when you feel so helpless in the face of someone else's loss? What good can your simple message do?

The art of crafting a heartfelt, handwritten message of condolence can be lost amidst digital communication channels, but it serves as a beacon of tangible solace in times of bereavement. Your "indelible comfort" is an essential form of support, especially in the wake of devastating losses, whether it's the death of a loved one or a sudden, irreplaceable void in one's life.

The act of writing is reaching out and providing a long-distance embrace, regardless of the words you use. People tell me these notes are saved and read later when they can be appreciated in a less emotional time. So, get over your lack of confidence in knowing what to say and do your best to convey your expression of love and shared loss. I appreciated a friend's comment: *"For sure, writing to someone who is experiencing a difficult time is a way to touch someone's heart."*

I take a moment before starting a sympathy note to visualize the person, putting myself in their position, and trying to imagine what might comfort me if I were in their place. This often helps me think of what to say. It is okay to start with an honest statement:

*Words fail to express all that is on my heart after learning of Milton's death, but I had to let you know how much I'm thinking of you.*

The fear of the deceased being forgotten is a special kind of anguish for those left behind. Sharing memories and affirming the deceased's influence can bring comfort. This idea resonates in certain Asian cultures that distinguish between the death of the body and that of the memory. They believe that as long as someone remembers the deceased, they are not truly gone. My friend Anne shared this about notes she received after her father died:

*"My father died when I was young. One note that was so precious to me was from another young person, a neighbor who also loved my dad. She wrote about how she'd always remember even the small things about my father, like how he could perch his glasses in the middle of his forehead when he wasn't using them, and how she marveled at the way he could read a paperback book and never crease the spine."*

My friend Esther echoed this same sentiment:

*"A few years ago. I went to a reunion of the church I'd grown up in and so many people talked about my parents. There was even a woman there who hadn't seen my mother since I was born, yet she told me how much my mother had influenced her formative*

*years. Here was a total stranger to me, with so much of my mother still a living part of her!"*

Even when you don't know the deceased at all, you can still craft a comforting message. When we are in pain, it helps to know someone else understands. You may want to share a sad experience of your own so they will know you empathize but be careful doing this. Always remember it's about them, not about you.

My writing friend Trudi shared a message she received and saved because it meant so much to her:

*"May loving memories cradle you and new beginnings lead you."*



## **Loss Comes in Many Forms**

We think of sympathy notes after someone's death, but of course, there are other kinds of losses that deserve your sympathy and a handwritten note:

- ♡ The loss of a job
- ♡ The loss of a business partner
- ♡ The loss of a pet
- ♡ The loss of a relationship or marriage after a breakup or divorce

The COVID-19 pandemic brought so many unique kinds of losses. There were milestone celebrations and traditional rites of passage: birthdays, college reunions, graduations, and weddings. I couldn't visit my mother in her retirement facility for several months. I have friends who were unable to be with their elderly parents when the parent was hospitalized, even dying. Remember there are all variations of bereavement. Anyone would appreciate a heartfelt acknowledgment of what they're going through or have experienced.



## Are You Making These Mistakes?

Sending a missive to a grieving person requires special sensitivity. It's often said that while your recipient won't remember exactly what you wrote, they'll remember how you made them feel. To make sure your note comforts without inadvertently hurting or offending, consider avoiding some common sympathy-note pitfalls:

- ♡ Avoid platitudes, religious or otherwise. It is not helpful, for instance, to be told God has a plan, even if you believe He does. And "God doesn't close doors without opening windows" may seem grating after a tragedy.
- ♡ Avoid using phrases that could seem like false comfort after an emotional loss. For instance, a mother whose baby died does not want to hear she has plenty of time to have other children.
- ♡ Be careful not to minimize their experience of grief with words such as, "You must be relieved that she is no longer suffering" or "It's a blessing in disguise that he doesn't have to suffer anymore." Though well-intentioned, these sentiments are not appropriate.
- ♡ Don't assume the person to whom you are writing is bereft by the death of their family member. Relationships can be complicated. Sometimes it's best to extend your condolences without elaborating on the depth of their pain or heaping praise on the deceased.
- ♡ Don't try to cheer people up. No one wants well-meaning encouragement to look on the bright side when their world has gone dark. Give them time and space to grieve.
- ♡ Spelling and typographical errors distract from your message: proofread.



## You Can Make a Difference

The act of writing a sympathy note is a profound gesture of solidarity during someone's darkest times. Such a note may seem small, but it provides lasting comfort and reassurance, making the shared sorrow a little more bearable. The art of writing a sympathy note is indeed the art of offering "indelible comfort."

# Appendix

## A. Sympathy Note Template

This template is for general guidance, but you will learn to add your personal touch as you'll see in the actual sample sympathy notes in the following section.

**Salutation:** Dear [Name of name of family.]

**First 1-2 sentences:** Expression of sympathy / condolences and reason (usually death of loved one and use that person's name).

- "I was deeply saddened to hear about the passing of [Name of deceased]."
- "Please accept my sincerest condolences on the loss of your [relationship]."
- "I am so sorry for your loss. [Name] will be greatly missed."

**Paragraph 2 (1-4 sentences):** Personal memory or acknowledge them in some positive way.

- "I will always remember [Name] as a kind and compassionate person who touched the lives of everyone around them."
- "I cherish the memories of [Name]'s infectious laughter and warm smile."
- "I will never forget the time when [Name] helped me through a difficult period in my life."

**Paragraph 3: (1-2 sentences):** Offer of support if you know them well enough.

- "Please know that I am here for you during this difficult time. If there's anything I can do to ease your burden, please don't hesitate to ask."
- "I understand that this is an overwhelming time, and I am available to help with any tasks or arrangements that need to be taken care of."
- "If you need someone to talk to or if there's anything specific you need, please reach out to me. I'm just a phone call away."

**Paragraph 4 (1-2 sentences) optional:** Offer comfort and encouragement if appropriate. This is usually only when you know the person you're writing to very well.

- "Grief is a complex and individual journey. Please take care of yourself and let us pitch in to ease your burden just a little."
- "Please remember to take care of yourself during this difficult time. It's okay to lean on others for support and give yourself permission to grieve."

- "Although we cannot take away the pain, know that you have a strong network of family and friends who love you and are here to offer their unwavering support."

**Closing and signature:** End the note with a warm closing and your name. Some common closings include "With deepest sympathy," "Thinking of you," or "With love and prayers." Sign your name (usually your first name only unless the recipient doesn't know you) to personalize the message.

Remember, the most important aspect of a sympathy note is to offer genuine support, empathy, and understanding to the grieving person. Customize the note based on your relationship with them and the nature of their loss, and always make it heartfelt.



## **B. Sample Wording for Different Situations**

These are actual sympathy notes from my files:

### **To a casual friend and former patient of my husband's:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

John and I were so distressed to learn of [Name of Deceased]'s death and wanted to send our sincere sympathy to you and your family. John always said if all his patients were like you and [Name of Deceased], he'd never have retired! He will always remember [Name of Deceased]'s getting him tickets to take our daughter to see her favorite player.

We will not be able to join you at the funeral, but please know we are lifting you up in prayer for comfort, peace, and happy memories.

Very sincerely,

\* \* \* \* \*

### **To a business associate:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

On behalf of the whole [Name of Business] family, I want to express sincere condolences after your mother's death. No matter their age or how much you

might have expected it, the loss of a parent is one of life's tough blows. So be gentle with yourself in the weeks ahead. John joins me in sending our deepest sympathy and our prayers to you and your family for comfort, peace, and happy memories,

Very sincerely,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To a friend who lost a father with whom he had a complicated relationship**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

By the time you get this, you will have already returned from your hometown and your father's funeral, but John and I want to express our deepest sympathy for your loss. The death of a parent is a significant one at any age, so take care of yourself in the weeks ahead.

You have shared the complications of your relationship with your dad, but I hope you'll remember that you've been faithful in your care and attention to him from so far away. I pray that love and forgiveness will prevail as you process your loss.

We are lifting you and your family up for comfort, peace, and happy memories.

With love and deep respect,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To a close friend whose husband died after a very long illness**

Dearest \_\_\_\_\_,

John and I were both so sad to learn this morning about [Name of Deceased]'s death. You guys have been through so, so much or so very long, and my only comfort is believing with all my heart that he is finally released from all those earthly troubles and at peace, completely well, and hopefully having happy reunions with dear ones already gone.

But for you and the kids, there is a [Name of deceased]-shaped hole in your hearts. We are lifting you up in prayer and very much hope your happy memories will soon prevail over the sad ones.

We are still in quarantine from COVID, but you'll be getting a care package delivery from the deli on Monday.

Love,

\* \* \* \* \*

### **After the loss of a child soon after its birth**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I was devastated to hear of [Name of deceased child]'s death. My mother's heart aches for you and your family during this unimaginable time of grief. I cannot begin to imagine the depth of your loss or the pain you must be feeling. We're not supposed to outlive our children, and your world must feel so dark right now.

In her all-too-short life, I have no doubt that [Name of deceased child] felt your love and care. You and [name of other parent] did all you could to ensure she got the best possible medical care.

Please know that my thoughts and prayers are with you and your family and that I am here for you in any way that you need. I'll be in touch to see when I can bring food or keep you company.

With heartfelt sympathy and my deepest condolences,

Love,

\*\*\*\*\*

### **To a friend whose grown child died:**

Dear [Name],

Words are simply inadequate to convey the sadness you must feel over your son's death—certainly they can't convey the sympathy and comfort I'd like to wrap you in. We are not supposed to outlive our children, and I'll never forget my grandmother making that simple sad statement when her son, my uncle died. I know you, and I have no doubt this experience will make you even more compassionate for others going through what you've been through, but I also know it won't diminish the hole in your own heart.

Pamper yourself a bit, as you slog through the inevitable emotional rollercoaster of these first months of the first year. You are much beloved. Let us help you.

Please know I am lifting you and your whole family up in prayer for comfort and peace. May happy memories soften your loss in the days ahead.

Love,

\*\*\*\*\*



**To a distant friend who lost two beloved pets within a few months:**

Dear [Name],

[Mutual friend] told me that [Name of cat] had crossed the Rainbow Bridge, and it is unimaginable that you must endure yet another loss in so short a time. I wish I lived close enough to bring ice cream or popcorn and we could binge-watch some dreadful, distracting movie to escape for a while.

Just know I am sending love and healing, comforting vibes your way.

Be looking for a small something from me—mailed from LaurelBox.

Love,

\*\*\*\*\*

**To the daughter of a business associate I met at a retreat:**

Dear [Name],

[Mutual friend] has shared with me the sad and shocking news of your mother's death, and I just had to reach out and express my deep sympathy to you and your family. I knew [Name of deceased] through [Mutual friend]'s group and retreat, and it is no surprise to learn what a difference she made in the lives of so many. She left us far too soon, but her legacy of light and love will live on in everyone whose life she touched, including mine.

Please know I am lifting you and all the members of your family up in prayer for comfort, peace, and happy memories.

Very sincerely,

\*\*\*\*\*

**To a woman whose husband committed suicide:**

Dear [Name],

There are no words to express the deep shock and sadness I felt on learning of [Name of deceased]'s death or the concern over your own well-being after such an experience. Still, I had to reach out with a hug by mail to try to convey my sincere condolences and let you know you are being thought of.

We will all remember [Name of deceased] as a kind, generous person and friend. By showing up for so many community events, he inspired us all to be better citizens. I know you will be asking yourself so many questions and wondering if you could have done anything to prevent this from happening. The answer is undoubtedly "No," but please, please let a professional help you process all these feelings and remember how much we love and support you.

John and I will always be grateful for the wonderful weekend we had with you last year. Hold on to those happy memories, dear one. I'll be in touch to see how we can best help you get through the next few weeks and beyond.

Love,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To a casual acquaintance whose brother died:**

Dear [Name],

I just wanted to send a belated hug by mail to express my condolences on the loss of your brother [Brother's Name]. I have three brothers of my own, and losing any one of them would be like losing a piece of myself. I am especially grateful for your brother's military service.

I wish you and your family comfort, peace, and happy memories.

Very sincerely,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To a woman whose elderly father died:**

Dear [Name],

I've just learned of your father's death and wanted to send a hug by mail to express our sympathy to you and your family. No matter their age or how much you might have expected it, the loss of a parent is one of life's tough blows. I hope you'll pamper yourself in the days ahead.

Please know I'm lifting you up in prayer for comfort, peace, and happy memories.

Love,

\* \* \* \* \*

**Email to a dear friend living out of the country whose wife died unexpectedly:**

Dear, dear [Name],

[Names of grown children] have just left, and we are a mess. I've expected to get this news several times over the last few years, but not today, and not so suddenly. We are just devastated.

We love you so much and we love [Name of Deceased]. Your friendship has been among the most cherished of our life's experiences, and we are forever richer and more blessed for it. I believe with all my heart we who have known and loved [Name of Deceased] will never truly lose her—only carry her in our hearts in a different way and only until we meet again "on the other side."

Love and comfort flow from our hearts to yours,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To a close friend whose grandmother died:**

Dear [Name],

This is just a hug by mail to express again our condolences to you in the death of your grandmother. I understand she was not someone you knew well—that was certainly her loss—but still at some level it is something with a kick to your heart, especially in its reminder of your father. I hope the good memories are foremost in your mind.

Love,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To a family member whose friend died:**

Dear [Name],

This is a hug by mail to express again our sympathy to you in the loss of your friend [Name of Deceased]. I hope with time you'll realize how much of him you will always carry with you.

Sending you love and hugs,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To a woman whose husband was a business associate:**

Dear [Name],

Words are terribly inadequate to express the shock and sadness we feel over [Name of Deceased]'s sudden illness and death, but we just wanted to express our sincere condolences. [Name of Deceased] helped us buy our very first house over 35 years ago, and more recently, it has been my privilege to serve with him on two different nonprofit boards. He has left an impressive legacy of accomplishment and service. He made a difference, and we will miss him.

John joins me in sending love and prayers for comfort to you and your family.

Love,

\*\*\*\*\*

**To friends whose son, a high school classmate of our children, committed suicide:**

Dear [Name],

Our whole family is reeling from the news of [Name of Deceased]'s death, and while words are woefully inadequate, we send our love to you across the miles and share your loss as parents. It is unimaginable, but I know we share an absolute conviction that [Name of Deceased] is enfolded in God's everlasting arms where in God's time, you will be reunited with him in the blink of an eye.

In the meantime, we are lifting you and your family up in prayer for comfort and peace.

Love,

\*\*\*\*\*

**To a friend who lost her husband:**

Dear [Name],

It seems appropriate to write this on St. Patrick's Day as [Name of Deceased] always appreciated his Irish heritage. His knowledge and enjoyment of all things historical and cultural were among the many traits we loved about him. I don't think we were ever with him without learning something interesting or useful.

There is a [Name of Deceased]-shaped hole in all our hearts right now—raw and gaping. There will come a time when he rides more lightly on our hearts, but until then, please know how much we care, and please take good care of yourself in the coming weeks. We'll be in touch to see how we might help.

Love,

\*\*\*\*\*

**To a friend near the first anniversary of her husband's death:**

Dear [Name],

I am realizing too late that Monday was the anniversary of [Name of Deceased]'s death, and I know that must have been a tough day. This is just a hug by mail to say, "I'm thinking of you," and to remind you of how many hearts he touched in his lifetime. His ministry of caring and checking on people was truly remarkable.

Thinking of you,

\*\*\*\*\*

**To a friend whose husband died after a long decline with cancer:**

Dear [Name],

I can't believe [Name of Deceased] has made his great escape! I like to think of heaven as a place where we are our best selves, and it is not hard to imagine the power of [Name of Deceased]'s prodigious intellect and fierce heart for justice being deployed for all kinds of heavenly causes!

My biggest concern now, my friend, is you. I hope you can feel the love of family and friends and pamper yourself in the days ahead. Reinventing oneself after the death of a spouse is surely one of life's great challenges. You have proven time and again that you are a master of facing challenges, and my prayer for you is that this one will, in good time, bring joy and discovery. For now, we share your loss and send love, comfort, and peace.

Love,

\*\*\*\*\*

**To a friend whose beloved dog died:**

Dear [Name],

We just wanted to send a hug by mail to express our sympathy to you in losing your beloved [Name of pet]. Many of us have been there, and it's a terrible pain that only time makes bearable. We wish you comfort peace, and happy memories.

Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened."

~ Anatole France

"Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole."

~ Roger Caras

Love,

\* \* \* \* \*

**From my husband to the widow of a college classmate:**

Dear [Name],

I can only imagine how hard it was to lose [Name of Deceased]. He was such a fine person. You have been in my thoughts and prayers since learning of his demise. It is hard to believe.

His neurologic deficits [after a stroke] had to be not only devastating for him but for you and the children. We can be thankful that he is no longer suffering.

I was so glad to have been able to speak to him while he was still able to know it was me. Our friendship was deep and long-standing. I will always cherish the memory of our college days and our relationship.

My concern for you and your family is great.

With deep sympathy,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To a woman whose husband was a college classmate of my husband's:**

Dear [Name],

I know John has written too, but I just wanted you to know how much we both think of you and share your loss. It will take you a while to heal from the emotional and physical toll of [Name of Deceased]'s long illness and death. I hope you'll now put self-care at the top of your priority list for a while. [Name of Deceased] would want that. Our invitation to come escape to the Shenandoah Valley holds. We almost always have an extra bedroom.

Please know we are lifting you up in prayer for healing, peace, comfort, and happy memories.

Love,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To the grown son of a good friend of ours:**

Dear [Name],

What a beautiful and bittersweet afternoon it was—the pain and sadness of saying goodbye to [Name of Deceased] was there, of course, but it was softened by how perfect his “send-off” was in every way that he would have wanted.

John and I were both enormously impressed and proud of your part in making the service so meaningful. It was articulate, heartfelt, and honest. Your father was, as you so beautifully expressed, a complex man.

If we can ever do anything for you, I hope you'll let us know. It was a delight to see you again after so many years and to meet your family.

Love,

\* \* \* \* \*

**To a friend my age after her mother's death:**

Dear [Name],

In my mind's eye, I imagine your beautiful mother among the welcoming throng of angels and loved ones who have gone before. What a legacy of light, love, strength, and grace she has left for us all to emulate.

She took me under her wing when John and I first arrived here in 1976, making sure I met people and was included in various events.

Your devotion and care of her, especially in recent weeks, is so special, but I hope you'll take care of yourself in the weeks ahead as you adjust to this loss.

Wishing you comfort, peace, and happy memories,

Love,

\* \* \* \* \*



## C. Quotes and Scripture for Sympathy Notes

When your own words seem inadequate, see my printable Sympathy Note Inserts below. Or you can borrow some of the eloquent expressions of sympathy from great writers throughout history. I've included many more that are specific to different faith traditions on pages 177-180 of my book *HEARTSPOKEN: How to Write Notes that Connect, Comfort, Encourage, and Inspire* (<https://heartspoken.com/book> for details). When you quote someone, always include proper accreditation.

*"What we have once enjoyed and deeply loved we can never lose, for all that we love deeply becomes a part of us."*

~ Helen Keller

*"So it's true, when all is said and done, grief is the price we pay for love."*

~ E. A. Bucchianeri

*"I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil."*

~ J. R. R. Tolkien



*"Unable are the loved to die, for love is immortality."*

~ Emily Dickinson

*"Those we love and lose are always connected by heartstrings into infinity."*

~ Terri Guillemets

*"Like a bird singing in the rain, let grateful memories survive in time of sorrow."*

~ Robert Louis Stevenson

*"We bereaved are not alone. We belong to the largest company in all the world—the company of those who have known suffering."*

~ Helen Keller

*"Things we lose have a way of coming back to us in the end, if not always in the way we expect."*

~ J. K. Rowling

*"What is lovely never dies, but passes into another loveliness, stardust or sea-foam, flower or winged air."*

~ Thomas Bailey Aldrich

**For the loss of a pet:**

*"Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened."*

~ Anatole France

*"Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole."*

~ Roger Caras

*"Not the least hard thing to bear when they go from us, these quiet friends, is that they carry away with them so many years of our own lives."*

~ John Galsworthy

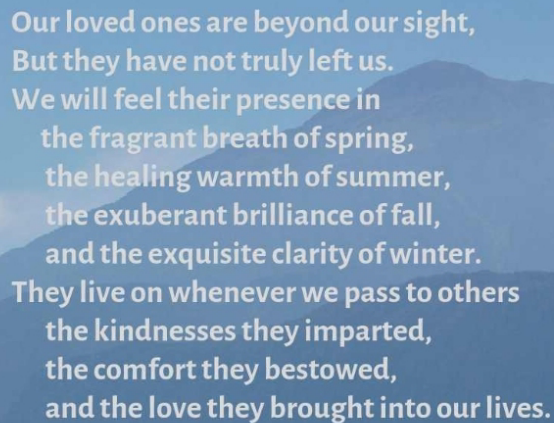


## **D: Heartspoken's Printable Sympathy Note Insert**

Copyright 2023 Elizabeth H. Cottrell.

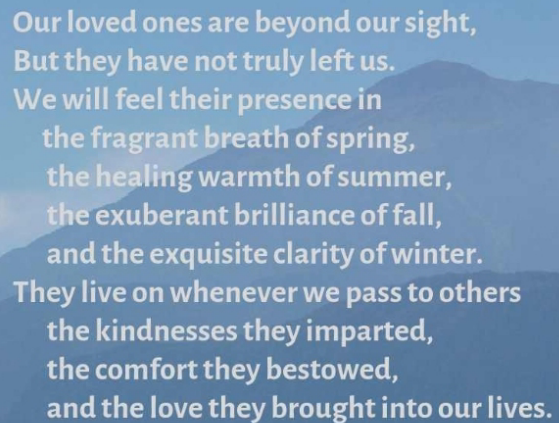
For personal use only; Do not distribute without permission.

Print the next page on light cardstock and cut into squares to tuck into your sympathy notes.



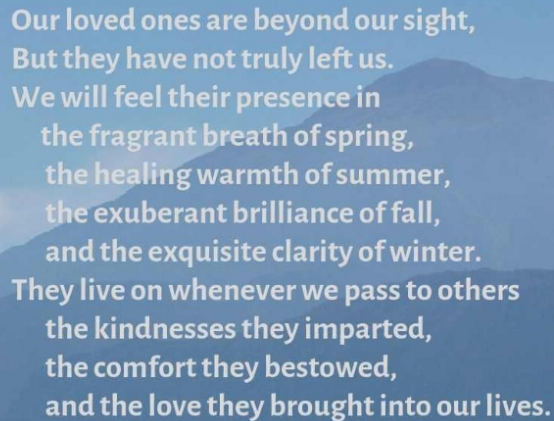
Our loved ones are beyond our sight,  
But they have not truly left us.  
We will feel their presence in  
the fragrant breath of spring,  
the healing warmth of summer,  
the exuberant brilliance of fall,  
and the exquisite clarity of winter.  
They live on whenever we pass to others  
the kindnesses they imparted,  
the comfort they bestowed,  
and the love they brought into our lives.

[www.Heartspoken.com](http://www.Heartspoken.com)



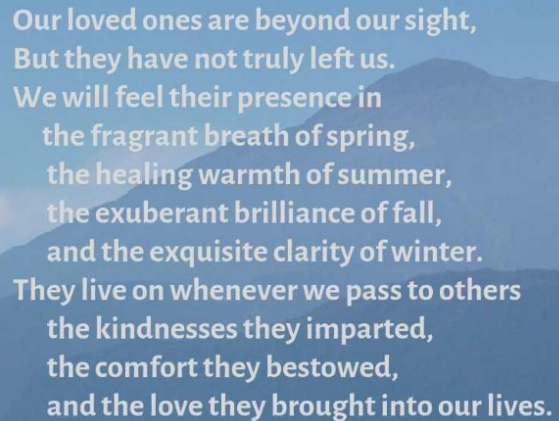
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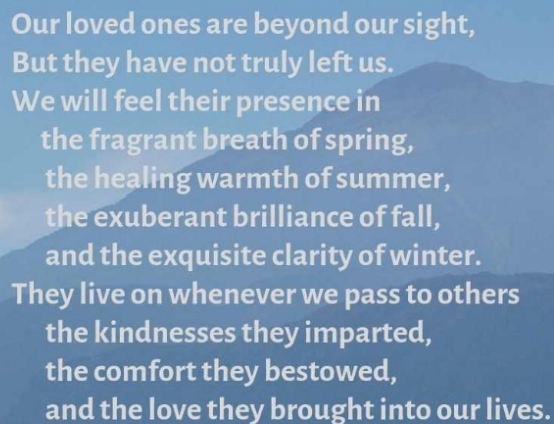
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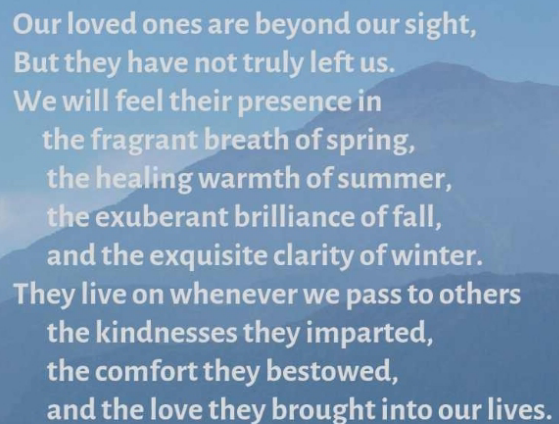
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## E: Heartspoken's Sympathy Note Checklist

### Do:

- ☐ Take a moment to reflect on words that might comfort you if you were the recipient. Open your heart and mind to inner guidance.
- ☐ Use lovely and appropriate stationery and postage stamps.
- ☐ Start by simply acknowledging the death.
- ☐ Write with sincerity and passion—as though you were speaking in person.
- ☐ Share a memory or story about the deceased.
- ☐ Stay neutral when complimenting the deceased, especially if the relationship between the recipient and the deceased is complicated.
- ☐ Offer a specific way to help rather than say, “Let me know if I can do anything.”
- ☐ Read their obituary. Even if you didn't know the deceased, this might give you enough to say, “Clearly, John left a legacy of leadership and love,” “Mary certainly made a difference in her life,” or “What a difference she made!”
- ☐ Write another note or make a phone call in 30 to 60 days—after loneliness sets in and outside support has subsided.
- ☐ Set up a reminder of their loved one's death date or birthday and reach out to them to let them know they're remembered.

### Don't:

- ☐ Don't use religious language unless you know the recipient's faith tradition.
- ☐ Don't use clichés such as “I'm sorry for your loss” or “Time will heal your grief.”
- ☐ Don't presume to know how the other person feels. You probably don't.
- ☐ Don't use euphemisms. It's okay to say that someone died rather than “passed,” but this is a personal decision.
- ☐ Don't convey unrelated information. A sympathy note is not the place to tell the recipient about your upcoming holiday plans.
- ☐ Don't forget to write notes later too, when the person may feel very alone.

**“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”**

**~ Maya Angelou**

(This is a paraphrase of a quote by Carl S. Buehner: “They may forget what you said — but they will never forget how you made them feel.”)

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## About the Author

Elizabeth H. Cottrell

Elizabeth's circuitous career has taken her from published leprosy researcher to stay-at-home mother, to community activist and leader serving on nonprofit and corporate boards. In 2016, she was elected the first female board chair of First Bank/First National Corporation in its 100+ year history, and as of 2024, she is still one of the few female board chairs in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Elizabeth is a blogger at [Heartspoken.com](https://heartspoken.com) and author of the award-winning [\*HEARTSPOKEN: How to Write Notes that Connect, Comfort, Encourage, and Inspire\*](#) published in 2022 by Koehler Books, a book that launched the Heartspoken Movement.

Above all, she is a connector and encourager whose writing explores the four essential connections of the Heartspoken Life: with God, with Self, with Others, and with Nature. Her expertise and passion for note writing in her book came at just the right time to touch a pandemic world desperately in search of connection. What better way to connect when we're forced to stay apart physically than to write and send a heartspoken note?

Through writing, speaking, courses, and workshops, Elizabeth helps her readers and students uncover and unleash their own heartspoken voice and learn to harness this powerful tool for nurturing their most precious relationships, both personal and professional.





## Further Support for Your Note Writing

### Join our Facebook Group:

*The Art of the Heartspoken Note*

This is a free, private group. Use the link below to request to join and we'll welcome you into a lively group of note writers. You'll find posts about etiquette and wording, stamps, calligraphy, artwork, papermaking, and much more. We learn from and encourage each other!

<https://facebook.com/groups/HeartspokenNotes>

### Get "Today's HEARTSPOKEN Note" newsletter

for further note and letter-writing support. Using the link below, you can peruse the archives of past articles on note and letter writing and can subscribe to be notified by email when there is new content. Weekly.

<https://heartspoken.substack.com/about>



### Note and Letter Writing Articles on the Heartspoken Blog:

The larger themes of my blog are the four essential connections of the Heartspoken Life, but I've written many posts here about the powerful connection tool of the heartspoken note. The link below takes you to posts in this category, but I hope you'll find other posts of interest while you're there.

<https://www.heartspoken.com/category/notewriting/>

### Follow me elsewhere for additional inspiration and tips:

I am @HeartspokenLife on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest

Monthly newsletter on LinkedIn: *The Heartspoken Connection*

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/elizabethcottrell/>

My articles on Medium: <https://heartspoken.medium.com>