

## About Rachel Donnelly

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Somedays I feel like a real-life Little Orphan Annie whose life should be subtitled "Death Becomes Her." As a small-town doctor's daughter, I am accustomed to being around those at the end of their life since I spent many a day in my father's office and accompanying him when he made house calls or rounds at the hospital. When I was 16, my father passed away at the age of 48. I tried to help my mother as much as I could, supporting her as she sold his medical practice and applied for Veteran's benefits. A few years later, we moved my grandmother from Tennessee to an assisted living home nearby so that we could help in the latter years of her advanced Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Disease.

Several years later, I am married with two kids, ages 2 and 4, and had recently moved into a beautiful new home. I had recently left my role at Emory School of Medicine where I was in development and alumni relations, often giving tours of the newly built cadaver lab to alumni and friends. My office phone number was one digit off from the Body Donor Program, which consequently forced me to know more than the average person about donating a body to medical science.

I had just accepted a new job in development at the Shepherd Center; one I was excited about but unfortunately afforded me no time off for the first three months. Just as I was about to start my new job, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and passed away several weeks later. My mother's passing left me with five houses to clean out and sell, as well as assuming her role as caregiver for my uncle, who was in the late stages of Parkinson's Disease. A few months later, I left my job to manage the affairs of my mother's estate as well as the care of my uncle. Last fall, my uncle passed away and I've recently assumed the role of Co-Executrix of his estate.

Other than a myriad of my own life experiences, my professional experiences have helped me to create Black Dress Consultants. As a professional fundraiser in higher education for 19 years, I've built countless relationships, organized events and helped individuals and families build meaningful philanthropic legacies.





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My career has taught me to be resourceful, solve complex problems, work collaboratively and manage and allocate funds, particularly in a resource-constrained environment. Dividing and administering an estate can be a daunting task, but with my knowledge of the administrative as well as emotional aspects I can help ease the burden of putting it all together. I am also a certified notary which helps in eliminating third parties needed to verify official documents.

I've been there and I have felt totally overwhelmed by all the work that came with managing the business of death and dying. I've sat in front of my computer and entered "what to do when someone dies" into Google. I've managed end-of-life care, including nursing homes, home health aides, medications, doctors and hospice. I've hired attorneys in multiple states. I've cleaned out and sold many houses – including one that was half-burned. I've managed multiple estate sales, a trust for an estranged family member, as well as the distribution of countless bequeathed items. I've fought insurance companies for payment, transitioned banking and investment accounts and tackled mountains of paperwork. I've worried over whether I was making the best decisions according to the wishes of my loved ones. I've been at the side of many deathbeds, holding the hands of my father, mother, and uncle while they passed. Each task has been a learning experience, which I've tried to approach with laughter, knowing it truly is the best medicine.

I founded Black Dress Consultants to help those in the same difficult position and my mission is to serve as your ally and resource for loved ones navigating the end-of-life journey.

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