

Is it appropriate etiquette to eat pepperoni pizza in a funeral home?

Death puts us in a funny place emotionally. We become weepy and melancholy. We feel nostalgic and reflective. We tend to zone out as we adjust and process the sad news. Muddling through the funeral home scene tends to place us in surreal moods. We are tender and fragile, and we cry intermittently as the initial grief hits us in waves.

After six hours last week at a funeral home in Dundalk honoring my sweet Uncle Martin Mossa – who was like my second father – multitudes of wonderful memories of life with my mother’s brother flooded my brain.

I stayed awake half the night texting with multiple cousins in the U.S. and Italy about our uncle. I dug up piles of photos from the closet to stare at his face and countless family trips and gatherings we’ve shared as a family. Everything I should have been tackling around the house and office could wait – all of it seemed completely trivial in the face of a family death. Who cared if the laundry got folded? Who felt like answering email? Let the mail pile wait. I only wanted to be in “Uncle Martin” mode.

Throngs of people from the past popped up at the viewing, as I struggled to guess their names and find younger versions of them in their “matured” faces. There was a bunch of double Italian kissing, strong hugging, murmuring of “good to see you, wish it wasn’t here” and back-patting. (Why do we smack each other as we hug? It sort of hurts.)

Death put me in a funny place specifically between the afternoon and evening viewings; actually, more like a funny setting. Have you ever eaten pepperoni pizza in a funeral home? We did.

You heard me correctly. I said *we ate pepperoni pizza in the funeral home*.

I could almost hear Uncle Martin chuckling from his casket, because – *who does that?*

Since my Mamma Gina is confined to a wheelchair and transferring her is not so easy, we saved the physical hassle of not transferring her four times in and out of the car, had we driven to a local restaurant for dinner. Instead, we decided to 'hang out' at the funeral home during the quick two hours between the 3-5 and 7-9 p.m. viewings.

The remainder of our family had left. It was eerily quiet in the room with only Uncle Martin lying there near Mamma, our two cousins, and me. The funeral home hostess gave us permission to order carryout and eat it in the viewing room; however, that seemed a smidgen inappropriate. Uncle Martin couldn't have any; and besides, wouldn't people wonder as they entered the funeral home why it reeked of pepperoni?

So after I sped down Merritt Boulevard to collect the provisions, we moved "the pizza party" to the staff break room down the hall ... where laughter ensued.

I suppose we were already a little "punchy" from the whacky situation. Yet, since death puts us in a funny place anyhow, why not amuse ourselves? Because if we didn't laugh, we would cry ... we were sad to have lost the patriarch of our large Italian *famiglia*.

There we were, our two witty cousins with mamma and me - joking, giggling and reminiscing about life with Uncle Martin as we wiped pizza grease off of our lips. The funeral home hostess poked her head into the room *at least* six times, because after all, laughter is contagious. (Secretly, we think she wanted to hang with us since we were obviously having so much fun. Or, she was hungry.)

Another employee who was clocking into work entered the room and we said, "Hi! We're your new hires!" and we guffawed some more because, of course, he didn't believe us, and perhaps wondered who were these four silly strangers in the break room holding a *Pat's Pizzeria* box.

Is it appropriate to laugh so much in a funeral home? Absolutely.

Because death is *such* a part of our lives, and it puts us in a funny place. Cry or laugh - pick one. (We figured we'd be crying amply the following day over our

treasured uncle at St. Rita's Church during his Mass of Christian Burial.)

Chalk up the hilarity to us having an original experience - eating pepperoni pizza at Uncle Martin's viewing, because well ... that's comical. And since death puts us in a funny place anyhow, we may as well chuckle at the scenario.

But should the aroma of pepperoni be wafting through a funeral home? Hmmm, that code of etiquette I'm not so sure about.