

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?