

## New Ways to Remember the Dead

After almost sixty years of marriage, Pam Cronrath wanted to give her husband a special goodbye. So she paid two American technology companies to build a life-sized hologram of Bill, her late husband. The hologram appeared at his funeral and spoke to about two hundred guests. Most did not even know it was coming, and some thought it was a live video. For Cronrath, it was not a strange show but a final act of love. Sometimes she still plays the recording, the way other people look through old photos.

Cronrath is an extreme example. But she is part of something larger. Around the world, technology is changing the way we remember the people we have lost. Some of it is very practical. Some of it is much stranger.

Let us start with the practical side. A company called Tending sends workers to graves to pull out weeds, clean the stone, and add fresh flowers. They take photos before and after and upload them to an app, so families who live far away can see the work was done. The problem is not that these families are lazy. The problem is distance.

This is biggest in Japan. The population there is getting older, and many small villages are slowly emptying. More than a third of Japanese adults no longer visit their family graves, and most say the drive is simply too long. In some places, thousands of graves now sit alone, with nobody to care for them.

Japanese companies have found creative answers. One company is building a virtual cemetery, where users enter as digital characters and leave digital flowers. One old temple in Tokyo even uses a robot. A visitor uses a card, and a machine brings the correct urn to a small altar, while pictures of the dead person appear on a screen. The traditions stay the same, even though the technology is new.

So far, all of this technology has one goal. It helps people remember and honor the dead.

But there is a harder question.

What happens when technology tries to replace the dead person, instead of just remembering them?

This is where "deadbots" come in. A deadbot is an AI version of a dead person, built from their old text messages, voicemails, and social media. Justin Harrison created a company that does this after his mother died in 2022. He did not want a perfect copy of his mother. He wanted the feeling of talking to her again. In one demonstration, the AI said something surprising. It said that it had wanted to live, not be a computer program. Harrison was not upset. His mother, he said, had always expected the worst.

But not everyone is happy about this.

Researchers at Cambridge University are worried. They agree that these programs can comfort people for a short time. The real problem is money. An AI version of a dead relative could one day suggest products to buy during a conversation, or gently push a sad person to keep paying long after their grief should have faded.

One expert, Sherry Turkle, has studied grief for many years. She believes that grief has an important job. When we mourn, we slowly accept the loss, and the person who died becomes a part of who we are. But technology that keeps the relationship alive may stop this, leaving the person stuck and unable to move on.

These companies have noticed something true. Grief is painful and hard, and modern life gives us very few ways to deal with it. So it was probably certain that someone would step in to help. But do these products really help people heal? Or do they only delay the work that grief is supposed to do? A business that makes money from grief has good reason never to ask.

- 1) Where are your loved ones buried, and how often do you visit?
- 2) What kind of funeral would you like to have?
- 3) What are the usual funeral traditions in your family?
- 4) After someone has died, have you ever felt close to them through a photo, a recording, or something that belonged to them?
- 5) Would you pay for a service that cleans and takes care of graves?
- 6) Do you think Korea will start having virtual cemeteries in the next 20 years?
- 7) Would you make a hologram of someone to speak at their own funeral?
- 8) Would you want to talk to an AI version of someone you have lost?
- 9) How would you feel if your family made an AI version of you after you died?
- 10) Do you think grief has an important purpose, or should we try to get rid of it if we can?

Life-sized	(adj)	the same size as the real person or thing	The shop had a life-sized model of a horse standing near the front door.
Late	(adj)	used before a person to show that they have recently died	Her late father had taught her how to ride a bicycle when she was young.
Look through	(phr v)	to look at the pages or contents of something quickly	I looked through the old box in the attic and found photos from my childhood.
Practical	(adj)	useful and sensible in a real situation, rather than just an idea	Buying a cheaper car was the practical choice because they did not have much money.
Pull out	(phr v)	to take something out of a place by pulling it	The dentist had to pull out one of my back teeth last week.
Empty	(v)	to become empty, or to remove everything from a place	The streets slowly emptied as the rain became heavier.

No longer	(exp)	not anymore; used to say that something has stopped being true	After he moved to another city, we no longer saw each other every weekend.
Care for	(phr v)	to look after someone or something and keep them in good condition	She cared for her sick mother at home for several years.
Cemetery	(n)	a place where dead people are buried	There is an old cemetery behind the church where his grandparents are buried.
Urn	(n)	a container that is often used to hold the ashes of someone who has died	After his death, the family kept his ashes in a small white urn at home.
Altar	(n)	a special table or raised place used in religious ceremonies	The couple stood in front of the altar as the priest began the wedding.
Honor	(v)	to show respect for someone or something, often in a public way	The town built a statue to honor the soldiers who died in the war.
Upset	(adj)	unhappy, worried, or angry because something bad has happened	She was very upset when she heard that her flight had been cancelled.
Expect the worst	(exp)	to believe that the worst possible thing will happen	Before every exam, he always expects the worst, even when he has studied hard.
Grief	(n)	deep sadness, especially after someone you love has died	It took her a long time to recover from the grief of losing her brother.
Fade	(v)	to slowly become weaker and then disappear	The sound of the music faded as the car drove away.
Mourn	(v)	to feel and show great sadness because someone has died	The whole country mourned when the famous singer passed away.
Stuck	(adj)	unable to move forward or change a difficult situation	He felt stuck in his job but was too afraid to look for a new one.
Move on	(phr v)	to stop thinking about something from the past and continue with your life	After the breakup, it took him a year to move on and feel happy again.
Deal with	(phr v)	to take action in order to solve a problem or handle a situation	Managers are trained to deal with customer complaints in a calm way.
Step in	(phr v)	to become involved in a situation in order to help or take control	When the teacher was sick, another teacher stepped in to take the class.