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My mother was always a giver — generous, thoughtful and always trying to anticipate ways she could help others. But when she died last month, we realized that she had left another priceless gift to me, my brother and our families. Not only did she have her will and her Do Not Resuscitate papers in perfect order, but she also had written down what she did — and did not — want at her funeral.

I'm not being maudlin here by any stretch. Rather, I'm here to tell you what a wonderful favor this was for us. The fact that she took the time to put these particulars on paper for us meant that we didn't have to wring our hands and make blind decisions on all kinds of details. And the best part was that we had the luxury of knowing, at the end of the day, that her funeral had been just what she wanted. I can't even tell you what a burden this lifted for us as we tried to make the arrangements for Mother's services in the midst of our grief over her death. So today I am urging you to do the same favor for your children, your spouse or whoever will be in the shoes to make such decisions when your time comes. This may be the best free gift you can ever give to those you love, and it is soooo easy to do.

Honestly, it's not complicated or difficult in any way. Just jotting your wishes down on a piece of notebook paper would do the trick. In Mother's case, she had written her desires on a church-issued form way back in 1999, long before the ravages of dementia took hold and robbed her of her faculties. My brother, who handled her business over the years, had her tidy, bright yellow (she loved yellow) accordion folder on which she had written in her inimitable hand, "when I die." Inside the folder, we found a sheet listing the Psalm and readings that she wanted at the service (John 14: "Let not your hearts be troubled. . ."), the hymns she had carefully chosen ("Lift High the Cross" and "Crown Him With Many Crowns") and even a partial list of pallbearers that included two of my brother's most mischievous boyhood friends, whom she loved and who loved her back. In the blank for flowers, she did not specify what she wanted but wrote "no glads unless mixed." Mother studied flower arranging and grew flowers and spent a lot of time and energy making gorgeous creative arrangements. But for some reason she really did not like a stand of gladiolas. She had included important dates such as the year she graduated from Ole Miss, the year she and my father married, and a few of her fondest memberships such as Tri Delta, Daughters of the King, Daughters of the American Revolution and Colonial Dames.

Of course, having these details handy made writing her obituary a breeze. Thankfully, she also included a list of people who she wanted to be notified at the time of her death, along with their contact information. This was a double bonus because she had lived in so many places as a minister and bishop's wife that we would have had a devil of a time coming up with all of these — even with my friend Google, which I did have to consult to find one of her oldest and closest friends.

All I can say is thank you, Mother, for this unfailing and precious gift at the end, and the inspiration for me to go ahead and spell out what I want, too, so that my loved ones will have the same luxury one day. I hope my readers will all take this step, too. It really might be the best cheap gift you ever give to the people you love. You know, I don't think I want gladiolas either. I think I'll go with daffodils and sunflowers and daisies, especially if they're in season and don't cost too much. Stay cheap! Mother would want it that way.

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