

How to Dress for an Online Memorial

He died in the early hours of April 1st, and one really wonders if life is a joke sometimes.

The night before, an online Catholic Mass had been planned to pray for his recovery, scheduled for nine o'clock in the morning. It was to be via *Zoom*, and over a hundred “prayer warriors” were expected. But in the seven hours between the time he passed and the time the mass was supposed to start, the attendees were all quickly transformed into mourners. Word was spread quickly; it would've been awful if someone attended a mass for healing, only to find a memorial in its place.

Many of the attendees were senior citizens like the deceased and thankfully, none of them were caught unaware. It was one trap missed in a minefield – for it was quickly apparent that not everyone was well-versed in the technology of online video meetings yet.

The *Zoom* screen was dotted by page after page of self-facing computer cameras from all over the world showing these drawn, carefully-composed faces... some standing too close, some too far, others in settings too dark or too bright. There were gritty screens of low resolution, or computer cameras facing the wrong way altogether, showing only a door or the light or the neglected corner of someone's room.

When the prayers ended, everyone was either saying some form of “Condolence” at the same time, or falling silent to give way to others – alternately creating indecipherable chaos and weighty emptiness, that a few someone's would then feel compelled to fill up, starting the cycle all over again. We overheard elderly couples consulting their grown children or each other on the volume, or if they could be heard, or how to switch this thing on or off.

It was inexplicably touching, how everyone was stumbling in earnest efforts to connect and be a community within the constraints of a pandemic lockdown. Everyone was trying their best to cope with the new realities we were in – the unprecedented losses, long-distance condoling, new technologies, and the new mores within them.

Good thing my husband and I bothered to dress up properly.

It was tempting not to. The city had been on lockdown for half a month by the time of our loss, and the most we bothered to wear on the daily were Filipino *daster* house clothes for me, and collared shirts over boxers for him. We started looking like our parents, disarmed on a Sunday morning.

Before the memorial mass started, I asked my husband what he was going to wear. He said he would wear pants. I told him no one would see them but the truth was, I just did not want to wash them. They took forever to rinse, wring and dry. But he said, simply, “*Para kay daddy.*”

I followed in his lead and dressed appropriately head-to-toe, no matter that others would not see much from a computer screen. I slipped on a beloved black, long-sleeved cotton shirt that I've owned for a decade but it suddenly felt thick, alien. The fabric was heavy and constraining on my skin, so much so that I stretched the cuffs and slapped them against my wrists, looked at

the tag, and wondered if it was mine or if the laundry service we availed of before everything closed had gotten it wrong. It was too thick, or my skin had become too thin.

On skin so used to threadbare house clothes, the simple shirt didn't feel like the one I'd owned and used so frequently for ten years. In just a few weeks of being on lockdown, I'd gotten used to wearing only the threadbare.

The threadbare...

Until the online memorial, the pandemic dress code in our house comprised of a few simple rules. Because we were out a laundry lady, "outside clothes" went straight into the wash, but clean "inside clothes" were to be worn multiple times to save on the effort of washing.

Bras became optional until I stopped wearing them altogether. Many women are likely to say the same thing, nowadays. Masks covered my face whenever I went out anyway, and no one would know it was me. It was also a small rebellion at a time when every move we made was so regulated and really - unless used for medical reasons, I liked thinking bras were just another relic of patriarchy. Mostly though – rendered extraneous and dispensable because they were a hassle to wash as well.

The rules went on: Wear only low-maintenance pieces that could either survive being dumped in a machine, or ones we could stand to damage and lose. Go light – it was kind on the hands for wringing, and quick to dry.

Under these principles, the clothes we haven't used in a long time, the clothes shoved in the bottom of the back of the drawer, the clothes which would have been donated if we had bothered to dig them up... were suddenly in heavy rotation.

One of them was my husband's singularly craptastic, kitschy, bold pink "I <3 Bali" tank top with oversized armholes that he bought on some inexplicable fancy while we were abroad. I've been meaning to get rid of it for some time, but I didn't think it was dignified enough for a donation pile. Now I wash it easily and so, *happily*, and it dries in two hours. I keep it highly visible so that he would wear it again and again.

I hid the designer duds in the bottom of the back of the cabinet – where its lesser threadbare country cousins once dwelt. They are so fussy with washing instructions and I do not want to bother, not when we put on paid leave our cook and our cleaner, we are taking care of our son's online schooling and sense of security and well-being, and there's regular supply 'foraging' and working from home, to boot. No. I refuse to handwash you and your ilk, cold, gently, separately, in a laundry bag, with bells and whistles and a lullaby. That's for the weak.

Also, I damaged one of my husband's and hid it, and would rather not damage another one, especially as I've not confessed. Yet. I am hoping it would be forgotten, or, once discovered - the loss would seem small in the larger scheme of things.