

The Natural Death Centre's official magazine

# more to death

thirteenth edition 2019

**The Only  
Cure for  
Grief is  
to Grieve**

**Thinking  
about  
DIRECT  
CREMATION?**

UNCOVER HIDDEN AND AMAZING OPTIONS  
SURROUNDING DEATH AND FUNERAL PLANNING



## Editor's blurb!

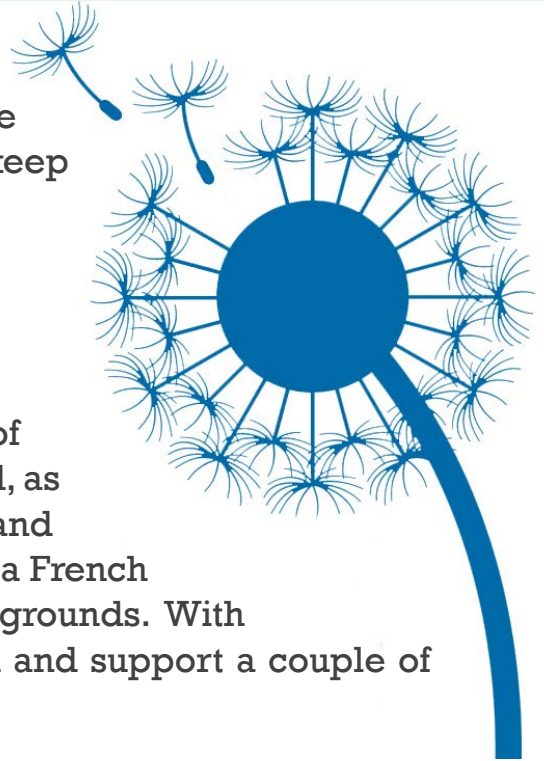
When Rosie asked me to be guest editor of the More to Death magazine, I don't mind admitting that I was a little scared, excited too - but mainly scared! Having only been in the industry eighteen months and volunteered with Rosie at The Natural Death Centre for even less than that, I thought I might have bitten off more than I could chew! Well, I needn't have worried; our extremely knowledgeable, experienced and creative contributors to the magazine have all done a sterling job. I hope that you will agree that our writers have provided the magazine with a number of interesting and diverse articles, making this issue, number 13, an insightful and mind provoking read.

It has been an eventful six months in the funeral industry as it has been under scrutiny from various angles. The Inspector of Funerals' work in Scotland is wanting more transparency when dealing with the bereaved. The Competitions and Marketing Authority are asking the industry to ensure that the bereaved are not taken advantage of, especially, at a time when they are most vulnerable. The Treasury are demanding assurances that monies from funeral plans are kept safe. Personally, I thought that would be a given - so no arguments there! Finally, Dignity Funeral commissioned Time to Talk Quality and Standards which brought funeral costs and practices under the microscope and looked at what was important to bereaved families. Some might say it was about time the industry had a shake up.

Here at The Natural Death Centre we have had our own little shake up. Rosie now has two eager volunteers, myself and Charlotte and we have been able to offer some additional help and time which has allowed Rosie to devote some much needed time to her house build. As a team, we have experienced quite a busy six months... I have taken over as editor and have been slowly updating our website and ensuring it is free of glitches.... no mean task for someone who is computer illiterate!

Charlotte on the other hand is brilliant so has taken over our Twitter account and is in the middle of creating our very own Coffin Club... so please keep an eye on her tweets!

So, what have we been up to? As always, we have been manning our helpline which never ceases to intrigue and amaze us with the diverse and mixture of enquiries. Rosie, an absolute fountain of knowledge for all things death and funeral related, as always, has been in demand and busy with radio and newspaper interviews as well as being the star of a French television news programme about natural burials grounds. With increased numbers, we have been able to attend and support a couple of industry events which was very exciting.



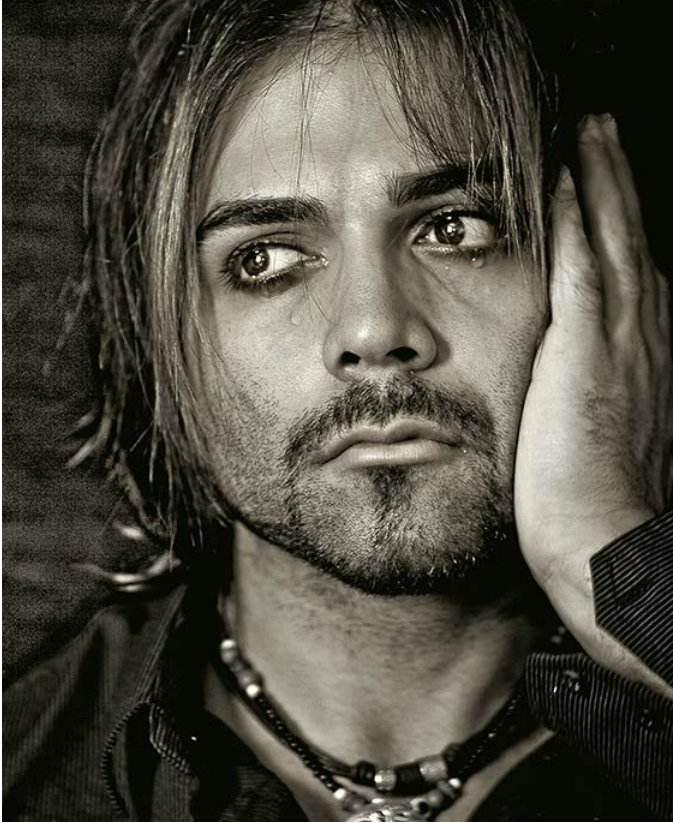
The Good Funeral Awards in September saw a triumphant return to its birth place of Bournemouth, with a friendly, fun packed weekend of events giving everyone time to meet up with old friends and make new ones. It culminated in the red carpet being rolled out for the awards evening, recognising outstanding service to the industry. In October, we supported the main event of Dead Good Days... family friendly events, workshops and talks held in and around Southampton through October. Despite the atrocious weather, the final event was well attended, it successfully informed, intrigued and inspired all those who were brave enough to attend. The aim of all the events was to encourage people to talk about the elephant in the room... death! It certainly did that, as people left thinking and talking about death, dying and loss, so well done to the event organisers.

Going forward things are looking rosy - excuse the pun! The Association of Natural Burial Grounds, ran by The Natural Death Centre is encouraging its members to embrace a new research project. The Beautiful Burial Ground Project aims to put burial grounds of all types across England and Wales on the map by revealing their hidden heritage and importance to biodiversity.... so, it's all going on.

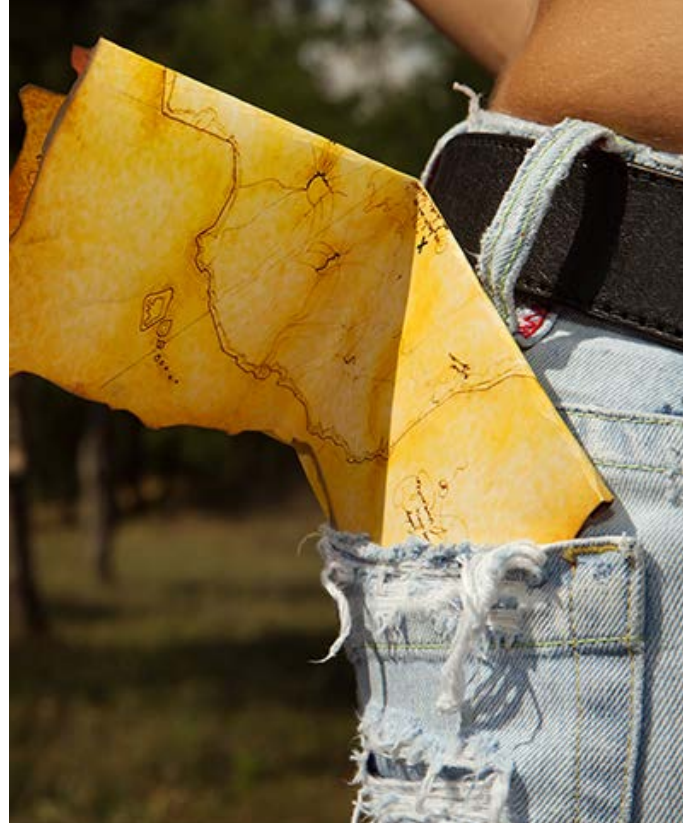
I do hope that you enjoy reading this brilliant, 13th issue of our magazine and don't forget to forward it to everyone you know and if you have a website, not that I would know how... you could always add a hyper link to it!

*Carol Anne Waters*

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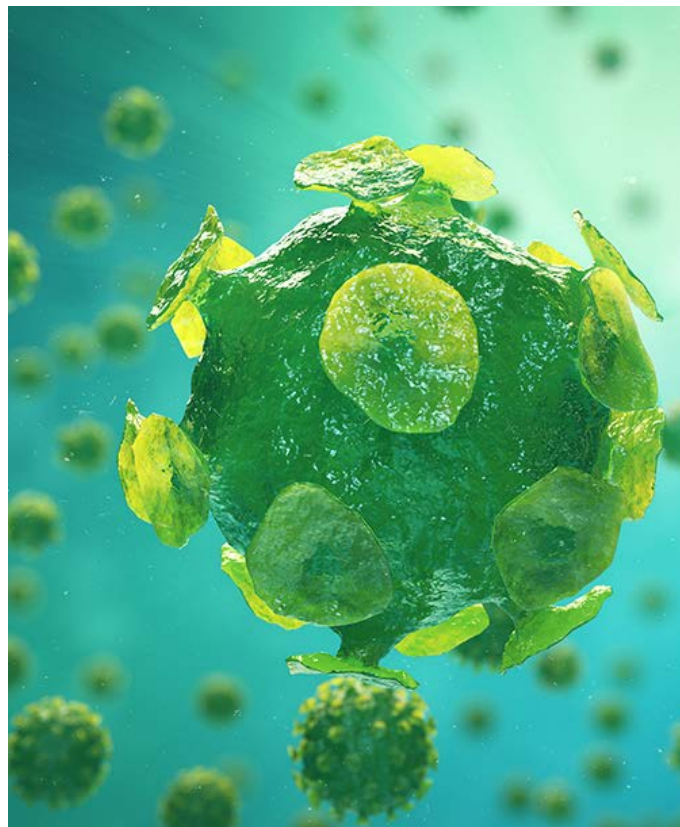
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From: LOCATION  
LOCATION  
LOCATION

To: Cremation  
Cremation  
Cremation

Although I am no stranger to death, if you'd asked me a year ago to predict where my career path might take me, I could not have envisaged it leading me to death's door ... or at least, the door of the death industry!

Having stepped over the threshold, looking back, it does kind of make sense ... in a big picture kind of way. 'Orphaned', as I like to put it, by the age of 28, I have long been aware of the strange discomfort many people experience around death, dying, bereavement and grief, and felt that things could be done differently.

Funerals, in particular, always struck me as very rigid in format, often lacking in the creativity and personalisation that can truly honour the deceased's life and the impact they've had on others. Cultural norms can be hard to ignore and if you are not prepared for dealing with a death in the family, choosing the most common and 'acceptable' route can seem to be the simplest and least stressful option. Ultimately though, it sometimes proves to be an emotionally unsatisfying experience, which can adversely affect the grieving process. >>



>>35 years ago, my mother's funeral was a particularly grim, graveside service, on a very grey day, for family only. My siblings and I were in our teens and because she had taken her own life, my paternal grandfather, was of the opinion; 'in such circumstances, you just have a small private funeral.'

We weren't remotely religious but back then ministers perhaps had the monopoly on conducting procedures, so my first ever funeral experience was some poor man of the cloth awkwardly conducting a brief service about a woman he didn't know, in the rain, with her children watching uncomfortably on. Thankfully, many things have changed since then but it remains an abiding memory of how NOT to do a funeral.

Some eight years later, older and a bit wiser, my siblings and I made sure that my father's funeral, while still fairly traditional, was a more adequate reflection of his life and social contribution.

I made sure that we not only honoured him, but my mother also ... by delivering one of the eulogies myself!

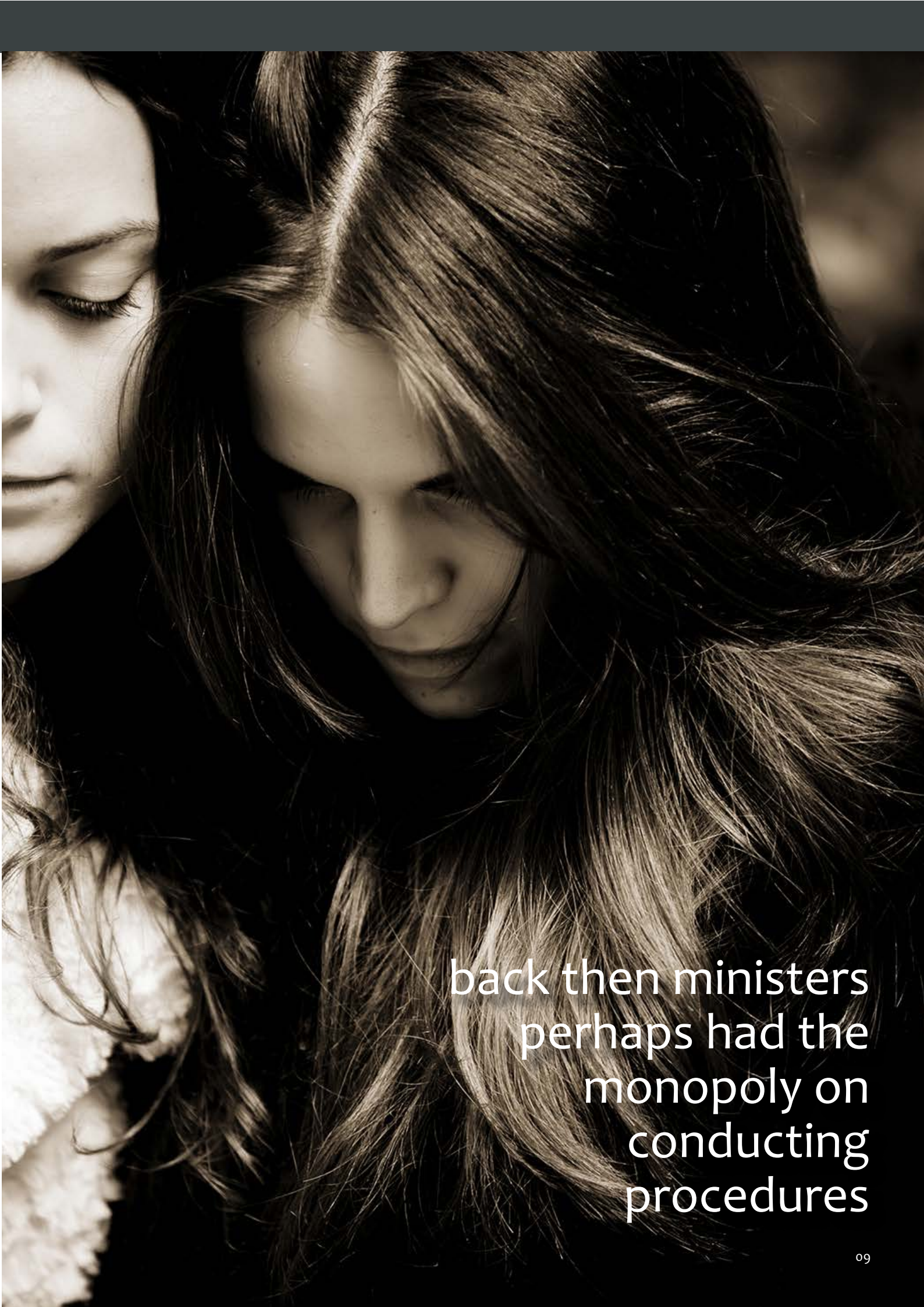
Eulogies are not necessarily something that everyone may feel capable of delivering, yet I suspect, more might be willing to consider it, if there was more flexibility and less formality to the average send-off.

Ever since those formative funeral experiences, I have questioned the conventional approach to rites of passage but mostly my preoccupations with the shortcomings of society's approach to death were limited to being expressed in casual café chat or dinner party digressions.

Much of my working life was spent in television production, latterly and quite frequently on C4's popular; 'Location Location Location.' As fun as that was, some years ago I made a decision to train as a counsellor and group facilitator and I had been balancing work in those fields with short term television contracts.

However, when I saw an advertisement for a Funeral and Bereavement Adviser with Scotland's newly-founded, first, not-for-profit funeral directors, my interest was thoroughly piqued. >>





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monopoly on  
conducting  
procedures

>>Okay, so I knew a lot about TV making, property buying, emotional well-being and working with people ... I knew nothing on a professional level about the funeral industry, but ... I did have plenty of personal experience and opinion! I felt it could be a good fit for both my organisational and therapeutic skills, as well as a chance to be part of a social enterprise aiming to effect change.

Caledonia Cremation only offers direct cremations and I confess that I wasn't initially sure what that meant. Once I had researched it, I realised it was a really good fit for my own philosophies around the funeral and grieving process, based on my experiences.

For me, the idea of separating the disposal of the body from any commemoration service or event provides a huge amount of freedom

because that way, family and friends have as much time as they wish, to create a very personalised way of remembering and honouring their deceased. Equally, they can still take a more traditional route by holding an event or service at a venue of their choice, with or without ashes.

As someone, who was born and raised in New Zealand to a Scottish father and an Austrian mother, who lives in Glasgow and makes regular visits to family in Vienna ... if I were to die in Scotland, a direct cremation would totally work for me. My ashes could be divided and dispatched for celebrations of my life in each of the 3 locations - hmm, 'Location, Location Location' ... that TV show really has infiltrated my psyche!

So I'm personally totally on board with direct cremation and the possibilities therein, as was David Bowie ... yes he requested one!

But what works for me and Mr B, may not work for everyone. The traditional experience of accompanying someone on their final journey, to the cemetery or crematorium, is one that feels right for many. Thus, one of the reasons I felt comfortable accepting the role was that it was made very clear I was not expected to 'sell', and instead, first explore with all clients whether a direct cremation was the right choice for them. >>



>>For some, it is definitely the low fee that inspires them to make an initial enquiry. However, once we've clarified the process and encouraged them to discuss it with their family, some do decide it's not for them and we offer them guidance about their alternative choices. For others, very often cost is not the primary reason they choose us ... there does appear to be a fair number of humble, pragmatic Scots who philosophically prefer the simplicity and secularity of a direct cremation, and are happy to have their family decide how best to honour their life.

The team is always on hand to offer support and advice around creating a memorial event.

However, many families are already quite clear on their plans, often due in no small part, to the deceased having expressed their wishes whilst living.

Personally, I think that this is one of the biggest gifts any of us can give our families ... clear guidance with regards to end of life care and funeral arrangements, once we expire!

I am so passionate about it, I'm now in the role of a Community Engagement Officer. I organise events in Glasgow South to inspire frank discussions around death and dying: encouraging people to consider, then make clear, their wishes, and sharing the resources to help them do so as there are more options now than ever before.

I believe if people put even a fraction of the effort they put into making other life decisions, into end of life decisions, they are likely to reduce the stress on their family and friends and gain some peace of mind for themselves.

For me, it's been an unexpected career transition ... from 'Location, Location, Location' to 'Cremation, Cremation, Cremation'!... however I'm loving it and feeling very alive!

---

**Stephanie Hutchinson**



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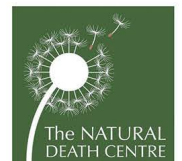
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# Menopause to Direct Funerals... Who'd have thought?

**'Whatever happened to you, Charles?' inhabitants of Funeralworld sometimes ask me. 'Lost at sea, old chap,' I reply, for my getaway home is on the Isle of Portland.**

We're where the stone comes from, the good stuff. The Cenotaph, for example.

We are defined by our stone and are overweeningly proud of it. Ours is a working class community; we win awards for deprivation and get EU grants to fix it (so we voted for Brexit, obvs). The only person you'll ever see wearing a suit on the island will be an estate agent or an undertaker.

**Unless there's a funeral, that is.**

We still have proper working class funerals here, let me tell you, so of course all the men wear suits. Black suits. Black ties. Suddenly we're Sicily.

Our undertaker, Sam, gives it the full Victorian: silvertopped cane, gloves, watch-chain, crepe streaming from his top hat. Mega-splendid. Resoundingly sombre, resplendently retro. We wouldn't have it any other way. >>







...of course, all the men wear suits.

>>It's no surprise that islanders cling to the oldfangled ways; their pride in their insular identity feeds on the past. And their funerals demonstrate that, hurrah, there's life in the trad funeral yet and that there's no such thing as an enlightened funeral ceremony or a formulaic funeral ceremony:

## a funeral is either well or badly performed, end of

“At a Menopause Café people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss menopause.” Remind you of anything? Of course it does: dear old Death Cafe. Rip off or flattery? Let's be generous!

As I was wondering about Menopause Cafe, I came across an article about it by feisty Times columnist Janice Turner. By the time I'd finished reading, I realised why all those awareness-raising events Brian Jenner and I put on - the Joy of Death and Ideal Death Show -- had so conspicuously failed to lure our fellow citizens and loosen their tongues.

“Don't some taboos exist,” says Turner, “because the subjects are, well, private, unpleasant, a bit icky? ... Thrush, herpes, incontinence, genital warts, vaginal discharge, catarrh, boils, flatulence . . .

Just like the menopause, all these are “natural”, yet no one suggests sufferers speak up every damn day.” Turner points out, that many books have been written about the menopause but “none has sold very well.”

The same goes for books about bereavement and grief. I think Turner may be on to something. People, she says, “want to discuss symptoms only with their very closest mates, preferably laughing over wine. But they don't want to wallow in menopause or be defined by it or “come out” as menopause sufferers.” Same goes for death, I fear. But I hope to live to be proved wrong.

The enlightened new wave of death-embracers, tell us we'd make a better fist of grief if we we used plain words. Because we've got a big death-denial problem. Apparently. So, away with euphemisms!

**Out with 'passed'. Say death, died, dead. Get real, death deniers! Engage!**

But would this really make all the difference? We no longer say 'crippled', 'lunatic', 'subnormal', all of them once official terms, we use euphemisms instead. They're kinder on the ear. We all know perfectly well what they mean. I'd advise enlightened people to be careful how they use a loaded word like denial, too.



The fact that we don't bang on about death doesn't mean we don't know perfectly starkly that in the end we're all lying stark, aghast and inert in a fridge.

Message to the enlightened: don't mistake reticence for denial, nor gentleness for euphemism. Having said which, I'd be happy if I never saw the word 'deceased' again. But that's not a euphemism, it's jargon. Like 'funeral director'.>>



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of the folding stuff

>>In the course of ten years' surveying the business of funerals I have, in all matters deathly, argued passionately, first for one side then for the other, and sometimes for and against both at the same time.

I have now arrived at an endpoint: serene ambivalence in all things. Except one. Celebrancy. Something stubborn in me persists in regarding celebrancy as an altruistic activity, not a service to be sold for a wad of the folding stuff.

**In short, commercial celebrants, ought to rebrand as community volunteers and charge for expenses only. Why?**

Because it would make for a far better and more equal working relationship between both parties and help normalise death for bereaved people by enabling them to deal with one of 'us', not one of 'them'. It would winnow out the moneygrubbers and leave only the most committed. It would also lead to a severe shortage of celebrants and, er, the loss of some of the best -- I'm not claiming to have completely thought this through.

When I quit Funeralworld, I considered offering myself to Sam as a volunteer celebrant but couldn't summon up the self-belief. Then I found myself being asked by a friend to do the funeral of her husband. I'd last spoken to Roger, just two hours before he died. Lovely chap. I could hardly say no. >>

>>When it came to it, I was beset with stagefright and misgivings. Sometimes self-doubt tells us truths about ourselves, in this case that I really am a rubbish celebrant. What a loss I am to my cause! But my argument still stands. I'm right about this. Celebrants, you love your work? Reward enough. >>

>>The last twenty years have been excitingly busy ones in Funeralworld. Natural burial. Non-religious funerals. Wicker coffins. Celebrations of life. And the seductive idea that, just as baby boomers had reinvented youth culture, so would they reinvent and enrich funeral culture. I fell for that big-time, did you? And what did we get? Direct cremation. That it took off without anyone noticing goes to show how bad death professionals are at reading the market. Too busy talking to each other?

Direct cremation will fill a sizeable niche but the trad funeral, rumours of whose imminent death we now know to have been greatly exaggerated, looks like being the default funeral for most people for some time to come. This, despite countless harbingers of change and a multitude of brave and brilliant game changing enterprises that have soared and gone phut. Let's not tangle with the reasons why.

## Let's just note that things continue to move with glacial slowness in the funerals business

Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme damn chose. When I started out I was dead against the fusty, male world of undertaking. Time for a shakeup, I thought. So I was all for the insurgency of alternative, artisan undertakers -- many of them female and most of them middle class (like me).

I still think that the best of these innovative newbies are great. But as I walk away from dear old Funeralworld, my greatest admiration, is for the very best of the old school undertakers, the ones who have taken so much stick for being stuck in the past. I've often pulled their legs about their Downton Abbey values: serving but never servile, deferential yet dominant, indispensable even when invisible -- just like Mr Carson, Downton's butler, or Mrs Hughes, the housekeeper.

## These superb men and women know the difference between role-playing and play-acting

Above all, they understand the difference between putting on a bit of a show and investing a funeral with decorum. I'm privileged to have met some extraordinary people in the death biz. To all of them I offer my respect and my best wishes.

---

**Article by Charles Cowling**

The College Equestrian Centre, Church Road, Keysoe, Bedford MK44 2JP  
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# Surfing the Net online-guidance

The Internet's almost limitless power to aggregate and deliver services has affected almost every business... the funeral industry is no different.

There are a growing number of websites that source local funeral directors with the aim of empowering choice through transparent comparisons. The influences of these businesses are growing and some believe that these sites have played a major role in the reversal of funeral costs over the last 3 years.

Although at first glance these comparisons sites appear useful, it is worth noting that all these sites except Funeral Advisor, charge undertakers for a listing or introducing the family to them. Therefore the many, possibly superb, smaller funeral directors, who do not have an advertising budget, may well be over looked. Arguably, the comparison sites are helpful but it is imperative to also carry out local research when finding a funeral director that best suits you.

**So, who are the major players? How do they differentiate? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Let's take a look at what's on offer.**

**www.beyond.com** - previously known as Funeral Booker.

Beyond is one of the most established funeral 'comparison' sites in the UK. The site has recently redesigned with a renewed focus on not only comparing funeral directors and funeral plans, it now offers countless services such as Will Writing, Probate work, Loans for funeral costs, as well as a 24hour helpline. Arguably, presenting a one-stop shop!

As is standard with the majority of comparison sites Beyond, requires you to enter an overwhelming amount of information before you can start searching for a funeral director. Firstly you will need to know whether you wish to compare costs for a burial or a cremation.>>



>>You will need to enter your postcode and choose a funeral package; providing of course you know what you want. There are several packages to choose from and if you do not know what you want there are explanations as to what is included in each package.

Finally, when all this information has been given you can peruse the list of funeral directors in your area, read reviews and see what services they offer.

The experience felt confusing and it took a long time to understand exactly what information the site expected from me and if you do not know what you want it could take even longer.

Beyond provides detailed information on each funeral director albeit with the exception of the funeral director's phone number, instead, Beyond has a 'call back' mechanic.

At the time of visiting the duration for the 'call back' was listed at under 5 minutes but I wonder if a lack of a direct contact option would drive people to simply Google funeral director of choice and skip the Beyond 'call back' system entirely.

**Pro's** – accurate pricing upfront, comprehensive selection of solid information about each funeral director.

**Con's** – Overwhelming amount of services offered on top of comparing costs of funeral directors. Confusing experience with little or no hand-holding experience through the selection process.

### **www.yourfuneralchoice.com**

Similar to Beyond, Your Funeral Choice requires you to enter information, namely your postcode, in order to view a list of local funeral directors. Many of the funeral directors listed on Your Funeral Choice also appear on Beyond, however pricing starts from a baseline quote for a budget funeral, meaning the prices shown are often not reflective of a more traditional funeral. Subsequently, users could be in for a shock when they learn the service they would need costs more than the prices shown on Your Funeral Choice.

**Pro's** – decent list of funeral directors and it offers some explanation of useful information on all aspects of death to include alternative services such as Direct Funerals.

**Con's** – little information on listed funeral directors and pricing may not reflect the actual costs of the chosen funeral.>>



# Funeral Advisor

In Association with The Natural Death Centre Charity no. 1091396

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We help you share and find out about experiences of different funeral directors

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**Smith Yeatman Ltd** "My mother was buried with no dignity whatsoever!"  
Rated 1 star overall

**Oak Funeral Services Ltd** "Can't recommend highly enough."  
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**Final Journey NDC recommended** "An uplifting experience"  
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## **www.funeraladvisor.org.uk**

While this site lacks the visual polish of the other two sites mentioned, the Funeral Advisor is a robust tool. As ever, users are asked to submit their postcode in order to spark search results. Funeral Advisor costs, are based on a basic funeral option and a cremation service and while the site does makes efforts to explain what both of those services mean, more specific pricing might be useful.>>

>>**Pro's** – the site has well-written explanations of services and a solid list of funeral directors that pay nothing to be on the site as well as extensive funeral directors reviews.

**Con's** – not all listings have pricing and the site feels a little dated.

## **www.funeralzone.co.uk**

One of the first things to note about Funeral Zone is how well it's designed, with nice, clear links to the various services on offer and a handy 'most searched cities' menu, enabling you to find a funeral director in your area quickly.

Although most of the competition in this space have a similar feature set to Funeral Zone, the site does well in keeping this information organized and contextual, this is especially true for the Help & Resources section which provides guidance ranging from 'arranging a funeral' to 'coping with bereavement'. Pricing however is Funeral Zone's 'Achilles heel' and the funeral director listings have no information on potential costs.

**Pro's** – clean simple interface funeral directors reviews and very considered guidance and resources.

**Con's** – no pricing information.

Since the writing of this article, funeral director comparison sites have sprung like spring flowers onto the net, offering an abundance of information to users. The National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) has launched **www.funeral-directory.co.uk** providing its members with a flexible marketing platform, the first phase, unhelpfully doesn't include pricing but does include information about funeral directors that belong to the NAFD.

Other websites include: **www.aboutthefuneral.com**,  
**www.comparethemarket.com** and **www.deadright.com**

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**Disclosure: Derrick Grant is the founder of Willow, an e-commerce site for affordable coffins, flowers and funeral services. Please visit [www.thinkwillow.com](http://www.thinkwillow.com)**





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# The Forgotten Mourner

Is it appropriate for children to attend funerals... or should they be shrouded from death and become a 'forgotten mourner?' As someone reading this article... what age were you, when you attended your first funeral... assuming that is... you have!



*Losing someone close to you, someone you perhaps loved, regardless of your age, is extremely painful, hard to accept and difficult to fully understand. Often, death can plunge families into utter chaos and confusion, leaving normal activities of daily life suspended, in limbo or neglected entirely and that is just the adults!*

Years ago, death was managed in the home by the whole family. The dead were washed and cared for in the home, family would pay their last respects, including children, in the home. Nowadays, death and dying, predominantly happens anywhere other than in the home and the dead are cared for and stored by complete strangers.

Arguably, funerals can be very distressing and emotional, not just for children but for adults too. While every family has its own traditions and beliefs, that often play a vital role, in the funeral planning and decision process, they are little help to parents when determining what is the right or wrong thing to do for their children.

we seem to be living in a world where adults  
want to over protect children

The difficult decision of children's attendance, can be complicated further, when adult members of the family have differing points of view on the subject. Parents often discourage children's attendance for fear of them being disruptive, misbehaving and noisy or parents mistakenly believe; children are not allowed to attend. Is there a way that children need to behave at funerals or shouldn't they just be encouraged to be themselves? After all, funerals are open to the general public ... so shouldn't the children of the family be allowed?

In my experience, children, of all ages, behave extremely well at funerals... Ok, some might run around a little or touch the coffin but generally their presence, although sometimes surprising, never offends and often enhances a funeral, adding another dimension to the occasion. In my opinion, it is the adults that often need a lesson in how to behave and show a little respect.>>

>>More and more, I am finding that we seem to be living in a world where adults want to over protect children, not just from 'bad' things but from absolutely everything, from being bored, to coming last on sport day ... the sheer thrill and emotion of winning has long been buried! When it comes to funerals, many parents still choose to protect their children from what is fundamentally a natural process in the circle of life.

many parents still choose to protect their children from what is fundamentally a natural process in the circle of life.

Generally speaking, younger children do not seem to have the fear of the deceased or a dead body, that adults think they do... perhaps it's the adults that are fearful? Children, once they are involved, included and given an explanation about death, dying and funerals, fair surprisingly well. However, children who become the 'forgotten mourners', i.e. ignored, dismissed and not allowed to go to a funeral, can inevitably, feel left out, abandoned or even resentful for not being given the chance to understand or to say goodbye ... some might say, increasing the risk of emotional issues in later life. Imagine, for a moment that you are a child... what thoughts might run through your head? Can I not go because I'm not good enough?... Is this a punishment? ... It's my fault they died? ...I must be a bad person or maybe they didn't love me?

Perhaps the best decision to be made by parents for their children, is to give them choices.

After all, a funeral offers the opportunity to emotionally and physically ventilate feelings, it can generate support, provide some sort of meaning and can be very effective in aiding the grieving process, especially if a child's participation is encouraged. In all cases, regardless of age, children need simple and honest information when someone dies. They can then begin to try to process and understand what has happened, as much as is possible, for them.


Older children, who have some understanding of death, dying and funerals, are often given the choice to attend or not, which appears, on the whole, to be respected. Younger children, it would seem are overlooked... to be seen and not heard! >>







Unfortunately, there are  
no easy answers



>>It is fair to say that people, including children, grieve in many different ways, so parents should not mask feelings, emotions or behaviours, they should not put on a brave face, or hold secret talks, just because they believe that children are too young to understand or be included.

Children need to know that adults feel things too, that it is normal and above all, it is OK to cry, to feel lost, confused or even angry when someone dies.

If nothing else, seeing vulnerable adults enables children to see, that although things seem tough, you can pull through. As a celebrant I always encourage parents to take their lead from their children and reassure them that if the child wants to attend ....to let them, even if they do not understand what is going on, they will feel part of it ... never make a child attend. I also encourage parents to make sure that children know, it's OK too, if they don't want to go to a funeral.

There are many charities, child bereavement agencies and an overwhelming number of books and internet sites that offer parents help, advice and guidance on children attending funerals. Most agree that with adequate preparation, it is fine for a child, of any age, to attend a funeral, if they want to.

As with most things in life, it is all about preparation and ground work and that responsibility ultimately falls on the parents and sometimes the child's wider family.

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers ... every family situation is different and personal to them, so understandably, it is a dilemma that parents face, only when and if they have to. Now, more than ever, there are no right or wrong decisions to be made when trying to decide whether a child should attend a funeral or not ... just what is right for the individual child.

Don't make your child or children, 'forgotten mourners'... encourage them to have a healthy understanding of death and that it is an inevitable part of being alive. Most of all, give them permission to grieve, however, whenever and wherever they want. >>

## **Here are some things that you can do to help your children.**

- Ensure that your children understand the concept of death. That they understand the body stops working, it doesn't need food, water or air and it can't feel pain.
- Children take things literally, as they don't know any different, so avoid using expressions such as 'lost your mum,' as they may try to find her, or 'mums gone on a journey,' as they might think she is coming back!
- Let your children know the purpose of a funeral... that it is a special event where everyone can remember and think about the relationship they shared with the relative that has died and it enables people to say goodbye.
- Let children know what it will be like at the funeral i.e. adults may be crying because crying can help you feel better, if you are sad. If it is OK for adults, children will think it is OK for them... also explain that adults may laugh too.
- Perhaps encourage your child to attend the funeral with a family member or friend who is happy to leave the funeral, should the child feel overwhelmed or the need to leave.
- Where children are deemed capable of understanding, it is helpful to give them a choice about whether to attend. Then children will not be prevented from doing something that they feel would have been helpful.
- Involve children with the preparations for the funeral... they could decorate the coffin, decide what they would like to wear, help choose the music or a poem, or write a letter.
- Ensure your children feel included and part of the whole process.

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**Article by Carol Anne Waters**  
**Celebrant**  
**Editor - More to Death.**



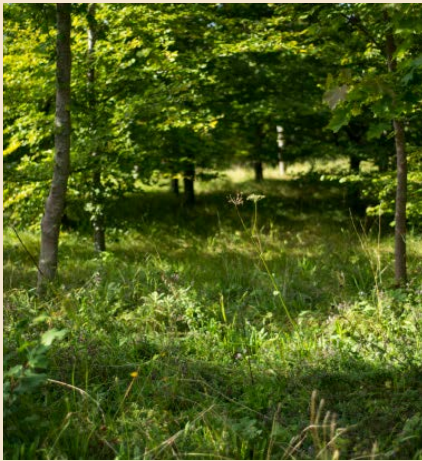
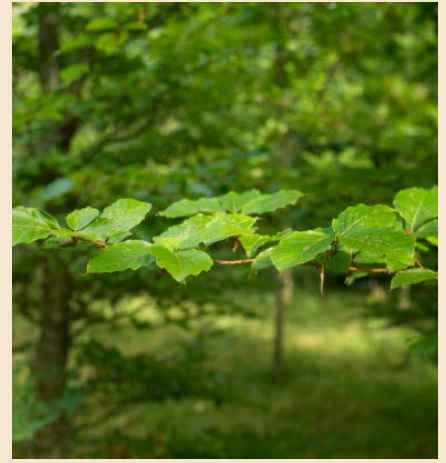


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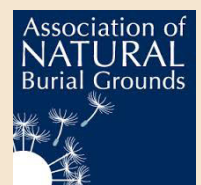


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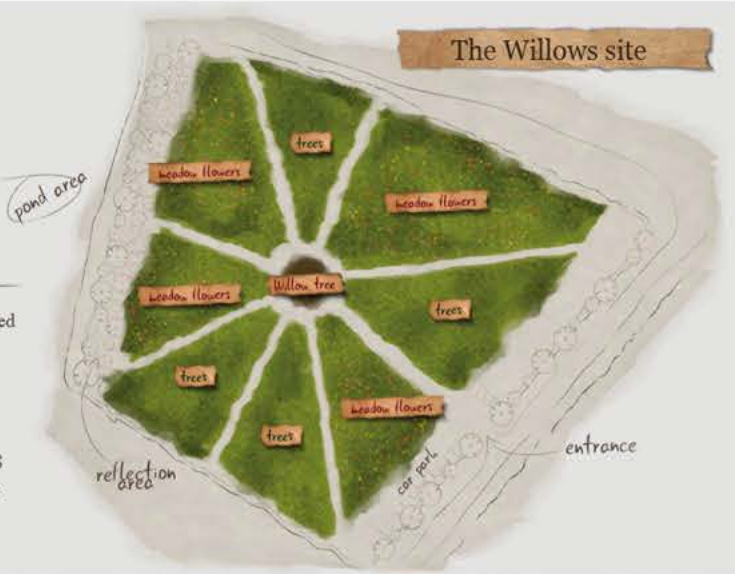




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remember your loved ones.**

# The Sound of Silence

**Everyone has a secret**

Hello there! If you are reading this it is because I am  
are going to have the job of reading my Eulogy. I had  
myself in the likely circumstance that there will be no  
about me.

ence

tory...

m dead and you  
ave written this  
no-one to speak

So, if I have died as an alcoholic, or a criminal, or I have caused any shame to others, it's likely there will be fewer good words or at least a large part of my life suppressed, and I would like the truth to be told.

My secrets are not too shady, but for those poor families searching for something good to say about an abusive father or a drunken sister who didn't do much with her life, it can be so very painful.

You see, most people these days want to celebrate their life with a 'Person Centred' funeral. Which is really great for some families but in my experience, having done, over two thousand funerals, it has its limitations.

If you have a big family that have managed to stay around, there will be many people who knew you pretty well, all with diverse and rich memories that paint a picture of the many dimensions of your life. Lots of stories and details, likely to produce, a unique and fully personal service in every way from the eulogy to the music.

The family, are always the first port of call for information about a person and in many ways, it is a reflection on them, as much as, on the person who has died. Sometimes there are things they don't want said, or they want hidden and the family are often careful to have others see, what they want or would like to portray about them.

Some hang on to family 'myths' about the 'perfect' family; the truth can be somewhat undermining for one's image. Whether it be prison, alcoholism, or even an illegitimate child...people have a position and a view of themselves in a community, that they are reluctant to tarnish.>>

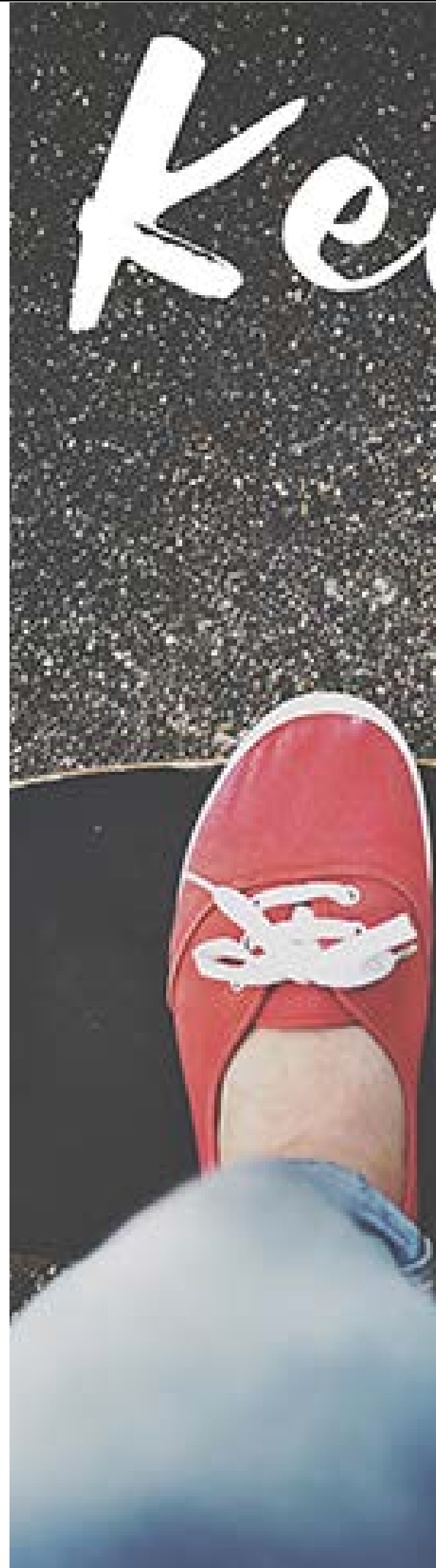
One family, went to great lengths to tell me about their wonderful father, he was a leading quaker and a conscientious objector during the war...it transpired that he would lock his children together, under the stairs, for the whole day, so meetings could take place in peace. It also transpired that he was prone to domestic violence, neither to be mentioned, of course; because the family were...too well known...for the truth to be told.

There are those families who are split, or live far away... a product of a more mobile society. They may have fewer people, who knew them well, to draw upon....or perhaps, the person had a small family...or had simply, outlived everyone?

So, many eulogies I have written, have been based on the most 'flimsy' of material, simply because a person was very old, had no children and the job of retelling a life had fallen on a nephew or niece. One lady recently, must have led a wonderful life...she travelled... worked for the foreign office and was big in the local 'Am-Dram' -, she died at eighty-eight. There was no one left of her friends who could speak about her... bar her neighbour three doors down, who could only say that she used to sing and play the piano with the window open...what a beautiful voice she had and how sad it was she had never been able to have children. Not, that children are always a guarantee of a good eulogy.

A child, will so often see a parent, only in terms of being a parent and know, so little, of a life outside the family. 'Well, she was just Mum...she was always there' is a common response. Children often know nothing of an earlier life, or even, the love story of their own parents courtship.

People can find it so hard to articulate these quieter, more simple human experiences... the ones that don't shout from the rooftops.





opening it  
Real







>>Also, when a parent/child relationship has been difficult, or there are perceived failings in that department, a child's opinion can be very one sided. An absent father, or a historic divorce, may mean that a child leaves out great accomplishments that happened outside the home, in work, with friends or community groups. People are so much more than the person 'WE' see and for some children, it can be a revelation.

There are so many people out there, living a different way of life...the loners, the introverts, the singles, the LGBTQ community and so many may have no children, or an estranged family. An example would be, the wonderful gay man, who worked all his life, entertaining and hosting on the best cruise ships.

What stories he must have told about the finest liners of their day, but, in the end, all he had was a young carer, who took it upon herself to do all the arranging and told me what little she knew about his life, having only known him for a few years. He had no family and no children, not only did he die alone but there was just the carer and myself at his funeral, with little consolation.

Yet sometimes there can be the wonderful moments that surprise.

We were contacted by a man in Scotland, whose sister had died near us and he wanted a very simple funeral for her. It turned out, that their parents had died when he was eighteen and she was just eleven. They were fostered by two different families and lost touch with each other, as they ended up at opposite ends of the country.

At the time, he omitted to tell us that his sister suffered from severe learning difficulties, which may have contributed to their life long separation.

We prepared, a lovely, personal service at the local crematorium. John, I will call him John for the purpose of this article, arrived with his wife and a bunch of flowers. >>

>>We could not believe our eyes as to what happened next, bus load after bus load of people came along, all carers and friends, who had known his sister. She had been a part of their community, a big community and she was well loved by them all. She was described as sunshine in their lives, full of joy, and an inspiration. She loved to sing, was full of life and had many meaningful relationships. The look on John's face was indescribable and it was a long way from the quiet funeral he imagined.

Everyone was full of stories to tell him afterwards about his wonderful sister.

It was bittersweet for him, but also beautiful too.

There are, of course, the situations where a family feels that a funeral must make up for the 'lack' of a life...perhaps the person has died young or was limited in some way. The longest funeral I have taken was for a young girl who had severe disabilities, she had never spoken, communicated or walked. Outside of her family, she had her carers and her teachers who supported her, and when she died, at just nine years old they wanted everything for her. A horse-drawn hearse with four white horses, a white coffin with painted flowers, floral tributes and a double slot at the crematorium on a Saturday, so they could have an hour and a half for the service. At the end of a long interview, detailing everything she could, the mother sighed and looking exhausted said, "I do hope I've done her justice". The eulogy took fifty minutes and was given by three different speakers, second only in length, to a service I did for a famous actor.

Perhaps it was just the fear that her daughter was to the world so 'forgettable', that the service needed to make this great stamp on people's memories. In contrast,

Napoleon was so sure of his legacy, he decreed his headstone to simply give his first name, the place and date of his birth and the date of his death.>>







>> In a person centred funeral, there is an underlying sense of the importance of showing the value of the person. Where before, it was about the 'stuff', now it is about the amount of stories and the achievements of the deceased.

So many families feel they do not have the words, or the ability, to articulate what they want to say, arguably, the more educated can create a better written and riveting eulogy with the words, the gift of humour and so often, the less articulate lose out in a person centred funeral. The reliance on cliché and simple phrases are not enough for the subtle nuances of individuality. Writing is an art, and effective delivery is paramount.

Often a service can take place with nothing more than a parade of 'I loved you so much, we will miss you, you're in heaven now with granddad', from everyone...and say nothing about the person at all!

That is not a criticism of the needs of the mourners, or the worth of the service, but here, again, it is the middle class that win. They have stories to tell and they are able to do it.

Then there are 'the bottlers', perhaps some of the saddest situations of all. Just this morning we had a funeral for a young alcoholic man, who died whilst drunk, he was hit by a car at just thirty-five. It was a hugely dysfunctional family, with no money and they were all over the place.

His distraught brother phoned all during the next week to add to a growing list of those who were writing, or speaking and asking was there enough time for everyone?...they were in the short slot of the day.

When it came to it, no-one had brought anything, no-one had written anything, and no-one would say anything...not even the brother....leaving a huge hole where the tributes should have been...the account of his life sinking into silence.>>

>>In the service where the person is everything, to lose them is a tragedy. The person-centred funeral places the deceased centre stage, not always where they felt comfortable.

The sense that we are all but grains of sand in a vast ocean of the universe can be a consolation but is not comforting for everyone.

It can connect us to not only each other and a place in time, but a more numinous and ephemeral self.

There is another consideration too, our modern cult of individualism and tendency to self-reflection is not a universal perspective. It is firmly rooted in Western middle class values and modern Rogerian psychotherapy and at its worst, has led to the narcissism of the 'selfie' generation.

To speak about a person requires a degree of skill in language and articulation that is not available to everyone.

A question like 'What may her thoughts have been about a life after death?' seems to floor most people for whom these topics of conversation have been limited, at best. But I have also sat with men, usually men of a certain age, to try to talk to them about their recently deceased wife, and it has proved harder than pulling teeth.

One man plaintively protested 'I can't really say what she was like, she was my wife!' And yet there was not doubt of his love for her..a marriage of sixty three years.







It is the educated and empowered middle classes that know what they want and feel entitled to ask for it.

All the details of the funeral; people to speak, photographs, music and flowers, are considerations for the person centred-funeral which, for some, works incredibly well. But they can also be a bit of a tyranny, like a wedding, where they worry they are getting it all right, or doing everything that they should.

Is it the right coffin? Is this the right song?  
Should the handles be silver or gold?

All these details can distract from the real grief that is being felt. It is something to do, a way to feel in control.

So many stories, so many songs in this cacophony, this symphony of life, so many unheard and untold. For these people, it is the levelling of death that once guaranteed equality. The religious service was the same for everyone and spoke of salvation for everyone, whatever their status or station, sinners and saints alike.

The person-centred funeral gives a last shout to the deceased. A last stamp on the mortal world and in the hearts of those that knew them. But let us not forget the voiceless and this may be me, or even, you.

If there is a world beyond, I would like to think the echo of the song I have made will resonate on. A great chorus of the songs of the voiceless, that will now find a place in all things. Even if I have left on quiet feet.

---

**Article by Angela Ward**



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# Green Graveyard

By Rosie Inman-Cook

# Tourist



**In the last edition I told of my tour of the east. Checking up on the members of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds (ANBG).**

**Since then I have visited a dozen more from the Humber to the Cornish peninsular and may well pack a few more in before the end of this year.**



The need for inspections has never been more relevant. Again this month I have heard from the public who have found problems with rogue natural burial ground operators. A common theme seems to be inadequate mapping of grave positions, resulting in the location of burials being lost.

A non-member site in the west has recently changed hands and like another one, that went on the market earlier in the year, there are no records indicating grave positions, resulting in the new owners having to have the whole ground surveyed at huge expense. They will also not be able to resume operations until this remedial work is carried out which is hugely distressing for families in the area suffering a bereavement. When ANBG members have been to see these sites with a view to possible expansion of their own business they have been horrified and speak of “not touching it with a barge pole”. Absolutely underlying the need for my visits!

## **The need for inspections has never been more relevant**

They are all flabbergasted at the idiocy that seems to be in the minds of these random sites and feel that basic housekeeping is not only essential but not an onerous task anyway. It doesn't have to be difficult.

Apart from checking that every site has a clear mapping and location system, I require that they have created a 'How To' file. This details all their systems, records and instructs anyone who has no knowledge of their site in how to facilitate a burial in the event of a managerial disaster – the death of the operator for example.>>



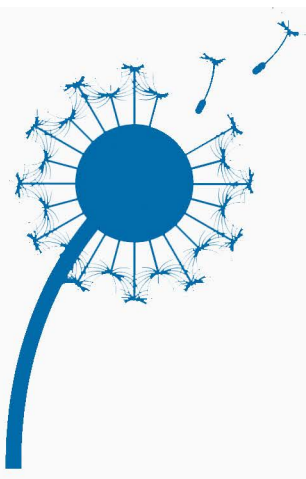
>> All have passed muster, I have only had to suggest small tweaks like the secondary back up of records to be kept off site, and the removal of jargon etc. Every burial ground has its own unique system and they are all perfectly logical as long as you understand each system. Hence the crucial existence of the 'How To' file.

Out of all the paperwork I have seen so far young Sheridan at Atlantic Rest has the most meticulous. She even has a document instructing anyone who is showing a bereaved person around her burial ground, where to stand to appreciate the view of the sea and which way to guide them round the ground and through the woods. Utterly thorough.



Another site, Michaels Wood, near Stonehenge, is notable for the huge improvements made since joining the Association. For years it had been managed by a well meaning individual but one who couldn't say 'no'. Consequently the site got out of hand with inappropriate memorialisation and grief litter everywhere plus benches of all kinds around every grave. The mapping was also somewhat patchy. What an improvement. Now a tidy, subtle and beautiful site, surveyed and managed by a new dedicated team. A very impressive turn around.

Our members, although not liking being inspected, have been very welcoming and appreciate the necessity. I am really looking forward to visiting the next batch.



The staff at the **Natural Death Centre** are experienced, caring and honest so if you have a question about arranging a natural burial, for yourself or someone close to you, please give us a call on **01962 712690** or email *[contact@naturaldeath.org.uk](mailto:contact@naturaldeath.org.uk)*





You can shed tears if  
gone or you can smile because  
they lived - David Hankins



CHURCH OF HOLY MARY  
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DATE:



SEPT  
NOV

John C. Ambrose  
se: xx.xx.xxxx sunset: xx.xx.xxxx

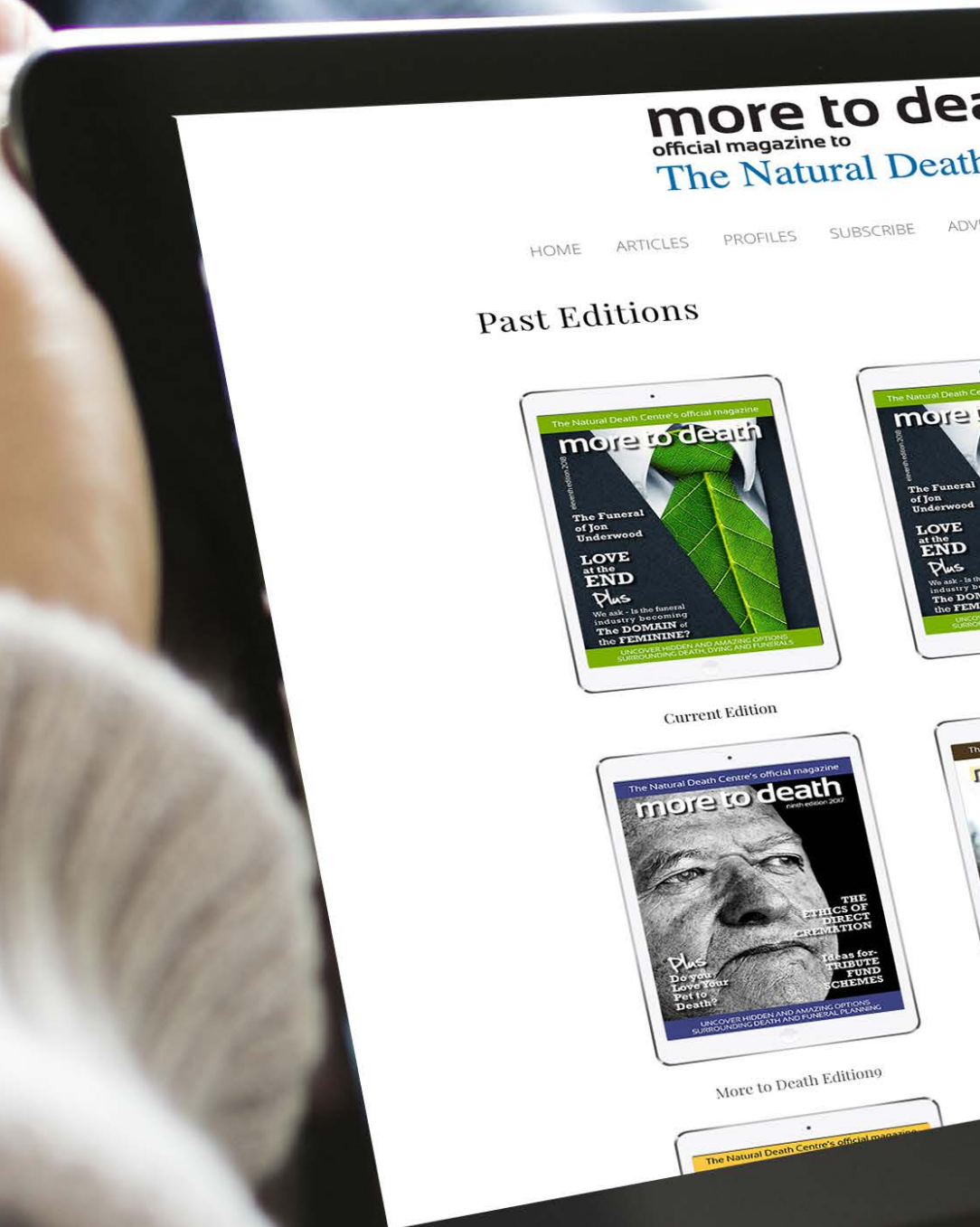
# what a life

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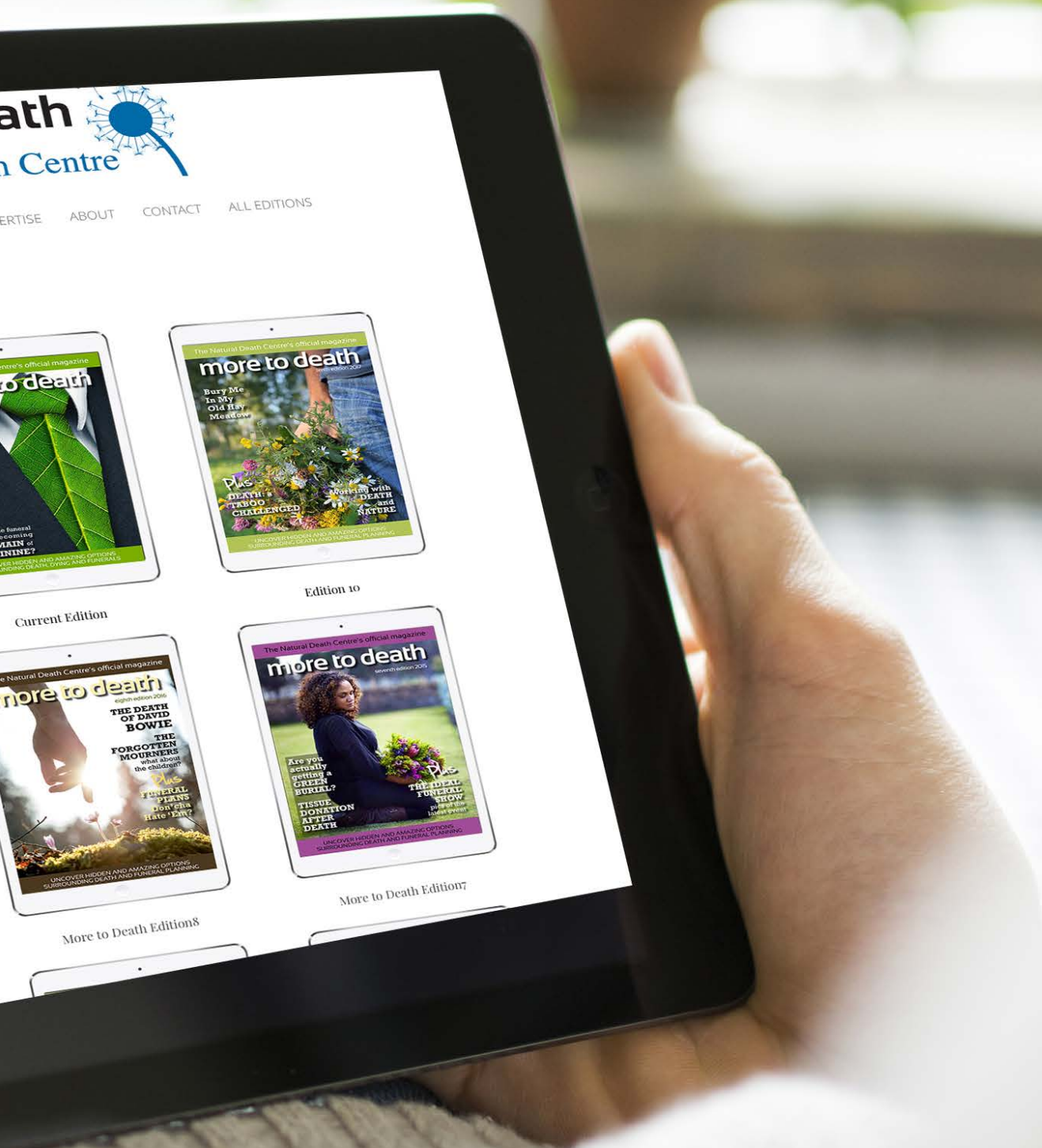
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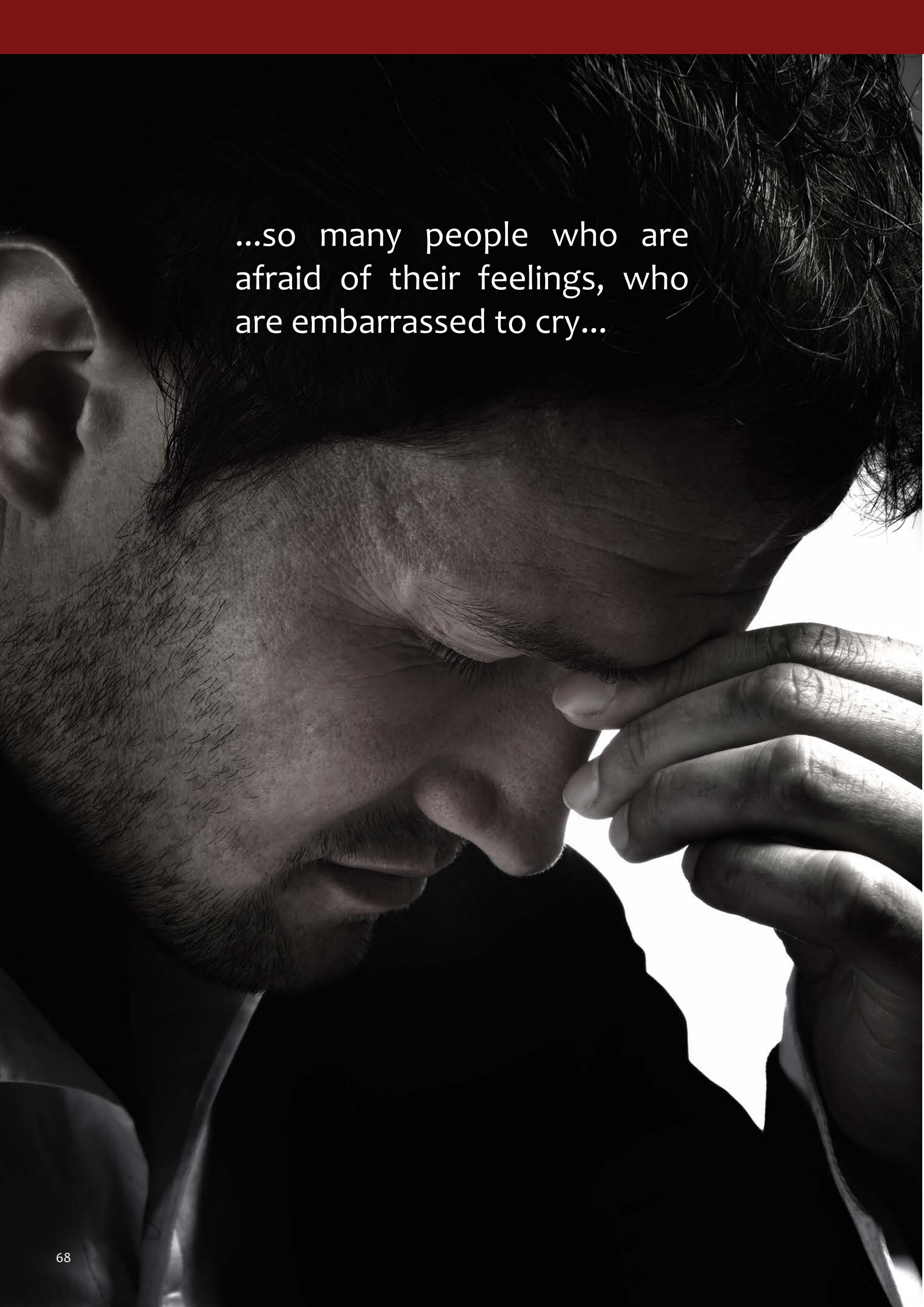


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...so many people who are  
afraid of their feelings, who  
are embarrassed to cry...

# The only Cure for Grief is to Grieve

Watching a television news report of serious flooding recently I was concerned to hear the way in which a priest described people's distress. "I actually saw a grown man in tears," he said. Why shouldn't a grown man be in tears? What message was that priest conveying to the millions watching? That things needed to be pretty awful for a grown man to cry? That men should not cry? That men are different to women? What is a grown man?

In my work with bereaved people I see so many people who are afraid of their feelings, who are embarrassed to cry and think they should be strong – whatever that means! Plus everyone around them is reinforcing the same message.



## So let's get a few things straight:

When awful things happen to people they will be distressed – that is normal. They may rage, cry, scream, sob, be stunned into shock, disbelief and silence and a whole range of other emotions. These are all normal reactions to bereavement and are a healthy way to express the myriad of painful feelings that we all feel when we lose someone dear to us. They can go on for a long time – often years. They might resurface on anniversaries, birthdays or, for young people who have lost a parent, on important days such as a wedding day or the birth of a first child.

When grieving, men are no different from women or children and will experience the same feelings, their emotions are not numbed or reduced in some way.

What do we mean when we tell people to be strong? Don't cry? Don't show your feelings? These are almost certainly not helpful concepts. To suppress or hold back emotional reactions can prolong or deepen people's distress. Often the last thing that the bereaved person feels is strong so to tell them that they must be can leave them feeling as if they are abnormal or failing in some way.

Bereavement is messy. Our feelings and behaviour can be confusing, chaotic and contradictory and that is to be expected. Those around the bereaved can want to tidy things up such as wanting to stop the distress or crying. People can find themselves being persuaded to dispose of clothes and belongings with the well meaning, but ultimately unhelpful advice, "to stop you being reminded of him".

We use euphemisms like 'passed away' instead of died, or even, increasingly, 'passed'.





As I write this looking out of my window, my postman has just passed – but I’m pretty sure he’s not dead! We often use euphemistic language as it’s easier for us to say. It may not be easier or helpful for the bereaved person who is struggling to accept the reality of the loss.

Not talking about a person’s distress or avoiding tears is not helpful and likely to create hurt and isolation. The bereaved person has not forgotten that their loved one has died and you are not reminding them when you bring up their name. You are expressing love and care by showing them that you remember the person who has died and how significant they were.

If only we could break down some of these misconceptions a lot of my work would be unnecessary. Often the work of the bereavement counsellor is to provide a safe space for those who are grieving to express their sadness, to tolerate their despair without trying to stop it and most importantly to reassure them that their reactions are normal and they are not going mad. People might say to me, “I wish they had taken me with them.” Those around them might say, “don’t be silly, don’t talk like that, you’ve got your children.” They already know that.

They just need to be allowed to say things that might feel impossible to say elsewhere. Just to respond by saying, “that sounds really tough” or “I can see how sad you are” might be enough.

Over time most people learn to manage their grief and to integrate the deceased person into their emotional lives. This might take years. For many they might never “get over it” and this can be an unhelpful expectation. For close losses lives will always be changed, for example the loss of a child or a partner.>>

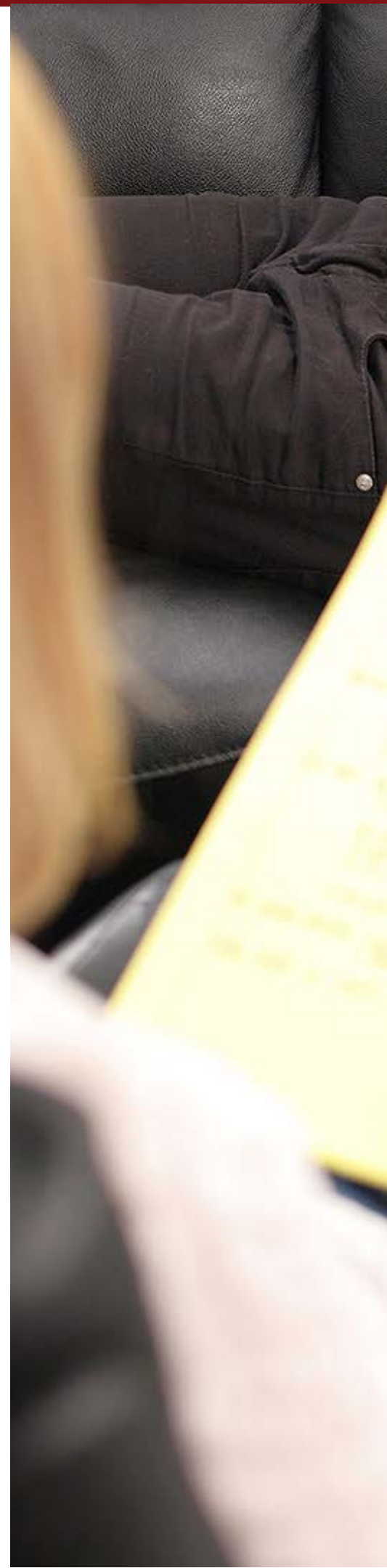
>>Finding ways to manage their loss and carry on with their changed lives in a meaningful way might be the best outcome for some.

Of course there is such a thing as complicated or prolonged grief that might necessitate the intervention of skilled help. A counsellor or GP, in the case of depression that would benefit from anti-depressants, might be helpful. Complicated or prolonged grief might manifest itself by the distress continuing for many years, long term depression (depression is normal and common in the bereaved and not necessarily a cause for alarm), the inability to take part in normal activities, ongoing mental health issues such as agoraphobia, eating disorders or self harm, an inability to invest in other relationships, such as a parent with their children after the death of a spouse, and high levels of distress much of the time.

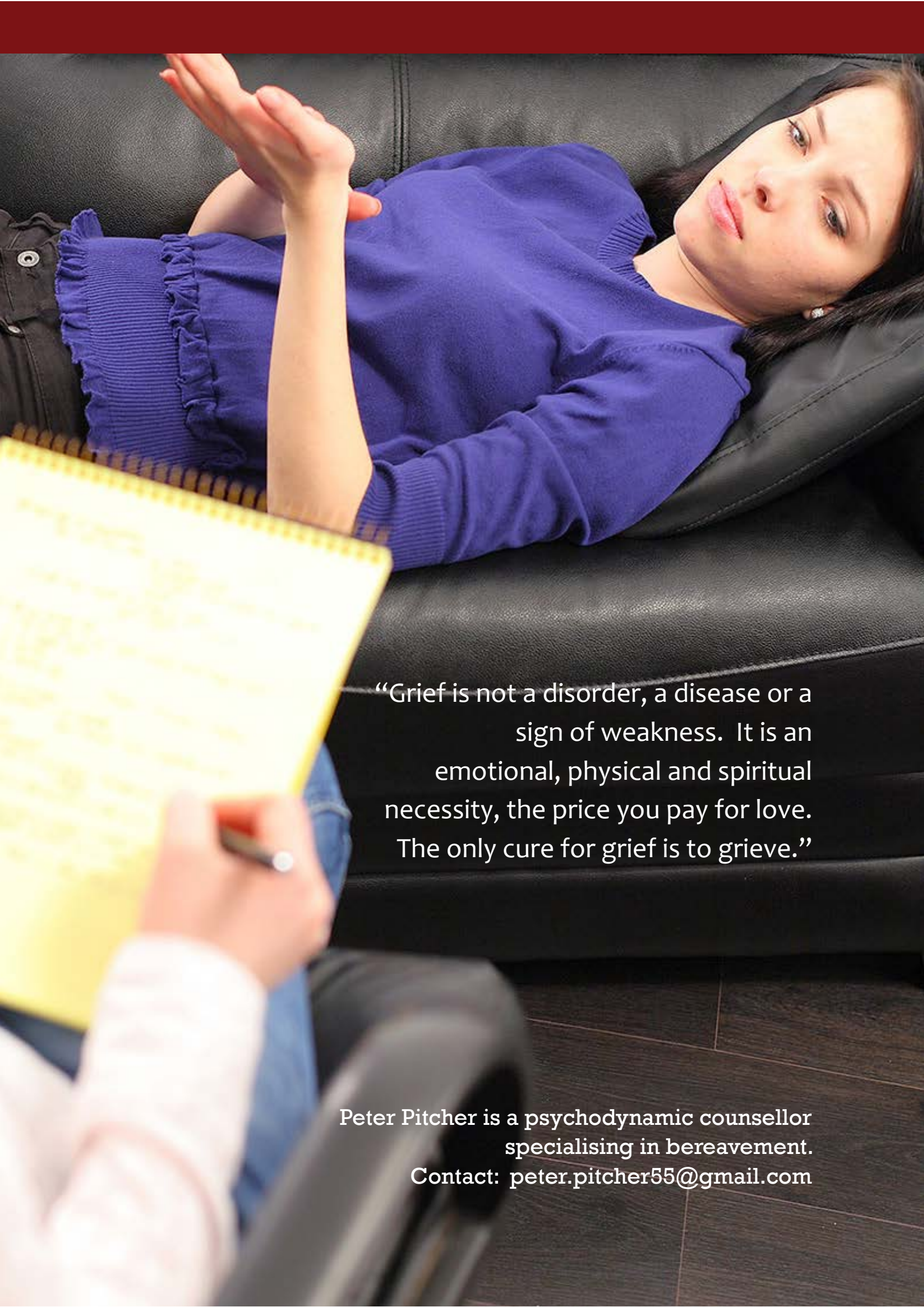
There are factors that we know predispose to a complicated or prolonged grief reaction and these include concurrent losses such as other bereavements, job loss, a hidden relationship such as an extramarital affair, same sex relationships, divorce, an ambivalent relationship with the deceased, pre-existing mental health issues, highly dependent relationships and suicide or violent death such as murder.

For those interested in the academic perspective of bereavement Colin Murray-Parkes, William Worden, Tony Walter, Elizabeth Kubler Ross and others have written much about the stages and tasks of bereavement. Stroebe and Schut have put forward a helpful Dual Process Model of Grief in which the bereaved needs to balance the expression of their feelings, as described above, with the practical need to invest in other relationships, return to work, manage or learn everyday tasks (perhaps how to use the lawnmower or washing machine) and establish a life in which the deceased has gone but is not forgotten.

In the end the words of Earl Grollman, Internationally recognised bereavement counsellor, perhaps summarise what I have been trying to say in a few words:







“Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.”

Peter Pitcher is a psychodynamic counsellor specialising in bereavement.  
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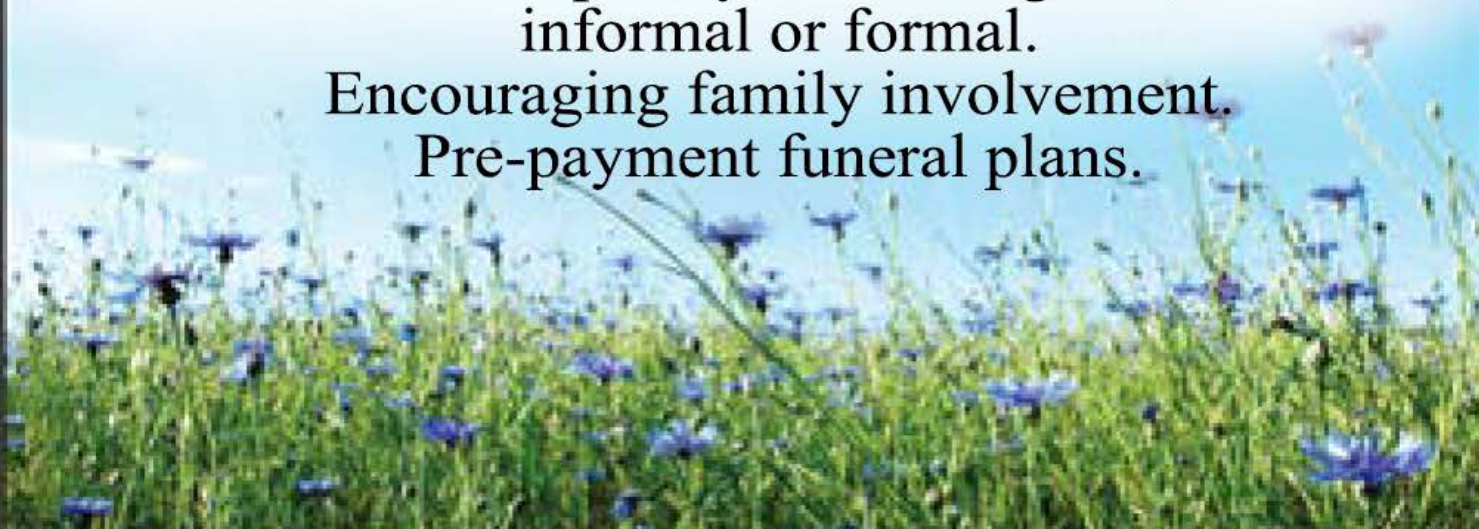
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# Disease and Dead Bodies

Article by Cara Mair and Sarah Clarke-Kent  
at Arka Funerals.

**Ok, so we know that there is a financial benefit to funeral professionals in stating that dead bodies present a risk to the public but if asked, no-one will say exactly what these risks are.**

**We just know that a ‘hygienic treatment’ i.e. embalming will save everyone from returning to the dark days of the plague or some such hellish risk. We are told that embalming will prevent the spread of disease but what exactly are these risks?**

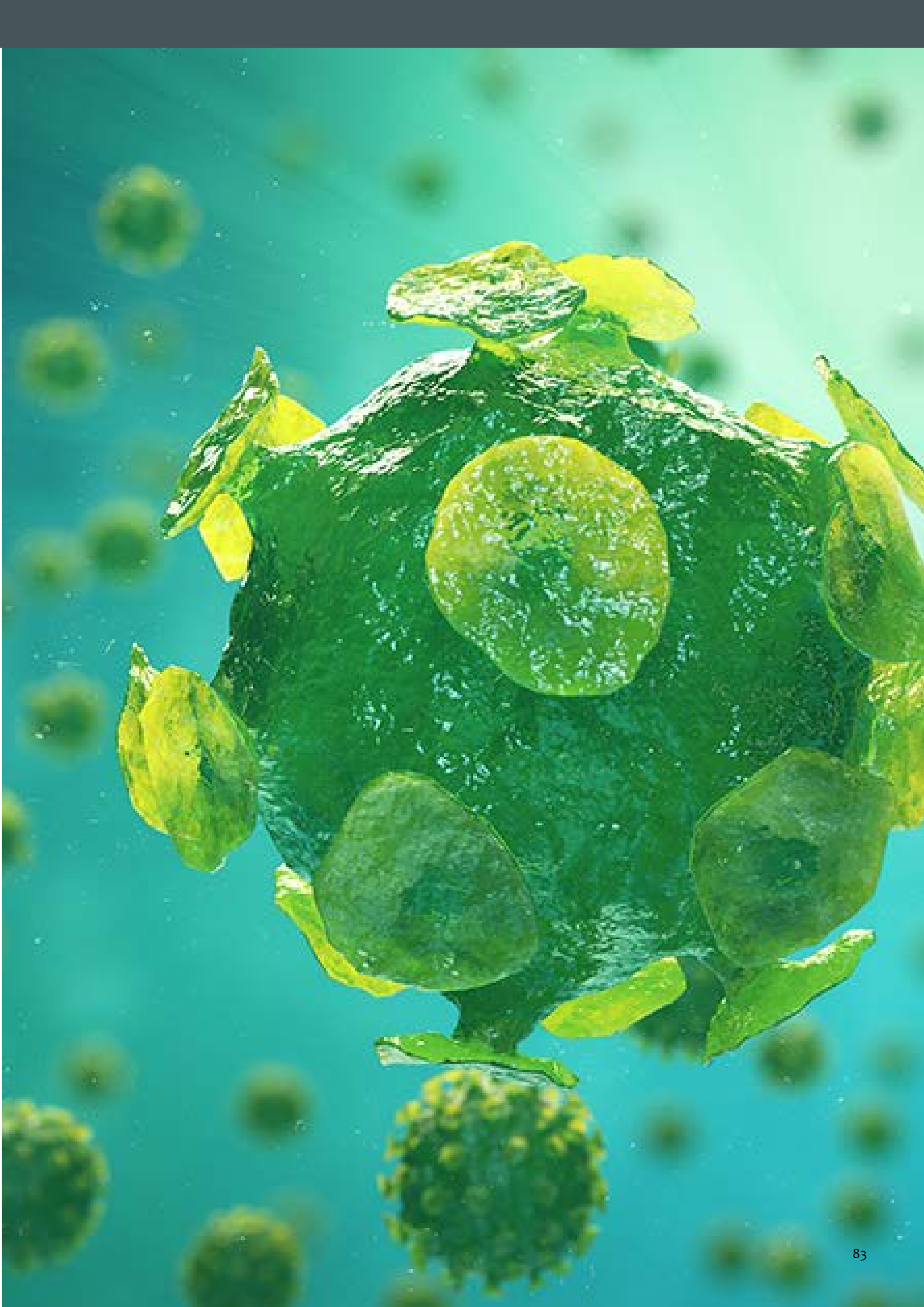
The public is also ‘advised’ on whether it would be a good idea to see their loved one after death, is this really the funeral director or mortician’s call? It’s a tricky one but a topic of conversation that all good funeral directors should be skilled in and (importantly) know what the facts are! No-one needs to do a biology degree to understand this but by not knowing what the facts are and squirming in front of customers this will only lead to further distress especially if the person has died suddenly.

**So can we catch a disease from a dead body?**

There is no evidence, peer-reviewed or otherwise, to say that we can get infectious diseases from the dead. In fact, there is overwhelming scientific evidence against it. The American Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, have published data backing this up. Also there are no studies showing a public health threat from unembalmed bodies. There is no evidence of rampant disease in the countries around the world (almost all of them) where embalming is seldom, if ever, practiced.

**Are dead bodies full of dangerous bacteria that can make the living sick?**

No, not usually. It’s important to know the difference between disease-causing microorganisms and the normal (if unpleasant) microorganisms that produce natural decay. To put it plainly, decomposition is a smell problem, not a health problem. The microorganisms that are involved in decomposition are not the kind that cause disease.>>





in summary...we don't

>>Most viruses and bacteria that do cause disease cannot survive more than a few hours in a dead body. An apparent exception is the human immunodeficiency virus, HIV, which has been shown to live up to 16 days in a corpse under refrigeration.

**So, if HIV can live in the body after death, doesn't that make an unembalmed body dangerous?**

No. A dead person with HIV (or most other diseases) is no more dangerous to you than a living person with HIV. The same simple precautions that we use, when coming into contact with bodily fluids from the living, apply when handling the dead.

Coroner's morticians will normally make a funeral director aware if someone has a contagious disease such as HIV (if this is known about) and we will take precautions to protect ourselves through using gloves etc.

There is no reason that an unembalmed dead human body should be infectious to

anyone attending a viewing. People transporting and handling bodies or cutting into them may be vulnerable in rare instances, with little or no risk, if proper precautions are taken. To refuse to present a body unembalmed because of infection risk is unfounded. People working in mortuaries and performing post mortem examinations would have stringent procedures whether the person has HIV or not.

It surprises many people to learn the U.K. U.S. and Canada are the only countries that routinely embalm their dead. Some members of religious and ethnic groups (predominantly Jews and Muslims), stick to the traditional private care of the body by non-professionals.

The use of gloves and simple protective clothing by the funeral director's staff and anyone else who handles the bodies should be an acceptable and effective safety measure. We have far more to worry about the effects of embalming fluid leaking into the environment. Formaldehyde is featured on the U.S. Environmental Protection



## need to worry too much about infectious disease from our dead

Agency's list of the top 10 most hazardous chemicals for damaging the environment.

It is carcinogenic in humans and animals because the cross-linking can cause DNA to keep cells from halting the replication process. This unwarranted replication of cells can lead to cancer. Formaldehyde also affects aquatic invertebrates, with crustaceans being the most sensitive type. Studies also show that formaldehyde has been known to injure some marine plant life and kill the root systems of some small plants. Formaldehyde released from the cremation of embalmed bodies enters the atmosphere and remains suspended for up to 250 hours. It is readily soluble in water so it will bond with moisture in the atmosphere and rain down onto plants, animals, and water supplies below.

### **What about groundwater? Don't decomposing corpses contaminate?**

Not if the cemetery is properly situated away from an important water channel.

Decomposition is nature's way of recycling the body's elements, and we need to keep this in perspective. Humans are not different in death from other animals. Deer, badgers and livestock die in the open all the time. None of them are embalmed or placed in caskets or concrete vaults, yet we don't lobby our city councils for mandatory taxidermy for wild animals or livestock. While it wouldn't be wise to bury bodies very near a stream or water table, the natural microorganisms in the soil do a good job of breaking down and filtering the products of decomposition.

So, in summary, we need to take care but we don't need to worry too much about infectious disease from our dead. However, we do need to worry about the environmental impact of embalming. This is just another example of how we in the funeral industry can take small steps to protecting the beautiful world around us. We can educate the public, talk plainly and empower people to relax and take control of what happens after they lose someone they love.



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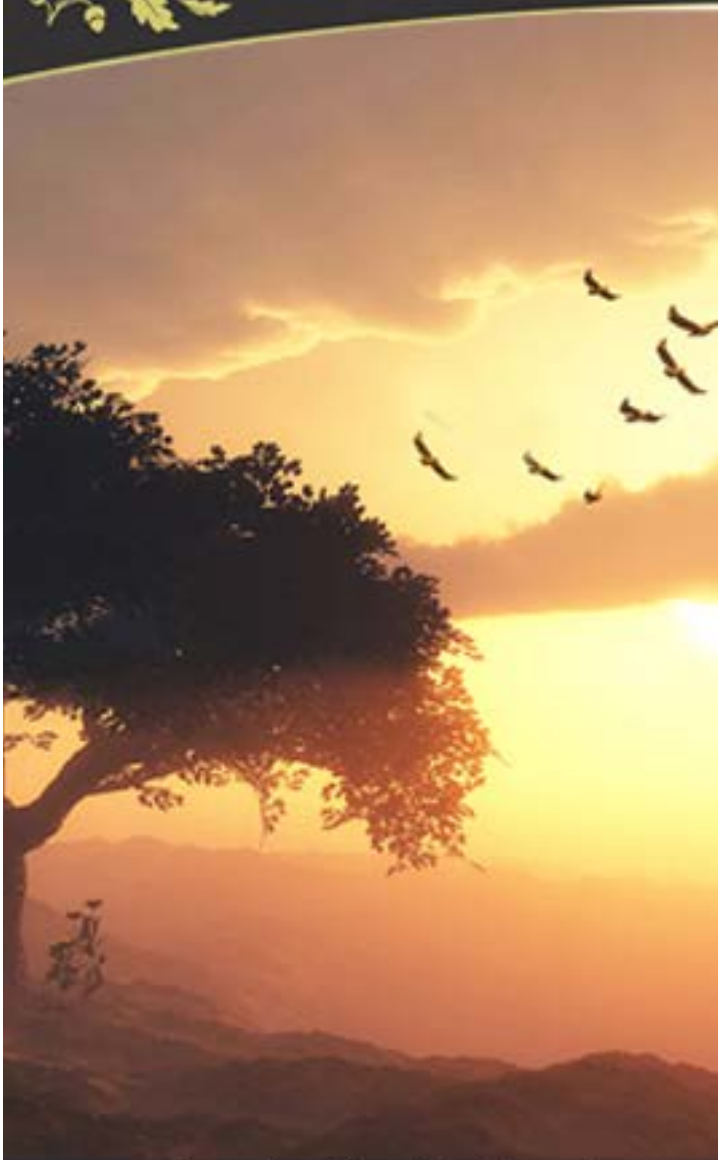
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# A Natural

# Undertaking

It's funny how it happens. You can never really envisage how the leap between being one thing and another will occur, but when you look back it's never usually quite how you imagine. It was like this when Carrie and I became undertakers.

Four years ago we were drawing on the brains of some of the best in the industry to help us arrange and manage our very first funeral. We were still in business planning mode when the call came through; no website, no car, no kit, no premises. But since it came while we were helping out at the Ideal Death Show in Birmingham, we had everyone around us urging us on, lending us equipment and telling us that it was now or never!

I'm happy to say that the funeral went very well, and although it was another two months before our next funeral came through, the confidence we'd gained from the experience was immense. In those two months we'd also built a website, leased a car, bought some equipment and secured some mortuary space.>>



>>Four years on and some three hundred funerals later we have (a lot) more equipment, another car (the first white electric hearse in the country) and our very own premises. And it's fair to say that even the path to get to this point, and the decisions we took to get here, probably didn't quite happen how we imagined.

We always knew we wanted our own premises but costs have a good way of helping you prioritise. We'd been introduced to a nearby funeral director – TEW Hickton. They let us rent mortuary space, chapels and cars as we needed them. They also gave us bags of emotional support and advice, and we honestly can't thank them enough. With this in place we decided not to rush into getting our own space.

Taking our time in deciding what sort of premises we needed, not only helped us from a cashflow point of view, but it also gave us time to work out what we did and didn't want to do, how we wanted to present our business, what equipment we should buy, how we would train and manage staff and how we wanted to promote our business. But more crucially we could take more time to understand what was really important to the families who came to us before making essential investment decisions.

In the end we found a place very close to where we lived. On a busy road and main bus route it was miles away from our romantic notion of a big old country barn – but common sense prevailed; there's no point having a place if no one knows you're there. At that time it was operating as a hairdresser – and with the name “Curl Up and Dye” it was simply calling out to us.

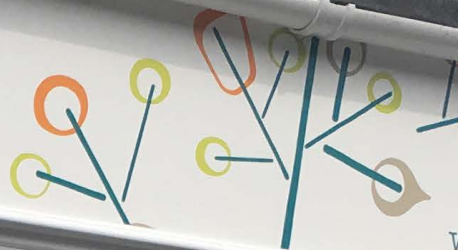
Almost a year after first seeing it, and after what seemed like months of legal and commercial discussions, we picked up the keys.

Now the work really started. How do you make best use of a (reasonably) small space to accommodate bulky equipment? How do you manage in premises where you don't have a usable back door? How do you communicate the fact that you're not always going to be in, but will always be contactable? >>



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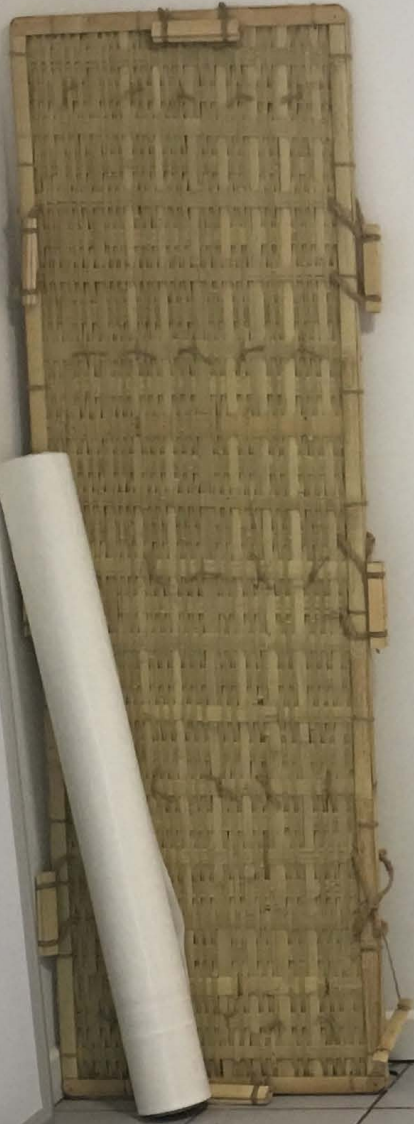


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No	NAME	SEX	SIZE	COFFIN	CREMATORIES 1	CREMATORIES 2	JEWELRY	CLOTH. DRESSED	WIGGING	ANY OTHER NOTES
1	[REDACTED]	F	5'4" 131	Cardboard Plywood	✓	✓	N/A		TBC	
2	[REDACTED]	CW	5'4" 124	UNUSUAL VENUE	✓	✓	N/A	YES	Yes	
3	[REDACTED]	GJ	5'9" 118				No			
4	[REDACTED]	F	5'10" 123	TBC	✓	✓	No	Yes	TBC	
5	[REDACTED]	CW	6'1" 122	Cardboard	✓		N/A	Yes	No	





How do you create a warm and welcoming space for a place that no one (given a choice) wants to come to? How do you decorate a room where people are going to spend time with their dead? And what do you even call it?

At every decision point we asked ourselves key questions such as, ‘how important is this to the overall experience for the families?’ or ‘Is this a better health and wellbeing choice for us and our staff?’ When you look at the questions through these lenses they really help to make the right choice.

Some challenges didn’t necessarily cost more – they just needed some creativity. When considering the lighting for the room where people spend time with the person who has died, we did some research. We were told that theatre lighting technicians know how to light people – ‘it’s all about colour’. So in that room we now have three, individually controlled, WIFI enabled bulbs and access to over 16 million colours. Our ability to create a softer atmosphere and adjust the lighting can make a massive difference to the people who are coming to spend time with someone who has died.

Once we were ready we invited people to join us across four Saturday mornings, to see the space, drink tea and eat cake. A crucial part of our ethos is to help people to feel that death is a normal and natural part of life, so flinging open our doors (including the mortuary) and letting people see what’s there is a really helpful part of that process. It’s also a very important part of choosing an undertaker – more people should ask to see behind the scenes, they should ask questions about exactly what will happen to the person once they have entered the premises; this will give a truer sense of how the body of the person you love will be cared for.

Since then we have welcomed in whoever wishes to take a look, we have had families help to wash and dress the person who has died, and above all we have created a calm and composed environment for anyone who wishes to spend time with them in a way that truly reflects our values.

Four years on, it’s better than even we could have imagined.

---

**Fran Glover**  
**A Natural Undertaking**



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# Coffin Club UK

You wouldn't expect a lot of laughter at somewhere called 'Coffin Club' but that's what dominates the room, a group of people gather around their coffins facilitated in their decorating by Kate, Kate and Larne and they talk and laugh.

Coffin Club originated in New Zealand and was brought to the UK by the Kate Dyer and Kate Tym, two celebrants that saw a need for a greater dialogue about death and took it into their own hands to make it happen.

At Coffin Club UK you can plan and cost your funeral wish list, listen to talks from industry speakers and build and decorate your own coffin. The coffins come from Dutch company 'Coffin in a Box' and have been dubbed Ikea coffins because of their flat packed design. They're made of ply wood and can be assembled using just an allen key. They can be taken apart after decorating and stored until they are needed. It's not suggested that you make yours too far ahead of time in case of changes in regulations but as it stands the coffins meet the standards for both burial and cremation.

Coffin club appeals to people who want a more personalised approach to their funeral but it also serves as a safe space to have conversations about death. Past participants have been people diagnosed with a terminal illness, the elderly and those caring for anyone that is dying. The safe space aspect of it is evident as the conversations that occur are open, honest and significant, as well as being funny. The people taking part are reflected in the designs they are creating on their coffins, one is bright pink and adorned with Elvis, another cream and decorated with hearts containing the names of her family. >>

## creating a space for people to talk about what is still a taboo subject

A wife and husband are decorating their coffins, hers with musical notes and his with hand painted pictures, she told me that once you get past eighty life is fun because you have nothing to worry about anymore, she likes to remind her husband every morning over breakfast that today might be their last and he jokingly told me that he doesn't like breakfast anymore. They all tell me that they've learned so much from the talks, they have all planned their funerals and know all of the options available to them. As a group they have bonded and are already planning to meet up after Coffin Club has finished.

What Kate Dyer and Kate Tym have set up is part of what they refer to as the funeral revolution, encouraging members of the public to seek out ways to talk about and engage with death, coffin club sits alongside Death Cafes and death events in creating a space for people to talk about what is still a taboo subject. "We intend to change the world of end of life celebrations, one dead person at a time!" they said. And they are making that change.

Coffin Club UK has received a lot of media attention and the concept is spreading with clubs being set up around the UK. If you are interested in setting one up Kate and Kate have introduced a Masterclass teaching session to pass on their knowledge.

If you are interested in joining a Coffin Club, we at the Natural Death Centre will be attending the next masterclass and are planning to have a club up and running in Hampshire in March next year so please get in touch to reserve a place.



Please help  
Coffin Club UK  
to receive funding  
by placing your vote  
**HERE**





A pair of blue rubber boots is shown in a park-like setting. One boot is in the upper left corner, and the other is in the lower left corner. The background consists of a green lawn and a dense line of trees with sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating a bokeh effect. The overall scene is bright and natural.

# Thinking about Direct Cremation?

I wrote about some of the potential benefits of direct cremation in a 2016 article following David Bowie's no fuss cremation in New York followed by a ceremonial scattering in Bali.

With direct cremations undoubtedly on the rise, I would like to revisit the topic to highlight some things to bear in mind from our experience of offering tailored funeral services over the last three years.>>

## Direct cremation is a professional term, meaning the option to deliver the body for cremation separately from a funeral

This option has economic advantages but also can allow for creative freedoms in how you choose to come together, express your grief and honour the person who has died.

Separating the practical from the ceremonial can give you time and space to create a highly personal and meaningful event. For some, there is undoubtedly an appeal to a 'no fuss' send-off, but it's worth considering the bigger picture of what is important when we respond to a death; be mindful that you don't slip into funeral avoidance.

New national direct cremation companies are boldly using media... TV advertisements promote simple cremation services as a perfect answer for people who do not like funerals. It is important that your funeral professionals commit to making the funeral process as positive as it can be for all. Be mindful that there is no template for how to feel and assumptions, must be avoided. Funerals can be hard, beautiful and real... they are an opportunity for people to come together to process a little of what has happened and lend support to one another. Make sure you don't deny yourself and those you care about this important opportunity. A good funeral can have far-reaching emotional benefits for the grieving process.

## The rise in direct cremations may very well be linked to a movement against the conventional conveyor belt funeral

It can be used as a way of side-stepping an industry bent on enforcing a template upon you of how things should (in their opinion and according to their streamlined, marked-up options) be done.

Numerous independent undertakers have offered 'no frills' options for years, and the larger national chains are no longer being complacent. Adopting the language and ideas of the alternative market, they are offering their own competitively priced zero frills, low cost, no service, no mourners options. However, this adaptation may be more about maintaining governance of the market, than truly responding to funeral poverty, or providing customers with real choice. >>





be mindful that you don't slip into funeral avoidance

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>> You may wish to consider protecting your autonomy throughout the process and be aware that if you choose a large conglomerate to conduct your direct cremation, then you may hand over all control of person who has died to the company you have employed. Things will happen at places and timescales that they dictate. Once you have chosen an extreme no frills package you are in danger of losing all flexibility from your funeral provider. The basic offering may not include any face-to-face time at all with a potentially supportive funeral professional. Shop around and find a undertaker whose style of support works for you as it is possible to find funeral professionals who will tailor even their most basic services.

## shop around and find a undertaker whose style of support works for you

Crematoria are also adapting their offerings. While some still insist that each direct cremation has the appropriate number of bearers and the coffin is carried through the chapel... others will now accept delivery of cremations throughout the day, making it possible for the body to be delivered through the back door on a trolley or bier when convenient.

Direct cremation is a “modern alternative to the traditional cremation funeral” but it’s not the only modern alternative for those who wish to keep things simple. There is actually a big area between direct cremation and the conventional ‘conveyor belt’ funeral. Arguably, it is in this area where much of ‘the good stuff’ can happen.

## direct cremation is a “modern alternative to the traditional cremation funeral”

So don’t consider opting for a direct cremation as a way of avoiding stress and pain for yourself or for your family and friends. It is the need to do something with the body that creates an opportunity for ritual and reflection. Even just talking through the options may well be a profound and comforting moment of discovery and healing.

Keeping things simple can leave room to confront and understand your emotions, rather than worrying about elaborate logistics and practical details. You can still come along and bear witness to the body’s last moments as a whole vessel. You might want to have a few private moments with the coffin, listen to a special piece of music, or offer single stem flowers. >>

There is a growing need for alternatives to the conventional style funeral. Some of us smaller operators choose to run our businesses in a particularly flexible fashion, offering tailored 'no fuss' funerals, as well as A to B transport options.

## There is a growing need for alternatives to the conventional style funeral

Find funeral professionals who can respond in a timely fashion and who can offer support through the process to actually create a meaningful event near the time of the death. Don't let too much time slip by or it may become more difficult to create the right event plan.

Drawing inspiration from the Irish, a quick response time between death and funeral can be for the best... the time between death and funeral seems to be gradually drifting and expanding in some cases. Direct cremation potentially encourages this drift and at worst, may actually take the pressure off of doing anything at all... a decision with potentially long-term negative consequences.

## direct cremation... a decision with potentially long-term negative consequences

I've overseen many direct cremations and though each follows a simple pattern, each has been part of a larger, unique and active process of mourning and celebration by the families.

My priority is to provide choice to people, not simply of cost-effective options, but the active power of choice that comes from understanding and participating in the whole process.

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**Tora Colwill,  
The Modern Funeral,  
Brighton**

# the modern funeral

Simple. Meaningful. Honest.

We can help you to make the best of things and create the perfect event – for the deceased, and for those who have been left behind.

The Modern Funeral is here to support those who would like to take charge and Direct-It-Yourselfs – even just helping with paperwork, transport or body care.  
It's your choice.

We also provide a full funeral service with no fuss direct cremation and burial options. Choose what suits you and only pay for what you actually want and use.

**Tora Colwill**  
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