

The Natural Death Centre's official magazine

# more to death

eighth edition 2016

**THE DEATH  
OF DAVID  
BOWIE**

**THE  
FORGOTTEN  
MOURNERS**

what about  
the children?

*Plus*

**FUNERAL  
PLANS**

**Don'cha  
Hate 'Em?**

UNCOVER HIDDEN AND AMAZING OPTIONS  
SURROUNDING DEATH AND FUNERAL PLANNING

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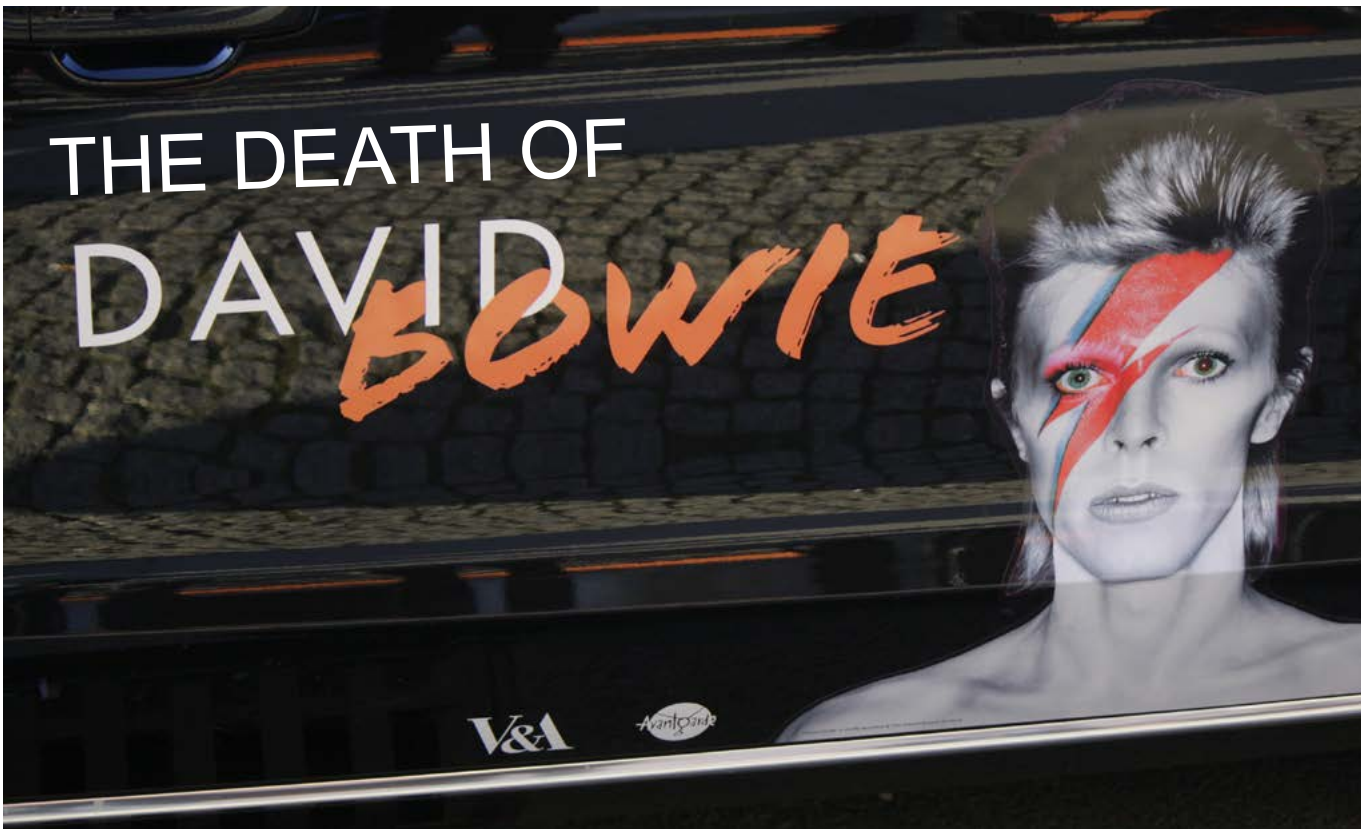


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The funeral world roller coaster has me whirling around the country as usual, visiting potential burial grounds and speaking at various deathly groups or events. I love this opportunity to get around, what a beautiful land we are blessed with. In April we had a fantastic meeting of the UK burial ground managers. Hosted by one of our newest Association members, Sheepdrove Organic Farm in Berkshire. We also have the first natural burial ground on mainland Europe open and join our merry band. Others in Wales, Leicestershire and Norfolk have gained planning and opened so the green burial option continues to spread out.

I still face the usual problems in the office, Gatekeepers (GPs etc) giving duff info to the bereaved and funeral directors still unwilling to disclose all options to the public. However, a fantastic statistic, pointed out to me by the chaps at Compassionate Funerals in London, is that since its inception the NDC website has had 28 million hits. WOW, that just goes to show that the internet is informing the public about the choices that are out there. It is just a shame that millions of our elders who do not have access to it are still super vulnerable consumers.

Talking of our Elders have any of you watched afternoon commercial telly? Every single commercial break includes an advert for funeral insurance or planning. With scary stats about the costs and your responsibilities towards your family. OUTRAGEOUS. Can you imagine how that must feel if you are stuck, sat in front of a telly in God's waiting room somewhere.

Ignore them and look at the GFG plan I say! Article on page 76. Either that or tune in to the BBC!

Looking forward to the Good Funeral Guide funeral Oscars in September, maybe see you there.

*Rosie Inman-Cook*  
Editor



Photograph with kind permission from Mathilda Culina

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# The Forgotten Mourners

As parents, we all want to protect our children from pain and grief. In this day and age we are fortunate that most of us discuss everything with our children, giving them an honest understanding of life.

**I believe that death is no exception.**

It is quite natural and understandable for adults to get caught up in their own grief and the practicalities of their own needs. Very often when children are bereaved, and almost as an after thought, the question can arise, 'Shall we let the children come to the funeral? Maybe they shouldn't be there?' Adults I meet often remember as a child or teenager not being allowed to go to a funeral, they can feel left out and excluded.

From my own experience, I agree that very young children or babies, who would not understand, could perhaps go to a friend for the day, as they can be a distraction for parents or siblings.

Children naturally have enquiring minds, and I believe that questions asked should be answered truthfully and honestly, to avoid them creating their own fears and fantasies. Teenagers may be going through a difficult time anyway, giving them a sense of involvement with the family is very important.

There are so many ways in which children can be included in a funeral, especially if the deceased person is a close relative. An older child may read a poem or something they have written. It is lovely when a musical instrument is played at the graveside, this, importantly, gives them something to focus on.

The simple gesture of tying a hand written message on the coffin, handing out flowers can be helpful, being the person in charge of making sure a memory book is passed round or releasing biodegradable balloons.>>





>>As I encourage family involvement, children can come with parents the night before the funeral and help to make a floral tribute and decorate the coffin. There may be Grandma's ashes or a pre-birth sibling to inter. Why buy an off the shelf container, when the children could decorate a box of their choice in their own way, with pictures and stickers. So personal and something they will always remember, that they were involved.

This helps in two ways, togetherness with the family and being close to the coffin so that, on the funeral day, there are no shocks.

I often meet a family with children the day before and walk and talk them through exactly what will happen, answering the many questions asked!!

### **'children, family and friends sprinkled hay and flowers'**

I remember three young children who had chosen Mummy's grave, but their concern was about leaving her in 'a hole in the ground'. After discussion, it was decided that the whole family would help to fill the grave. Ten large shovels and three small ones were on hand. We placed fresh hay and flowers on top of her coffin, softening the reality of the earth going into the grave. The children however, only did two shovels each, were satisfied, and then wanted to know if they could go off and play!!

I specialise in woodland burial, which on the whole is a far less formal experience, that can also be replicated for cremations. Whether I lead the ceremony or the family takes control, it is more laid back and personal, which can only mean an easier situation for children and parents alike to cope with.

One of many lovely goodbyes recently was to a special Uncle. An abundance of Sweet William's (his name sake) were gathered from various gardens. Close friends played recorder and guitar and sang unaccompanied. At the end of the ceremony the children, family and friends sprinkled hay and flowers, which gave them all a feeling of togetherness. Sadness, but fulfilment. >>









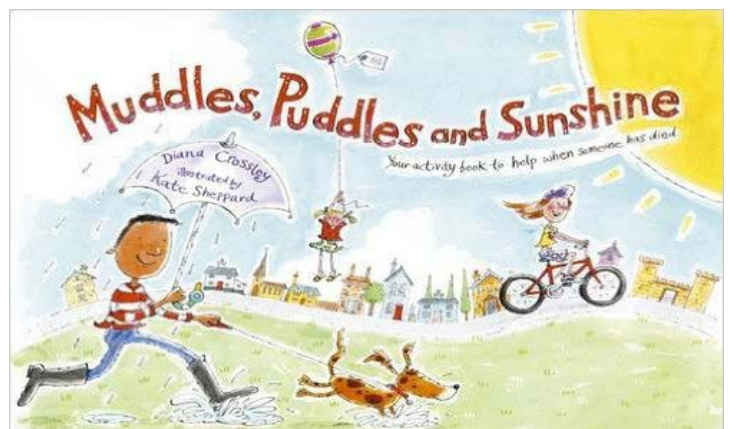




>>The children were delighted to hand out their homemade decorated biscuits with faces. They called them their feeling faces, showing happy and sad. Emotions they had talked about with Mummy.



There are many good publications about children and bereavement. My favourite is called 'Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine' described as 'an activity book to help when someone has died'.



A little gift I give to families with children, and the feedback is always good, for the adults too.

A funeral is one of the most important events you may have to arrange. There is such a thing as 'A Good Funeral'.

It's so important to talk, and with guidance and openness we can all ensure that children don't become the forgotten mourners.

---

by **Wendy Clarkson, Green Funeral**  
**Director, based in North Yorkshire.**  
**01756 701688 or 07968 205880**  
**[www.wendy-clarkson-funeral-services.co.uk](http://www.wendy-clarkson-funeral-services.co.uk)**



## Remember a loved one with the Woodland Trust's new in-memory range

When someone you love dies, it can be comforting to celebrate their life and keep precious memories alive in a symbolic way. The Woodland Trust has launched a range of exclusive eco-friendly biodegradable urns and ash keepsake jewellery with the aim of helping people going through this difficult time.

After discovering the Limbo Geos biodegradable urn and ash keepsake jewellery at the National Funeral Exhibition last year, the Woodland Trust realised that charitable versions would allow people to remember their loved ones while helping the environment at the same time.

Coral Banks, marketing and communications manager for products at the Trust says,

**"We're really proud to be the first UK charity offering these kinds of products. The links between life, death and trees are especially poignant, and being able to supply these kinds of products just made sense to us."**

All profits go towards the charity's work helping it continue to protect, restore and create woodland in the UK. Coral comments, **"We hope that people who buy our urns or keepsake jewellery will feel some comfort in knowing the difference their purchase has made to UK woodland and wildlife."**

### Woodland Trust biodegradable urns and memorial trees

Exclusively designed to feature the Woodland Trust oak leaf logo and crafted from plant matter, fibre and golden sand, the Trust's new eco-friendly biodegradable urns can be planted with a sapling to create a lasting memorial to your loved one.

The urns are available in two sizes, with the smaller urns suitable for pets. They can be interred either straight into the ground or in a planter to move with you. Every urn comes with its own complimentary location marker made from recycled materials.

And to help give you everything you need, the Woodland Trust will be offering a complimentary English oak sapling with each order of a biodegradable urn that you can watch grow and become a new home for wildlife.

### Beautiful keepsake jewellery

If you want to keep your loved one close by, the Woodland Trust is also offering a unique collection of sterling silver and gold-plated keepsake jewellery designed to hold a small amount of your loved one's ashes. The range comprises pendants, cufflinks, beads and brooches – all featuring the Woodland Trust oak leaf and a discreet compartment to allow for the interment of ashes.

### Other ways to remember

As the newest addition to their in-memory range, these exclusive Woodland Trust urns and jewellery pieces join tree and woodland dedications as options for those wishing to remember their loved ones in a natural way.

To find out more about the Woodland Trust's new in-memory range, visit the Woodland Trust shop at [woodlandtrustshop.com/memories](http://woodlandtrustshop.com/memories) or call our friendly team on **0330 333 5310**





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# THE DEATH OF DAVID BOWIE

## *Ashes to Ashes*

article by Tora Colwill of The Modern Funeral

When David Bowie died on January 10 this year, people around the world immediately came together to remember his life and work, and to grieve. Our experience of work by artists like Bowie is both profoundly personal and collective. It is universal. Similarly our relationship with death is something individual, but which also unites us.





Our natural responses to death are often spontaneously amazing. When there is a focus a place, an activity we can experience the same kind of transformation that came so naturally to Bowie himself.

People got creative there were impromptu drawings, inspired tattoos, atmospheric memorial gigs and club nights, countless gathering of friends playing their favourite tunes. We learned from David's life and work how to respond to his death, and we can also learn from how he managed his own death how we might prepare for it personally.

In the days following his death, details emerged of the practical arrangements concerning his body. David's wish was to have his ashes scattered in Bali, "in accordance with Buddhist ritual", and chose the option of a direct cremation in New York to enable this.

The cremation was prompt, two days after his death; it was inexpensive, just \$700; and it was simple. His body was disposed of with no immediate funeral ceremony, thus separating what happened to his vessel from how he was to be remembered.





This cost effective and timely process is available to all.

A direct cremation is a flexible way to go. The body is placed in a simple coffin and taken straight to be cremated. Choosing this option seriously keeps costs down you don't have to pay for a hearse, or the limousines for family members, or flowers or orders of service. Some crematoria even offer reduced fees for early morning cremations.

If you opt for a direct cremation there is still plenty of scope to come together for a meaningful ritual with the ashes in your own time. There's no disrespect in working out the practical approach that suits you and this can even reduce the stress upon those left behind. The financial burden can also be reduced.





The average inclusive cost of a funeral in the UK is around £3500; direct cremations, including all paperwork, transport and care for the body, start from £1000.

David Bowie took good care to plan for the end of his life, practically and creatively. He kept the news of his final illness private while he quietly completed his final album, *Black Star*, in which he confronts his mortality. The timing, the birthday, the album release publicly and privately all aspects seem meticulously planned. Surrounded by his family in his New York apartment it seems that David had a good death. At the very least he met death on his own terms, as he did everything else.>>

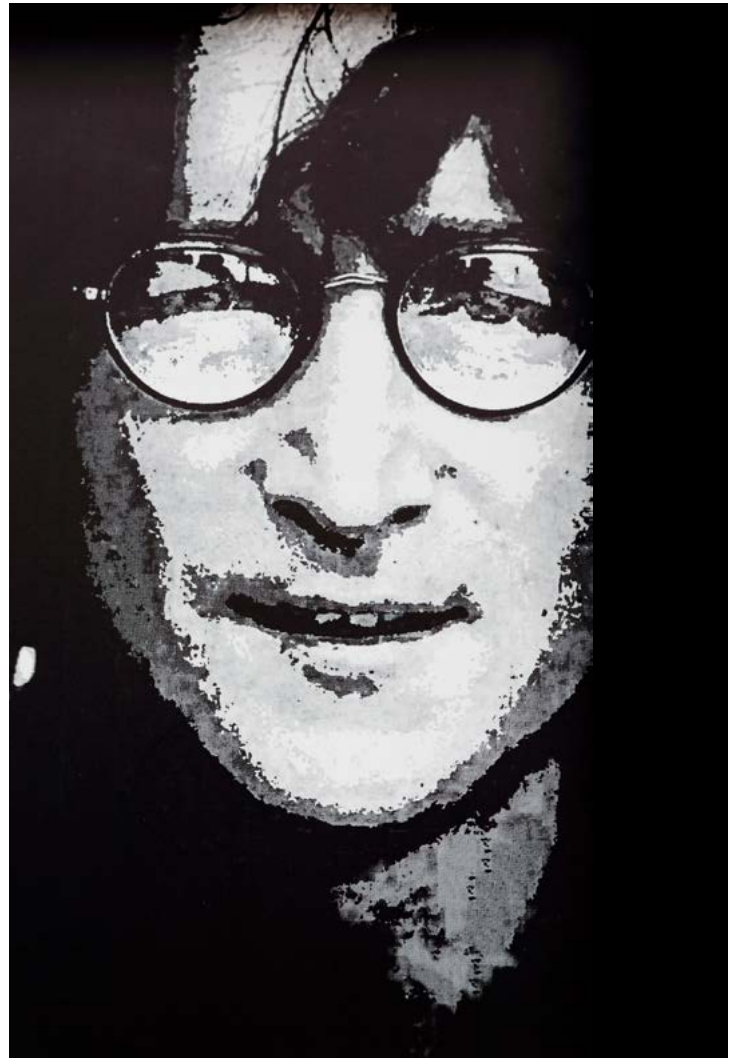


>>With a personalised, farflung ceremony and a straightforward local cremation, David Bowie typically transcended the conventional processes. His resources and fame could have meant something equivalent to a state funeral grand, intricate and public.

Instead he thoughtfully chose a simple method which separated the practical concerns of his body from the symbolic marking of his death. His decision created private space and time for his loved ones, enabled them to sidestep a potential circus and say a private goodbye in a Buddhist ceremony in Bali. Simultaneously his funeral could happen in a spontaneous, global way.

Now David Bowie wasn't adverse to a little appropriation here and there and we should note that he wasn't the first of his peers to opt for direct cremation with little or no funeral ceremony. On the day following John Lennon's death, Yoko Ono issued a statement announcing no funeral, but urging love and prayer. People responded with vigils, radio stations by going silent for ten minutes. His memory was and still is honoured further, everywhere, such as in Iceland at the Imagine Peace Tower, which projects every year a beam of light into the winter sky. >>







>>People with big lives and many admirers leave unique challenges for their mourners. Bowie, Lennon, Lemmy, and now Prince, couldn't have everyone at their funerals so had to find a different way.. But even for those of us without public relations duties, millions of fans, or the ability to create beautiful music to help people handle our deaths, preparing and planning practical avenues for our loved ones after our deaths can free them to mourn and celebrate in the most meaningful way they choose. If you choose a direct cremation, your funeral need not be confined to any particular place, or even indoors. Plenty of things can be done with your ashes incorporate them in jewellery, pop them into fireworks, scatter them at sea, in the garden, whatever suits you. Funerals can happen anywhere!

David might have done us one last serious favour by characteristically challenging convention and leaving us with a poetic lesson or two about death. Following David Bowie's lead we can contemplate our own wishes and gift some all important guidance for those we leave behind.



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**Tora Colwill**  
*the modern funeral*



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"IT MADE ME LAUGH, IT MADE ME CRY, IT MADE ME WANT EVERYONE TO SEE IT."

WALTER HILLARD, DIRECTOR, THE GOOD LITERATURE FESTIVAL

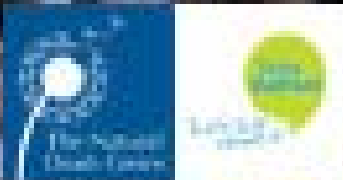
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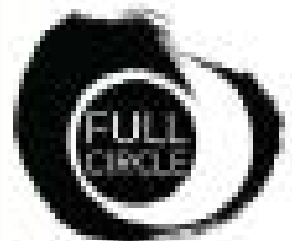
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About Death*

Written &  
performed by  
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For those wanting to, there will be a chance to share the conversation and add new stories to the show's repertoire as it travels around the country exploring the territory outside the box.





*" I'm not afraid of dying, I just don't want to be there when it happens." Woody Allen*

## Outside the Box - A live show about death



Stories collected from life's finish-line by Liz Rothschild - performer, celebrant and manager of 'Cemetery of the Year 2013' Westmill Woodland Burial Ground.

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*"Talking about sex doesn't make you pregnant, talking about death doesn't make you die"* Jane Duncan Rogers

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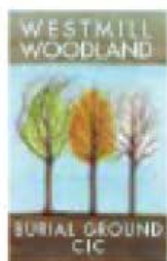
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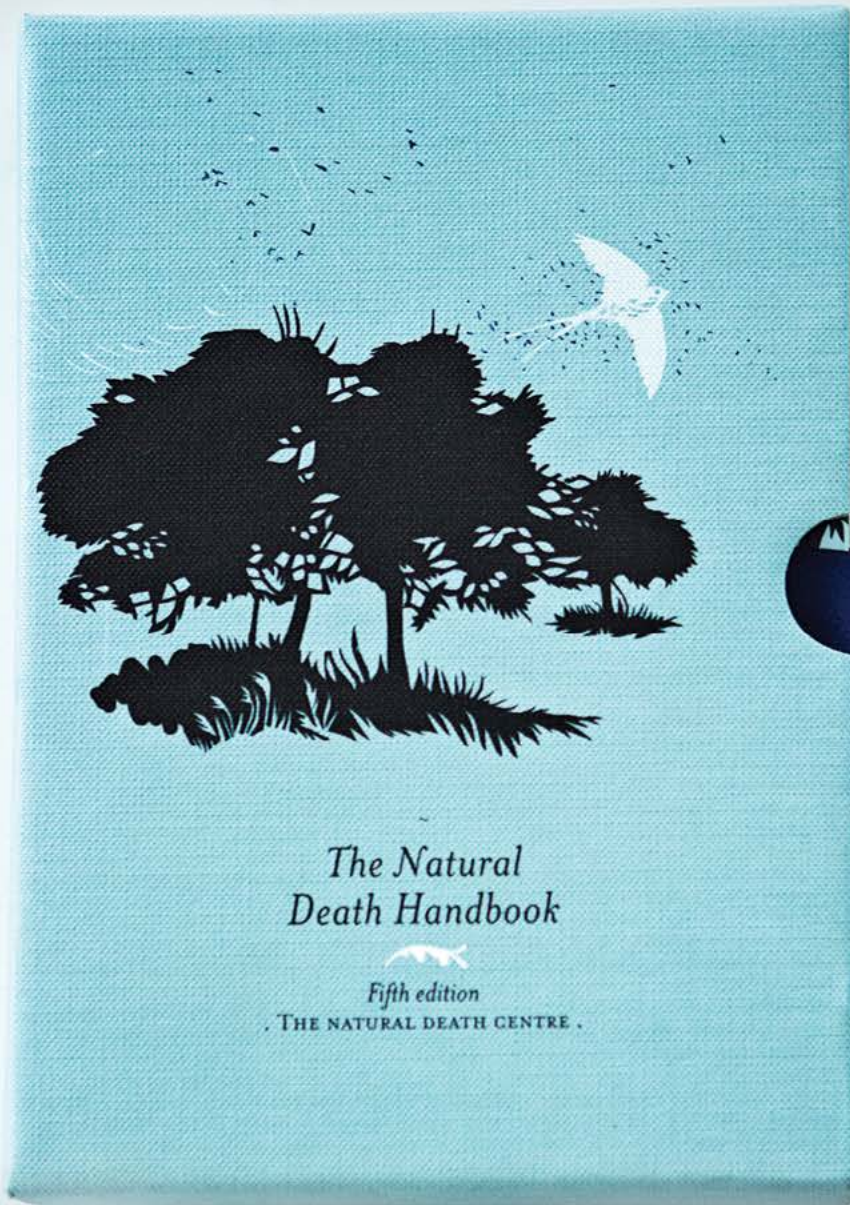
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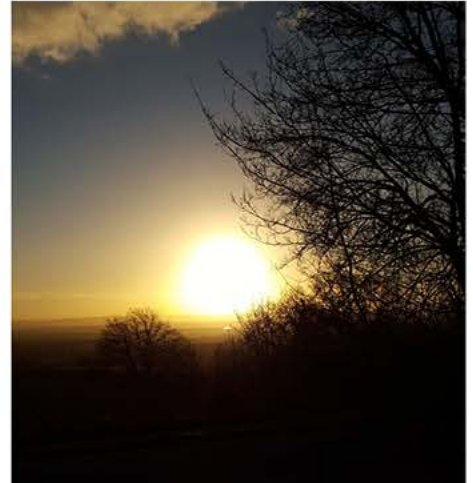
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# I Enjoyed THAT FUNERAL!

## Your Life Is Special - shouldn't your funeral be too?

Too often our clients will say "I shouldn't say this should I, but that was a really good funeral." It's almost as if they are nervous to admit that they have actually enjoyed the service. Not much else is usually said and we simply add it to our 'thank you' list, an indication that all has gone well.

We all want to know that things have gone well, we want the reassurance that a good job has been done but when someone says "I shouldn't be saying this but..." I ask myself 'Why not?' Why do we feel uneasy being pleased when all has gone well - we wouldn't feel the same about a wedding, would we? >>

>>Perhaps it's because we associate it with an uncomfortable level of joy.

This gets me thinking or over thinking, as usual.

**Why do we have such reservation when it comes to dealing with death in our society?**

Surely how we deal with death is just as important as how we deal with life. Those trekkies amongst you will know where I stole that line from and those who don't, can ask!

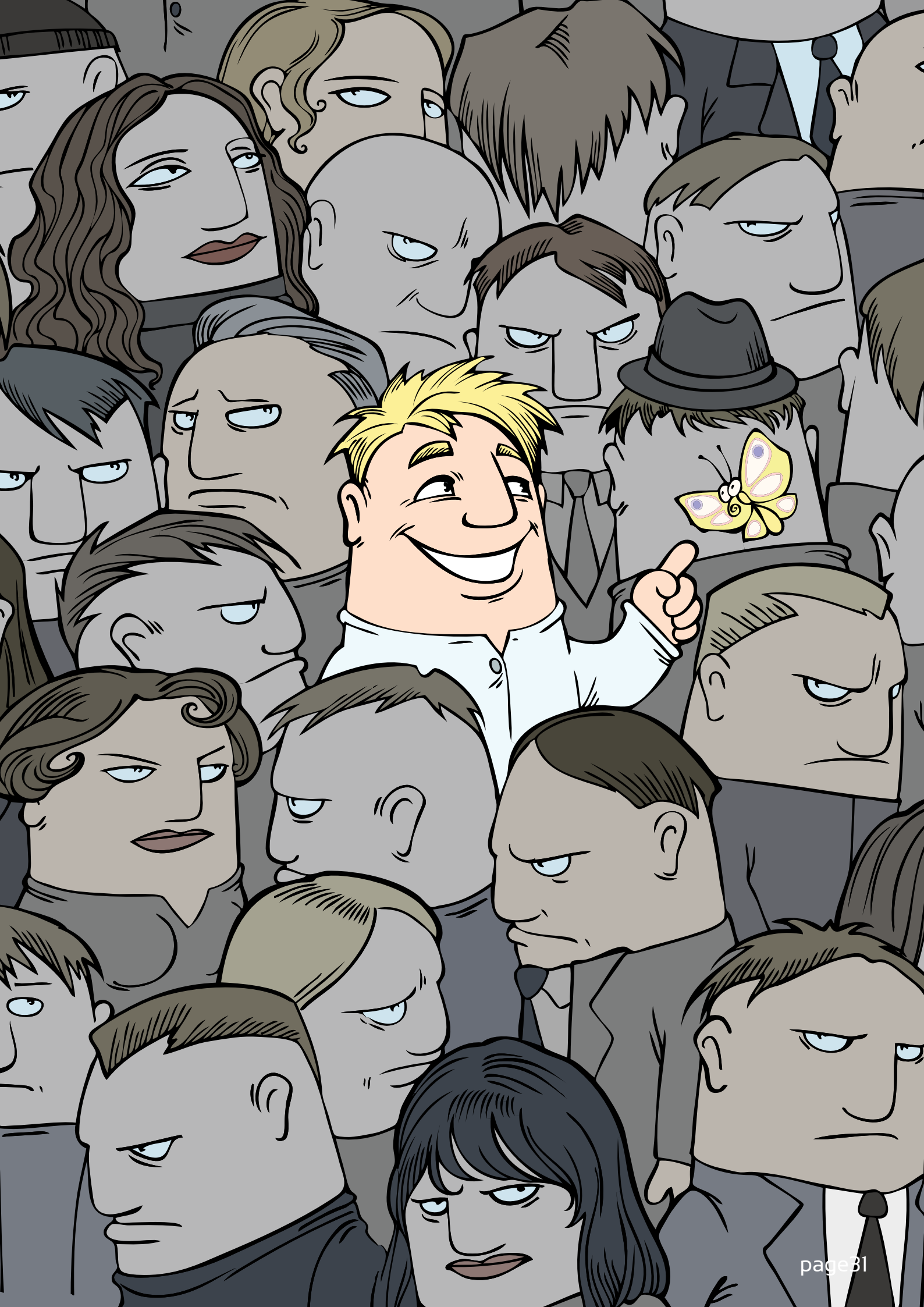
Perhaps what they are trying to express is indescribable, the right words can be really tough to find, especially at a time when emotions run high and reactions can be adverse. Quite simply, people just don't know what to say or how to say it.

Maybe what they really mean is "surprisingly it was a great atmosphere and I enjoyed being a part of it" or "I was glad I was here, it made me feel better." In other words they weren't expecting to enjoy it and therefore saying so makes them feel uneasy.

Now, I'm not naïve enough to believe my saying all this will change everything overnight, change comes with time but we, as funeral directors, are starting to see a change in society's approach to death. There is less of the Victorian top hat, pomp and ceremony, more of the personable approach. For example, I offer to adopt a different dress code for a green burial.

Generally, life is complex and everyone's journey is individual with twists and turns along the way, some good and some bad, sometimes with faith or belief and sometimes without. Each life is special and should be treasured. Death has a huge impact on those around us so should our funerals not be special too, complex too, unique too?>>







>> Some of the ‘best’ funerals I have conducted have had real character about them, I’ve been asked to dress up as Gandalf the Wizard, I’ve led a family through a field all singing at the top of our voices, walking to the graveside for a full worship service with guitars etc.

What, you may ask, did all these funerals have in common?

Well, for one they were all heavily personalised by the families who were very much in the driving seat. They were informed and knew what they wanted and perhaps more importantly, what the deceased had wanted. They’d had the BIG Conversation, the one so many of us are scared

to broach. And when they needed something, we as funeral directors, gave them the options and the space to make an informed decision. Ultimately though, it was they who pushed the boundaries by asking questions such as; “Could you film the service?”

“Can we play a song that Dad wrote during the committal?”

Throughout the service, these funerals ooze character, there is no getting away from it – they are unique.

Of course, traditional funerals still have their place, they can be highly personal too, just in a different way. Sometimes the smallest, most insignificant detail can make the biggest difference.





In the current climate of economic uncertainty and with funeral poverty growing as an issue each day, it is important to understand how we can make something special without it costing a fortune.

How can we do that?

So whether it is by simply placing a photo, sprinkling petals at the graveside, releasing balloons, choosing a coffin that best reflects that person's life, a family member leading the service, breaking the boundaries and choosing the unconventional, we should remember that each life is special.

However you refer to us (funeral directors or undertakers), surely the important point to remember is that we 'undertake' to deliver the family's very personal requirements.

Our lives are special and our funerals should be too.

Planning to say goodbye is important to those left behind, the funeral service is a huge part of the grief journey that follows loss, it is such a personal and individual process – some may shed a tear, some may have a stiff upper lip... How we say goodbye should touch the hearts of those we leave behind.

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"The FA course gave us a good solid foundation for providing this service. The presenters were extremely informative and engaging"

"The CMB course was extremely hands on and detailed. It gave practical experience and the opportunity to meet others doing this work" *student 2016*



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# HOW TO BE A

# *Funeral Director*

It would be nice to say that being a funeral director is just like people think it is: social work for the newly bereaved, guiding them through the blistering initial stages of their loss; listening, advising and steering their grief in a healing direction by enabling them to hold a meaningful funeral ceremony.

Indeed, when it's done properly funeral directing is just that: collaborative, short-order event management where maybe, just maybe, a moment can be created where the stars will show themselves in the darkness.

The truth however, is that the funeral profession represents the Accident and Emergency Department of Bereavement and behind the scenes in a funeral home things often get just as chaotic and pressurised. That's partly our own fault for making like ducks: creating the pretence of gliding along serenely whilst our little legs paddle furiously beneath. Ironically, the price of treating everyone like they're our only client is that when it comes to spending time lovingly tending to the dead or holding hands with sobbing relatives, we rarely have the time.

That's not to say it doesn't still require a very particular grace and exceptional powers of empathy to work with the newly bereaved, but as funeral directors we need to be constantly aware that no-one approaches us by choice and they rarely want to engage with our offering for a moment longer than necessary. >>













>>They want help getting the funeral arrangements made and in the meantime have the body looked after, whilst resigned to the expectation it'll probably cost them an arm and a leg for the privilege.

## 'bereavement can make people act in very irrational ways'

A funeral director's daily duties are governed by their individual status as employee, manager or company owner, as well as the size of their company. Consequently once you get to 'funeral director' level you don't necessarily have much daily contact with dead bodies. Sometimes that's a blessing. There are lots of people who think it must be really special to work with the dead, and for the first few years it is. But the dead become quite boring once you're accustomed to seeing them in all their various permutations; and as for being told, "You've made him look so peaceful," after you've spent ages getting the body looking palatably presentable (by dead body standards, at least), you're equally likely to get "It doesn't look like my Dad". I once got a "Bugger me... I wish I hadn't bloody come now." It was tempting to parry back with an equally blunt "Look, she's been dead for a week; you can't expect a purse from a sow's ear," but that wasn't what my visitor meant. If affirmations from grateful clients are trophies, we're often awarded the wooden spoon.

Bereavement can make people act in very irrational ways, but if they're socially awkward or idiosyncratic characters to begin with, bereavement will just turn up their volume. Whilst for some the rug is pulled out from under them, taking with it everything they hold dear; for others the responsibility of making funeral arrangements is a distasteful imposition and an outrageous expense. Either way funeral directors are expected to parachute in, identify and pirouette around even the tiniest individual sensitivities, create something meaningful from it all and still find a tactful way to render the bill before exiting stage left.

However, there can be beauty in the darkness and sadly too many funeral professionals fail to notice the rich and rewarding subtleties this work brings with it.

Funeral directing isn't just a job; it's a daily negotiation between the profound and the prosaic. It demands acute levels of self-awareness and emotional intelligence and requires us to honour its otherness and submit ourselves to its sense of transcendence.>>



>> The greatest responsibility placed upon funeral directors is to maintain constant awareness of the power we're granted and the obligation we're placed under every time the bereaved open up their lives and their grief to us. Whilst there's genuine satisfaction in treating people's vulnerability with honour, that power has to be exercised with the utmost caution and respect. Perhaps it's no coincidence the majority of funeral directors are still family-run, independent businesses; well established within their communities but continually striving to be all things to everyone by balancing progressiveness with traditional mores, just as they've always done.

**'a profession that dances  
between the sacred,  
the secular and  
the surreal'**

In contrast the large funeral chains are a constantly exploitative menace, but at least the public have a greater awareness of them now. However, corporate chains represent just one polarity of contemporary funeral directing. Opposite them is a radical left wing of niche undertakers who decry 'tradition' and all its paternalistic black-clad works, and instead espouse a consciously non-interventionist approach. Although well-intentioned, this movement inevitably risks attracting recruits from the ranks of the bien pensant and potentially more dangerously, those with scores to settle after damaging run-ins with tradition. You simply cannot afford to approach funeral work pre-loaded; the bereaved are endangered enough already.

There's no foolproof recruitment test for a career in funeral directing. But if you want to be truly effective within it, you'd do well to begin by asking yourself precisely what your motivations are. If you're drawn by the uniqueness of a profession that dances between the sacred, the secular and sometimes the surreal, you're far from alone. But if it's the prospect of drawing alongside the newly-bereaved that really fires your imagination, be sure your intentions are baggage-free before you seek to heal others.

---

**Article by Funeral Director and author,  
James Baker**







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# *Homey Funerals*

**A GRANDMOTHER'S  
VIEW**





**Did you know that family led funerals with limited input from funeral directors or even entirely without funeral directors are totally safe and legal?**

In working families, even as late as the 1900s, home funerals were what happened when someone died. They weren't something special. It was just what was done in every family.

My Grandmother cared for her family and extended family when they were alive, when they were dying and when they were dead. She was the village midwife, so not only did she bring new life into the world, she made sure that those leaving it were shown due respect and treated with honour and love. Laying out the dead and performing the last offices for them, was to her, not only a sacred rite, but a labour of love.>>

**article by  
Lyn Baylis**



The move to hide death away started with the moneyed gentry towards the end of the 17th Century.

Until then, even for the wealthy, death was just a part of life, with most families losing at least one of their children to illness. However, if you view tombstones from the 18th Century onwards, the stark statements are transferred into gentle metaphors. Sentiments such as “Here lies Fred, he is dead” cease to be visible and instead, tombstones talk of someone “sleeping with the angels” or being “gathered into God’s arms.”

### ‘the dead were painted, rouged and plumped up’

With the death of Queen Victoria’s beloved Albert, rituals around death became more and more formalised. The care of the deceased followed prescribed patterns; even the behaviour for those in mourning was formalised.

The ensuing funeral arrangements were totally removed from the family and summarily placed behind closed doors, where the dead were painted, rouged and plumped up before being wheeled out for photos (with or without the family) or death’s head masks.

Then they were locked away again and packed firmly in their coffin, jaws bound and limbs tied tightly together in case they should make a noise that would distress the relatives on their final journey or when they were lowered into the ground.

These social taboos around death slowly seeped into the mind-set of the general population. Death, which had once been accepted as just another part of life, eventually became hidden behind the closed doors of the funeral parlour, only spoken of in reverential tones or whispers. >>









Even today, people are a little bit in awe of the funeral director and this, together with the numbness grief often brings, can cause them to accept any arrangements suggested to them, pick expensive coffins, or settle for funeral arrangements that will cause them social, cultural or financial distress, accepting any date they are given for burial or the cremation.

### 'the funeral director is there to help them'

They forget that the funeral director is there to help them, to provide a service, and that it is they who are ultimately in charge of what happens.

We, the baby boomers of the 40s, fought for the right to give birth at home, a right enjoyed by many mothers around the world now. We have reached an age when our parents and others that we love are dying, and we do not want to just hand them over to some faceless funeral director, however professional, nice or kind they may be.

We wish to make sure that our loved ones, and ultimately ourselves (when our time comes), will be looked after in death and afterwards by people who know us, love us and will care for us at the end the way we would like to be cared for.

We wish to hold vigils where we can say goodbye to our own with the rest of the family and friends in our own homes, not some faceless funeral parlour. To honour them with our rituals and talk to them while we organise the funeral, sourcing, making, or painting the coffin, and decorating it in a way our loved ones would approve.







We want to hold a wake as in the old days, raise a glass, share the old stories and spend time with those we love before we eventually lay them to rest in a celebration of their lives, not with an impersonal, remote ritual which often seems to be staged to be the ultimate separation from our loved ones.


### **'let people know about their options'**

I and others who feel the same will continue with this battle because it is ultimately for ourselves. It is, however, wonderful to see that more and more people are becoming aware that they do have options when it comes to caring for their dead. They can use a funeral director to organise the funeral, or get involved and direct the funeral service making considered decisions, or have a home funeral if they so wish.

My aims are to let people know about their options, to assure them that home funerals are legal and achievable (with or without help) if that is what they wish, and to remind people that they have choices. My hope is that, in some small way, I can empower families to do whatever it is they wish to do for their loved ones at the end of life.

For some, when they think of home funerals, the main drive is to offset the ever increasing costs, but for many more, they wish to take control of a ceremony they find removed from them, depressing, morbid and not in any way uplifting. They wish to reflect the spirituality of their loved ones, treating them with honour, respect and love, making all actions sacred as the loved one dies and to continue this heart led care whether it is in person until they reach their final resting place, or in spirit walking with them towards the other realm.>>





>> Organising part or all of a funeral does make you aware of the reality of death, yes. You see the person you loved dead, but with a good death comes a serenity and peacefulness that is wonderful to witness, and this revelation can assist the grieving process and be a very healing experience.

Therefore, if anyone wishes to participate in any way, or lead their own end-of-life rites and rituals then I will help with advice and assistance if I can or alternatively put them in touch with someone else who can.

**‘with a good death  
comes a serenity  
and peacefulness’**

For those of you who believe you would find it difficult to have a body at home, and do not wish to even think of doing this, I do understand. When we talk about the dead, it is often the images we see on the TV or in films which are paramount in our thoughts, complete with dreadful smells and a decomposing corpse, but in actuality, that is generally not the case.

When we look at other cultures around the world, there are many whose death rituals are based around keeping a loved one at home for three days or three nights. It is only our distance from death these days and the fears that are triggered by these images that highlight the problems. In addition, with the help of air conditioning or ice packs, we can keep a body at home for a week if necessary, so three days generally will cause no problem.

However, if your loved one died in hospital or in a hospice, as long as you haven't appointed a Funeral Director they will generally keep hold of them until you can collect them from there to take them to the crematorium or to the burial ground. These same facilities can sometimes be used if the deceased has to be kept for some time, e.g. a son/daughter has to travel from abroad to say their goodbyes>>.



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>>If your loved one dies at home, some modern funeral directors will work with you, while some green burial grounds have facilities to keep the body, or you can call upon an End of Life Transitions Guide\* to help you.

## 'laying out someone is a service of love'

If you belong to a spirituality which sees death as a rite of passage, then this usually begins with laying out your loved one after death, washing them, combing their hair, anointing them and placing them in the clothes they wished for their final journey. Whether you are family, a friend or someone who has been called in to help. I can assure you (being a Grandmother myself now) laying out someone is a service of love and one which I always feel privileged to perform.

If you are leading a private celebration of the deceased's life as part of a rite of passage, then first identify what it was the deceased achieved in life. It could be a major thing or something they might not themselves have classed as an achievement, e.g. bringing up a family.

Honour their achievements, whatever they were, and understand their passions, their hopes and dreams. Open sacred space. (If you are helping a family that is not your own always ask them how the deceased would have done this.)

Work with other members of the family to get them involved choosing, prayers, poems, and songs that express the deceased's journey through life, get them to tell the stories that they love and want passed down to the family, share photos, etc., The decoration of the coffin can have its own place in these celebrations, whether it is weaving flowers into a willow coffin, painting or pasting photos onto a cardboard coffin or choosing a more conventional coffin and the items to be placed in or on it. You are only restricted by your imagination - and the practical requirements of the burial ground or crematorium.

If it is to be a spiritual ceremony, then call upon the deities/spirits that were significant to the deceased and mark a sacred space where you can hold the ritual and invite those with whom the deceased wished to share this special time. Many spiritualities believe that the spirits do not begin their journey for a while after they seem to have gone, e.g. some open the window to let the soul fly out. Whatever their ways, find out beforehand; if it's family then, of course, you will already know.

## 'express the deceased's journey through life'

When taking your loved one to their final resting place, you can use an estate or a van: as long as the body is covered, it really is not disrespectful. Getting friends and family to gently lift and carry the coffin into the crematorium or to the graveside feels somehow more natural, personal and meaningful to me. If you do not feel that you will be able to speak, then you can always hire a celebrant who will understand and honour the spirituality of your loved one and the family.

If you decide to have a home funeral and venture down this road, I promise you will find it a rewarding, moving and deeply transforming experience.

*\* this is the name agreed by the National Home Funeral Alliance in the USA to cover End of life Midwives, Soul Midwives, Death Doulas, Home Funeral Guides and any group or person who works with the dying before, during and after death.*

---

## For further information on Home Funerals

**Lyn Baylis**

lyn@liferites.org.uk or www.liferites.org.uk

**Claire Turnham:**

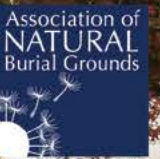
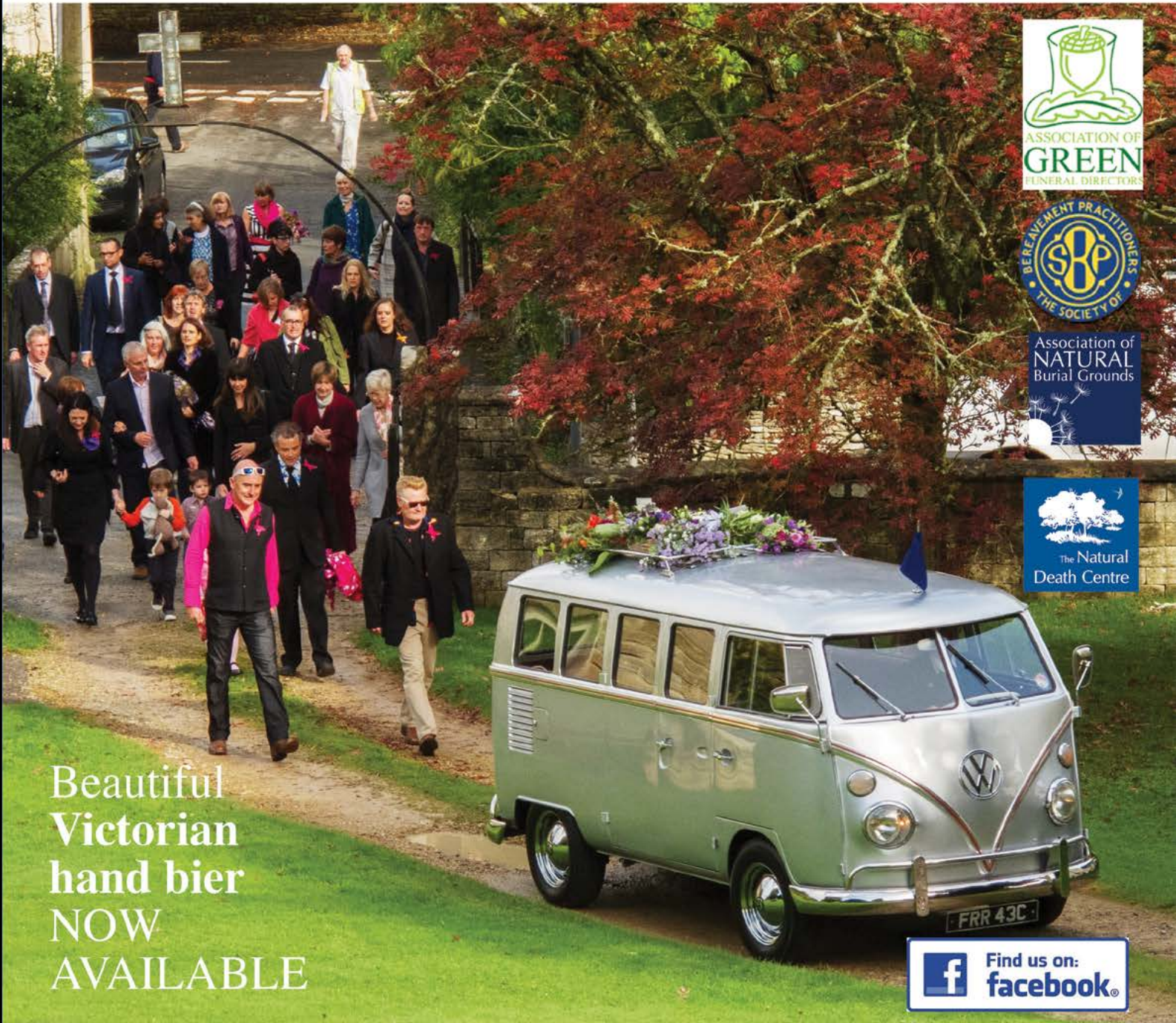
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It's our

25<sup>th</sup>

birthday

**I am so proud of what the NDC has achieved and feel grateful to everyone who has been involved with the Natural Death Centre over the years.**

The Natural Death Centre has been spearheading the natural death movement to bring back power to the people and embrace death as part of life, the place it should have. I believe it is to the benefit of everyone, but

perhaps not to the big funeral companies, who don't mind to have their pockets lined by families in distress who are unaware of what choices there are and do not realise that there is another way.

Thank you to Nicholas Albery for all his work in setting it up and running the Natural Death Centre and for all his courage and inspiration. It was due to him that an idea became action.



Natural burial is now commonplace. We now have over 300 natural burial sites and more are in the planning stages. The funeral industry has exploded with new, family focused funeral directors supporting natural burials and simple, low cost funerals, using cardboard coffins and cremation, that families can afford.

Hearses don't look like the old-fashioned hearses anymore. There are silver VW vans, motorbike sidecars, a bicycle rickshaw or a big, fat pink limousine you can have instead.

A major toast to everyone who has been involved in the past and is involved now! And a toast to everyone who has benefitted!

The later includes Nicholas of course and many close friends.

Josefine Speyer,  
Co-founder and  
patron of the NDC

We now have The Ideal Death Show, The Good Funeral Guide, Death Café, the annual Dying Matters Awareness Weeks, the Home Funeral Network, and the Order of the Good Death and many more projects to inspire and professional services. But we lost the English Day of the Dead with its festivities in springtime!

How massive the movement has become and what impact the Natural Death Centre charity and the Natural Death Handbook have had, not just in the UK, but also worldwide! It is quite phenomenal!







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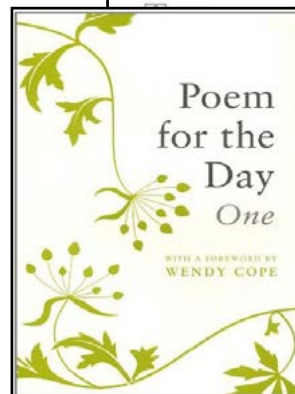
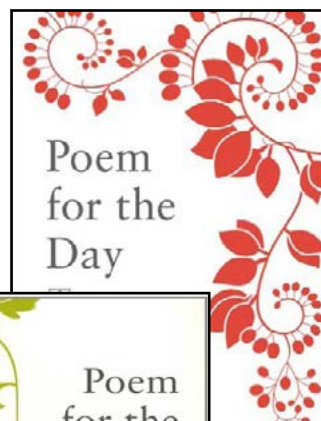
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**Nicholas Albery, co-founder of the NDC**, loved poetry, learning it by heart and reciting it to a receptive audience, but he found these audiences hard to come by.

He solved the problem by creating the Poetry Marathon (now The Poetry Challenge) as a charity fundraising event.

He edited the best selling Poem for the Day books and donated the royalties to the NDC. Naturally, he launched the book with the first Poetry Marathon in October 1995!





# Springtime reckoning.

March is always a time of shuffling piles of paper around and crunching numbers and personal comments, down in the NDC bunker. 600 feedback forms, completed by the families carrying out a funeral at one of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds are scrutinised to establish the levels of customer service, the love and attention to detail experienced by the bereaved at member sites.

Narrowed down to the best two in each region, by external assessors, these are then presented to the NDC trustees. They decide on a winner in each region and from those five winners the best in UK.

## Runners Up & Winners

### **UK North**

Runner Up: Brocklands Woodland Burial, North Yorkshire  
Winner: Binning Memorial Wood, East Lothian

### **UK West**

Runner Up: Westall Park Woodland Burial, Worcestershire  
Winner: Westhope Green Burial Ground, Shropshire

### **UK East**

Runner Up: Brightwater Green Burial Ground, Lincolnshire  
Winner: The Willows Natural Burial Ground, Leicestershire

### **UK South West**

Runner Up: Atlantic Rest Natural Burial, Cornwall  
Winner: Higher Ground Meadow, Dorset

### **UK South East**

Runner Up: Deerton Natural Burial Ground, Kent  
Winner: South Downs Natural Burial Site, Hampshire



# 2016 People's Awards



Overall Winner  
Jo Vassie of Higher  
Ground Meadow  
receives her much  
deserved award from  
Fran Hall







Chris Neave  
Brightwater



Amy Tolley  
Westall Park

Just some  
Award V



Chris & Jenny Scroby  
The Willows





Sheridan Rosser  
Atlantic Rest



# Some of our Winners



Sian Muir  
Deerton



Al Blake  
South Downs







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# *Be Brave*

There is a painting by LS Lowry called "The Funeral Party". It shows a line of mourners at a funeral. They are all turned away from one particular mourner as he is wearing a red tie.

It's seen as disrespectful somehow.

When I was talking to my Nan (who is 97) about my funeral business plans, she told me about an old music hall song called "Brahn boots" by Stanley Holloway.

"I will admit 'e 'ad a nice black tie,  
Black fingernails and a nice black eye;  
But yer can't see people orf when they die,  
In brahn boots!"











Ed Holden







>>**It takes real bravery to challenge convention. To stick to your guns and to genuinely not worry, “what will the neighbours think?”**

It's changed since then. Now it's common for people to ask for bright clothes to be worn. Nobody would bat an eyelid at a red tie.

The rise of the bright and cheerful coffin, the secular celebrant and the alternative hearse are evidence that we are beginning to challenge ideas of what a funeral should look like.

But what if what you wanted, felt right - yet was truly challenging what a “traditional” funeral should look like.

**We recently helped Alie to arrange a funeral for her husband Ed.**

It was important for Alie to have the chance to say goodbye properly, and to ensure that Ed's funeral reflected him in every way. She felt “you couldn't have put Ed in a box in life - so why do it in death”. We suggested a shroud instead of a coffin.

Alie wanted Ed's friends and family plus his church congregation to accompany him on his final journey from home to church for the funeral service.

We walked him down the road, past the Co-op and across the pedestrian crossing. The shroud was on a stretcher, and was beautifully decorated with flowers. But there is still something very stark about what we are doing - traffic stops and people look. However, the respect is palpable and the emotion in this simple walk is beautiful.

Ed, in his shroud, was brought into the church and was present throughout the service and afterwards. Whatever concerns and fears people held beforehand about the shroud were gone. In fact it was really interesting to see how quickly it became normal. You could really feel Ed's presence in a very real way.

I realise that this isn't for everyone. But what I want readers to take away from this account is “Be Brave”. Define your own ideas of what is “respectful” and dignified. Don't worry about what the neighbours might think.

If what you do is done with love, they will respect you for it.



## Alie's account

My beloved husband Ed passed away in hospital a month before Christmas and I was faced with arranging a funeral, something we had never really discussed. Where was I to begin?

A reputable funeral director was recommended to me but I began to think I did not want to end up in that time-standing-still moment using a black hearse, so I began to browse the internet for ideas and discovered 'A Natural Undertaking' with links to all sorts of original and personal funeral ideas.

I was amazed to discover what was permissible and possible when it comes to arranging a funeral. I was highly impressed by the website, the options and costs were clearly displayed, enabling me to make some good choices about what would be best for us.

The lovely and tender-hearted Fran came to visit me in my home. She patiently and sensitively listened to me and we talked everything through and a plan began to form. Afterwards she was always available to review and finalise the details and had all sorts of suggestions, enabling me to discover exactly what I wanted.

Whilst preparing the shroud for the funeral, she gave me the courage to bring Ed back home the night before the funeral. Fran and Carrie laid him out in my home with bunches of rosemary and lavender. We could be together one more time, far away from the formality of funeral parlours. Allowing myself and other family members to have much needed time just to be with him; a most wonderful and precious time.

We live across the road from the church where the service to celebrate his life was going to be held and the next day brothers and sons carried him on the stretcher, in a most memorable, moving procession.

He was there, at the front of the church, like he was a part of the service. The ceremony was followed by a lovely buffet back at the house, Ed remained under a tree kept company by those who wished to stay with him.

The cremation service was then held in Redditch, some distance to travel but so worth it. Our last journey to the countryside together which we always loved to do. Two of us could travel alongside him in the simple white people carrier belonging to Fran and Carrie. The view from the crematorium is stunning and such a lasting memory of his final place of rest.

**Thank you Fran and Carrie. You are awesome.  
Thank you for enabling this day to be so  
wonderfully, perfectly, special.**









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We understand that everyone is different, and every family has differing ideas and feelings about the kind of service that will be appropriate for them. We believe in giving each family the time to think things through, so that everything is just right. There is no rush, you decide what you want and in your own time.

So, whether you want a traditional, contemporary or alternative funeral, please feel free to call us or pop in for an informal chat.



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# FUNERAL PLANS

## Doncha hate em?

If you don't you certainly should. They are the spawn of the Devil. Of all the products dreamt up in the secret, black and midnight minds of financial services sorcerers, the pay-now-die-later funeral plan must rank as one of the rankest. It stinks. It's idiotic. And it's not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

A funeral plan purports to benefit consumers by enabling them to buy tomorrow's funeral at today's prices (or thereabouts). But it wasn't invented to benefit consumers, it was invented to benefit funeral directors. One of the biggest funeral planning companies even describes itself on its consumer-facing website as "owned and run entirely for the benefit of independent funeral directors".

The prepaid funeral plan addresses a problem peculiar to funeral directors. Their problem is this. However brilliant you are (and caring, dignified, etc), there's absolutely nothing you can do to persuade more people to die, and you can't sweet-talk them into doing it more than once.

So if you want to steal a march on your competitors, you need to stitch up tomorrow's market by bagging the biggest share you can get of it in advance — by taking tomorrow's clients off the market today.>>

ARTICLE BY  
CHARLES COWLING  
at The Good  
Funeral Guide





>> What a pity it ever started. As soon as one funeral firm does it, everyone else has to join in, like it or not. There's even a formula to work to.

If your sales of funeral plans are greater than 20 per cent of your sales of at-need funerals, you're okay. Less, and you're in doodoo.

### 'restoring face-to-face accountability'

The only way you can achieve this increased market share is by offering a product riddled with deficiencies and anomalies. In this, the age of the bespoke, personal funeral offering a high-value emotional and spiritual experience to the bereaved, you offer package funerals of the crudest, most mechanical sort.

*Package one:* Crudholme coffin (4 handles), no viewing, hearse straight to crem.

*Package two:* Greyfriars coffin, viewing, hearse and one.

*Package three...* but you know all this.

The problem for funeral directors is that when you invite people to buy a funeral for themselves, they tend to go for cheap.

### 'what price superb personal service?'

What price superb personal service in all this? Zilch. Experiential value to those left behind? Irrelevant. Funeral plans offer nobbut disposal in limited and highly unimaginative cosmetic options. Its appeal is highest to the put-me-out-with-the-rubbish brigade.

Here at the GFG we dreamed for years of something 100% consumer focussed but were told by all sorts of clever people that you can't always get what you want. What we dreamed of, above all, was restoring face-to-face accountability between buyer and seller - bereaved person and undertaker. Because only such a relationship can provide reliable consumer protection. Yes, we think

[Click here for more information](#)



it is of paramount importance that a funeral director is chosen on merit by the customer at the point of need.

Seek and you shall find, promised St Matthew. And, d'you know, he's right. Eventually we found John Taplin of Open Prepaid Funerals who undertook to make our dreams reality. Between us we cooked up a savings vehicle that we're very proud of. We call it GFGPlan.

The limpid, luminous beauty of GFGPlan is its utter simplicity. It's a pot. Into which you put money. As and when. It grows at around 4%

pa. None of your money is spent on salaries, commissions or a free biro. None. GFGPlan empowers consumers to buy precisely what they want and no more than they want. And it pays a proper price to funeral directors.

Is it risk-free?

No, not if there was a total global financial catastrophe. But if every GFG Plan-holder died today, the trust fund would be able to cover every single one of them. Can any other prepaid plan provider can say that?

## Declaration of interest:

The Good Funeral Guide CIC receives £25 for every plan sold.

We're not a bit embarrassed about that.







Photograph with kind permission from Mathilda Culina, photographer

Rosie comments:

What I believe Charles has failed to emphasise and get across is ...





This plan is a family savings pot, that pays for any funeral related expense; beyond the normal undertakers' plans that limit you to their company and it's own unknown future efforts and products.

Any money left over after the funeral, rolls over and pays for the next funeral in the family /group. At this point another family member can join the 'group'. Most regular plans will keep any funds that may be left over. Especially when the fund holders have phoned round different firms, farming out the funeral to the cheapest bidder.

It is ring fenced from estate valuations or means tested assessments for social care etc.

**Wonderful, I wish it every success.**



# Our Influence Is Spreading

The NDC and Association of Natural Burial Grounds have been the driving force of the global growth of Natural burial since 1993. The Americans are catching up but mainland Europe has been slow to change due to restrictive practices and attitudes within the church, industry and state. However, it is no surprise to me that it is in another liberal European country that the first mainland European site has opened.

Congratulations to our good friend Joyce Sengers. Here are some lovely photos of her extensive site in the Netherlands.

Congratulations go too to John Hooper in Leicester and also Richard and Sarah Vale in Powys who have also recently gained planning permission for their sites.

For a full list of member sites please go to the Natural Death Centre [website](#).





[more beautiful photos>>](#)





Joyce Sengers







and some more >>









simply stunning eh?





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“As in the eye of nature, they have lived,  
so in the eye of nature let them die”

William Wordsworth 1888



The Willows is a flourishing family run  
**award winning** natural burial ground located  
in the Leicestershire countryside. It is  
a **peaceful environment** where people can  
remember and reflect in the serenity of nature.





A photograph of a forest path during the golden hour. The sun is low in the sky, creating a warm, golden glow that filters through the dense canopy of trees. The path is narrow and leads into the distance, flanked by tall grasses and undergrowth. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

The Natural Death Centre

You can trust us to tell  
you the truth...





If you would like to know more about family led funerals but aren't quite ready to make that call, why not listen to Claire on the video above and see how you feel afterwards.

# Only With Love

family led home funerals

gently changing death care



## Only With Love

family led home funerals

gently changing death care one family at a time



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Help to create a ceremony and arrange a family-led funeral for your loved one.

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claire@onlywithlove.co.uk M: 07881 641583 T: 01865 362984

### Imagine

- being listened to with compassion, sensitivity, warmth and grace
- feeling nurtured and empowered to keep your loved one at home when they die
- being guided to lovingly take care of their body naturally, like you did in life
- the only hands to tenderly touch your loved one are your own gentle, loving ones
- having more precious time to say goodbye in your way, in your own home
- helping to create a personal ceremony filled with deep meaning and lasting value
- saving substantially on the arrangement costs
- developing a strong and nurturing relationship with one person who supports you throughout
- having the opportunity to stay connected, participate and give back to your community
- knowing all this is legal, affordable and possible.

Our Vision Families who feel their loved ones are cared for from our work to create a significant difference.  
Claire Turbham



Support and guidance in how to care for your loved one at home after they die.



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# With Love

Some funerals

are one family at a time



Help to create  
a ceremony  
and arrange  
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## Imagine

- being listened to with compassion, sensitivity, warmth and grace
- feeling nurtured and empowered to keep/bring you loved one home when they die
- being guided to lovingly take care of their body naturally, like you did in life
- the only hand to tenderly touch your loved one are your own gentle, loving ones
- Having more precious time to say goodbye in your way, in your own home
- helping to create a personal ceremony filled with deep meaning and lasting value
- saving substantially on the arrangement costs
- developing a strong and nurturing relationship with one person who supports you throughout
- having the opportunity to stay connected, participate and give back to your community
- knowing all this is legal, affordable and possible.

For those families who feel this choice may be right for them we seek to make a significant difference.

Claire Turnham





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