

Loved ones are never forgotten

CHANGE. A new e-mail address. A different hair cut. Another birthday.

Or **C**HANGE. A bombing. A tornado. An airplane crash. A high school massacre. A terrorist attack.



FOUNDATIONS

CHARLOTTE LANKARD

Some changes make little difference in our lives. Others happen,

and we are never the same.

When it is life changing, we need it to be recognized, validated, remembered. Grief expert Doug Manning calls it establishing significance. So, we build a memorial. A wall with names. A reflecting pool. A museum. A survivor tree. A statue.

Sometimes the memorial is a public project. Other times it comes from one person's need to give expression to personal feelings. Such is a painting by Colorado artist Linda Arnold who painted a picture for Colorado's Columbine High School after 14 students, including the two gunmen, and a teacher were killed.

People in that community were so moved by it that they wanted prints made of the painting for their homes. It is titled "Columbine Forever."

I first saw it at a small antique store on N Western, run and owned by Linda Fernstermacher.

As I admired the print, Fernstermacher told me the rest of the story. Having served as a teacher and administrator in a Colorado high school, she had contacted Arnold and asked for a print after seeing it displayed on a magazine cover

In the months that followed, Arnold decided she'd like to paint something similar for the people of Oklahoma City. The artist called her Oklahoma City contact, Fernstermacher, and asked for a picture of the Survivor Tree, so she could include it in the painting, along with Oklahoma's state wildflower, Indian blanket.

In the painting, you see a tree trunk, covered with Indian blankets — 168 petals representing the people who died. On the petals are rain drops symbolic of our tears. Arnold completed the painting, and the back was signed by people in the Columbine community and presented to

Gov. Frank Keating's office. Prints of this picture are also at the antique store.

Recently, Arnold's work was recognized by a group from New York City, and she has completed a painting that speaks of that tragedy and hangs in the Training Academy for firefighters in Brooklyn.

Establishing significance is important. We want to make sure people we have loved are not forgotten. Whether we paint or sculpt, write a poem or plant a tree, it is good to remember those who have been important in our lives. Though they are not physically present, their spirit is alive in our hearts and in our memories.

Remembering is good, loving, healing and healthy. Our loved ones mattered before. They matter now. We do not have to leave them behind.

Charlotte Lankard, marriage and family therapist, is director of the James L. Hall Center for Mind, Body and Spirit at Integrity. E-mail her at clankard@cox.net.