

What it is you would like the stone to say

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [May 27, 2015](#) issue

Called the cemetery this morning to begin to plot  
What happens to my mom and dad after they die.  
Yes, I just wrote *plot*. My parents would smile at  
That. They are not afraid. They have lived so wry  
And well. They survived wars and four dead sons  
And savage diseases, and they still reach for each  
Other here and there. I have seen it. The cemetery  
People are so very helpful. Discharge papers: that  
Is the first thing. The cemetery will donate a head  
Stone free of charge. And the casket liner. I admit  
The casket liner was not on my list of stuff to talk  
To the cemetery folks about. Plenty of room, says  
The cemetery lady. Yes, your mom will be buried  
With your dad, no charge. What do we engrave on  
The stone? The specific words? *In loving memory*,  
Usually. That is standard. Can you edit the words?  
Well, I suppose so. Within reason. There are space  
Concerns, of course. I suggest you talk to your dad  
And mom and brothers and sisters, and agree upon  
What it is you would like the stone to say. I would  
Like the stone to say grace, and sinewy, and young.  
They were so young when they married. He did not  
Expect to survive the war. Their first son died—his  
Name was Seamus. Can you find room for Seamus  
On the stone? Mom nearly died, too. But she is too  
Tough to die at thirty. A hundred and thirty, maybe.  
Can we say endurance, and prayerful, and compose  
A poem about how they like their tea, and who gets  
What section of the paper first, and how they never  
Ever forget a birthday or anniversary? Can we copy  
Their meticulous undamaged handwriting? Can you

Show the note of her laughter, and the way he never  
Misses a day with the crossword and how he is right  
Now bending over the tomato plants to be sure he is  
Not about to water the tiny shy frogs who live there?