

The Natural Death Centre's official magazine

more to death

eleventh edition 2018

**The Funeral
of Jon
Underwood**

**LOVE
at the
END**

Plus

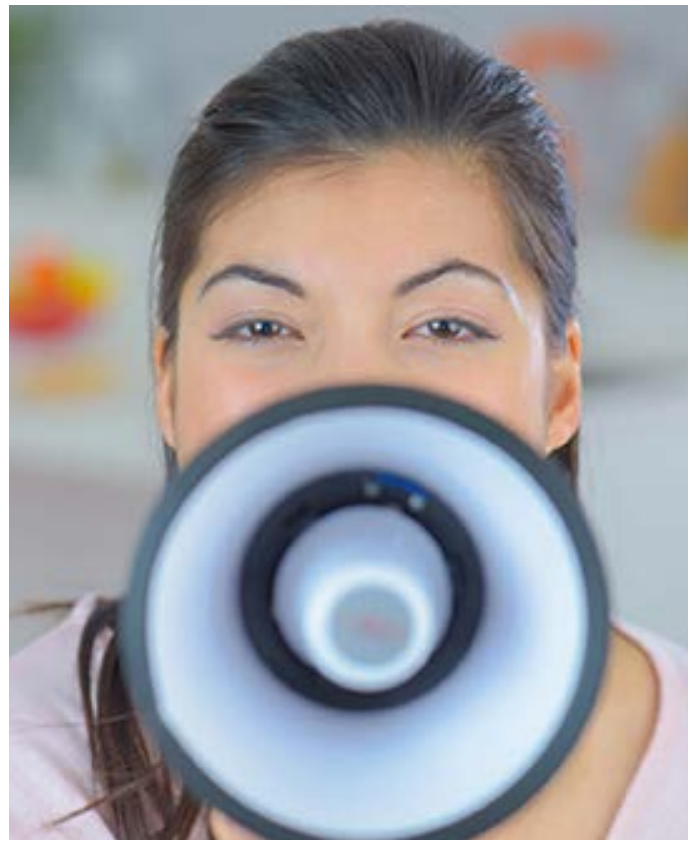
We ask - Is the funeral
industry becoming
The DOMAIN of
the **FEMININE?**

UNCOVER HIDDEN AND AMAZING OPTIONS
SURROUNDING DEATH, DYING AND FUNERALS

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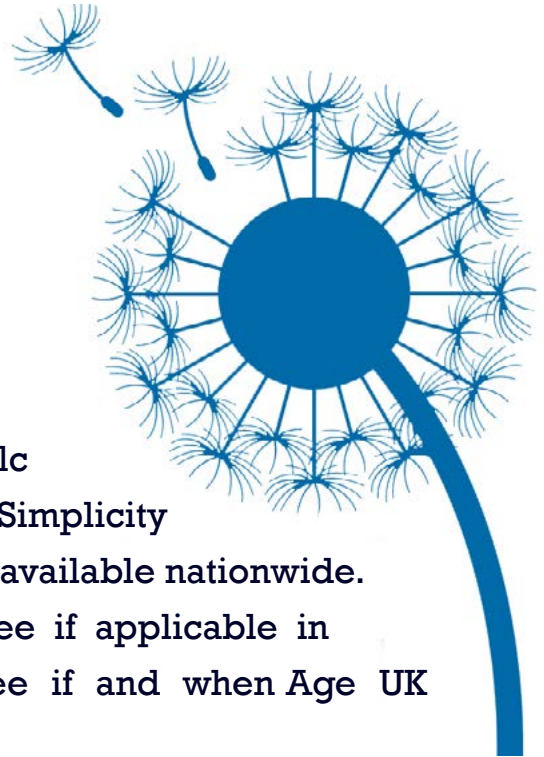


Editor's Comments

I would like to thank all our contributors, especially Louise Winter for the wonderful account of our friend and colleague, Jon Underwood's funeral. Page 35.

I am expecting some flack over the article on page 8 - 'A gut-full of funeral directors'. Sorry, but my Yorkshire heritage has ingrained a pathological propensity to say it how it is. My dad, Prof. Bill Inman was the same and Michael O'Donnell said of him that like Margaret McMillan being described by J. B. Priestly, he was "one of those beastly people who are always bringing up awkward subjects and making respectable people feel uncomfortable". So be it.

Late 2017 saw a victory in arbitration for one family who were refunded the cost of a funeral (over £7000) from the funeral director for breach of contract following the most disgusting, monumental 'cock up'. We now wait to see what the trade association will do, if anything, with their guilty member! I am glad to be able to offer the family moral support throughout this ordeal.



The close of the year also saw Dignity Funerals plc broaden their direct cremation service, with their Simplicity Cremations Prepaid Funeral Plans now becoming available nationwide. Excellent. Shame it doesn't include the doctor's fee if applicable in England and Wales. It will be interesting to see if and when Age UK take this plan on board.

Not sure what to make of the new hospice funeral franchise. How can it be a continuity of service? What Hospices need is informed staff who can empower families, with sound advice about all their funeral options. Even better, that every hospice has its own mortuary and offers DIY families some mortuary space. FOR FREE. Doubling up as facilities to hold bodies so that families are not rushed into choosing a funeral director. This would be a much simpler and less contentious option. We are always very keen to offer guidance, facts and advice to all hospice staff and other medical gatekeepers.

Let's hope that there are some really good developments in 2018.

Don't forget to smell the roses. Send me contributions to this e-zine and ring if you need any guidance or a listening ear.

Have a wonderful new year everyone.

Rosie Inman-Cook

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A Gut-Full of Funeral Directors

18 years I have spent working alongside them. 18 years of watching them bang on about how worthy they are, how essential, how generous, respectful and sensitive. What, thoroughly upstanding members of their communities they are, all that charity fundraising!!!

I am a unique observer, sitting at the NDC helpline desk, taking calls from the public who are having a less than harmonious time with the 'profession'. Not all bad though, yesterday, A. F. France and Sons stimulated some brilliant feedback from a family who phoned on another matter. Well done chaps! I also, absolutely, appreciate all the revolting and potentially disturbing sides of their job, the coroners' contract work for example.

**Most of the public are not litigious,
they are not after compensation**

Another role I have is to vet and mediate the bad reviews that come in via the Funeral Advisor website. Those with serious complaints, those who get given a token discount, a bunch of flowers but no apology - even those having the frighteners put on them, in an effort to shut them up.

The things that I have heard over the years would scare the pants off even the most hardened, pragmatic 'once you're dead you're dead' type. Most of the public are not litigious, they are not after compensation. >>





>>All they want is an apology when things go wrong and an explanation as to how on earth it happened. More importantly they want to know that the funeral company has taken note, acknowledged the mistake and put some system in place that will hopefully prevent it from happening to another family.

Not to be fobbed off, lied to, bullshitted and even blamed. (this is starting to sound like other scandals and abuse situations!).

I'm not sure if it is because the insurance companies have instructed the industry to never admit fault or ever say sorry. The result is a deeply wounding callousness and at times the undertakers even turn on the family blaming them in some way. "Rosie", they say, "don't you worry about that family, they are not right in the head", "they have a pathological grief disorder" or "they are just looking for someone to take their grief out on".

Now, of course I know that there is always the odd family or individual for whom nothing is ever right, I'm not talking about them. I am talking about everyday people who have been horribly let down at the most awful time. Wrong bodies, wrong coffins, un-dug graves, bodies left out to rot. Serious faults, not simply the wrong name on paperwork, missing vehicles or flowers not turning up at the right place or time.

Everyone makes mistakes
but it is how these
are handled that matters

*My personal little grumble is the chronic problem of funeral directors failing to supply the correct coffin sizes to cemeteries who of course want to dig the right size grave. What the hell is their job if not to measure and convey coffin sizes accurately? A core business activity you would have thought. **Hopeless.**>>*

>>The directors bluster around the trade shows, all puffed up and full of themselves. Their arrangers can be ignorant of the law and actual consumer choice, they mislead folk and are letting the public down.

I was inspired to write this piece as I have recently been comparing notes with others who work on the periphery - celebrants, grave diggers, mortuary assistants and even some funeral directors.

What percentage of funeral directors in your area would you trust with the body of your child or partner?

We all feel the same. I thought I just had rather a skewed view of the industry, that a disproportionate ratio of complaints had coloured my opinion.

Putting a figure to it I feel that my years of experience would not endear me to, or make me happy to trust 90% of funeral directors. And you know what? My fellow witnessers came up with broadly the same figure. One the other day put it at only 5%.

How awful is that? That people working around funeral directors, who witness behind the scenes and are privy to their attitudes, have no faith in the vast majority. Sorry, but virtually to a man that is what they all feel.

Read the trade magazines and you get no hint or even a glimmer of any self doubt or inward scrutiny. They are “pulling together in the public’s interest” Are they my ****! Their only interest would seem the Status Quo, the latest fleet of shiny black vehicles and their own successes.

Will the new regulation of funeral directors do anything to address these failings?

I doubt it. I fear it will be the powerful main stream who will be in control.

So our message to the public remains the same. SHOP AROUND, funeral directors are not all the same. Make them dance to your tune, after all you are paying enough for it. Many are intrinsically lazy or controlled by head office and want everyone to have the same, what we here in the bunker call the, 'formula funeral'; easy, quick, profitable.

The NDC provides a free pdf of questions to ask a funeral director and even a contract to get them to sign – usually it is the other way round!



So, when my time comes who do I want handling my body?

There are good folk, dotted about the country who I would not hesitate to employ for myself or the funeral of someone I love. In the meantime I will keep on doing DIY for as long as I can and hope that my kids have gained some confidence and know-how along the way.

Good luck and in the meantime I will keep asking that question.

Rosie



Granny's A-Wake

I just wanted to let you know about the celebration we had recently to celebrate my mum, Heather Herbert's life so far. She is 89 and lives with me. She is pretty much immobile and bed bound. She has often talked about how she'd rather be dead and death doesn't scare her, it's the getting there that concerns her.

We have talked a lot about what her funeral would look like too.

Initially she said she didn't mind as she wouldn't be there, but then it developed. She feels it's such a shame that people say wonderful things about the deceased at their funerals and how much better it would be if they were said to the person while they are still alive.

Mum suggested that she would like what she called a 'pre-funeral funeral'. I thought it wasn't a very catchy name and enlisted the help of the wonderful celebrant who took my step-father's funeral in 2009. He was so good that a few people asked me how he knew my step-father.

He suggested calling it 'This is Your Life' party and my teenage niece later termed it: 'Granny's A-Wake' – which we all thought was genius and hilarious.

Mum moved down a few years ago to live with me in Eastbourne on the south coast. However, Peter Wyllie, the celebrant offered to come down from Lutterworth at the end of last year and interviewed Mum to get her life story. I then searched through images and found ones appropriate for different parts of the story and Mum suggested pieces of music and poems that she likes. The celebrant put it all together into a wonderful presentation.>>



Mum suggested that she would like what she called a 'pre-funeral funeral'



'a bargain by comparison to standard funeral costs'

>>Last Saturday, a local hotel hosted Mum's party. Close friends and family arrived and drank prosecco before sitting down to the service/presentation, after that time anyone who wanted to, stood up and told Mum what she means to them. We then had a sit-down lunch and lots of eating and drinking occurred.

When the time comes, whenever that may be, Mum wants just a direct to crematorium funeral... something I will look at doing ourselves as I don't really see the need for a funeral director. She then wants her ashes dropped at sea by whichever of her children wants to get involved along with my stepfather's ashes – he is in an urn in her room.



Saturday was a joyful, uplifting occasion. Mum was able to hear the wonderful things people think of her and we have some really warm, wonderful memories – the whole thing for 32 people with the celebrant and lots to eat and drink was only £1500 in the South East.

A bargain by comparison to standard funeral costs.



Caer Caradoc sunset from Enchmarsh

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Previous editions of Death re



Why Go Direct?

Believe it or not, direct cremation - which is the most simple form of cremation – is not that new.

Anyone living in the USA or Canada, and even Australia, will be familiar with this funeral option, as it's actually been around for years. The UK is just about coming to terms with accepting direct cremation (or direct disposal as it is sometimes known) as a recent, but now mainstream choice.

So, why would anyone want to choose a “no funeral” funeral for themselves, or a family member?

The answer is surprisingly diverse. OK, so it's a cheaper option. That goes without saying, as only the essential elements of providing the service are involved. But, the majority of people choosing to “go direct” appear to be doing so as a positive choice.

As an undertaker whose connections with the trade go back longer than I care to remember (well in actual fact it's over 47 years), I was taught that the overriding principle of offering funeral service was to give the client what they want - as long as it was legal!

Many aspects of the trade have moved-on since that date, with large groups and corporations becoming more prominent, and funeral homes becoming more plush. Hearses and limousines have always played a big part in traditional funerals, though few people realise the substantial cost of purchasing these specialist vehicles new. **It's no wonder that traditional funerals are not cheap.**

There will always be a demand for the traditional and alternative forms of arrangement, as people choose to express their feelings, following a death. After all, it's something that can only happen once, so it's important that it ticks all the right boxes.>>



>>So, apart from those families that want to take the opportunity of saving themselves the not inconsiderable financial benefits of “going direct”, there are the people that have no religious beliefs, the folk that think it’s all too much fuss, and those of us that are content with the most simple possible exit.

As an undertaker, I have personally arranged direct cremations over the years for the most humble of folk, and perhaps the not-so humble. Composers, artists, doctors, nurses, lawyers, professors, scientists, and indeed, people from all walks of life.

Perhaps the more unexpected choice of direct cremation was by several unconnected clients who were gentlemen “of the cloth”. It would appear that a less formal exit sat comfortably with their beliefs.

Looking at several non-UK funeral arrangements, we can see that often, the more important the person that has died, the more simple the coffin and service. From the plain coffin utilised on the last Papal funeral to that of the last late Saudi King, who was buried in an unmarked, public grave.

So, what should you expect if you decide to choose a direct cremation?

With several specialist firms now providing this option, and an increasing number of traditional funeral directors including it on their published price list, it may still be prudent to obtain more than one quote. Having said that, the cost of the service may well be dictated by location and requirements.

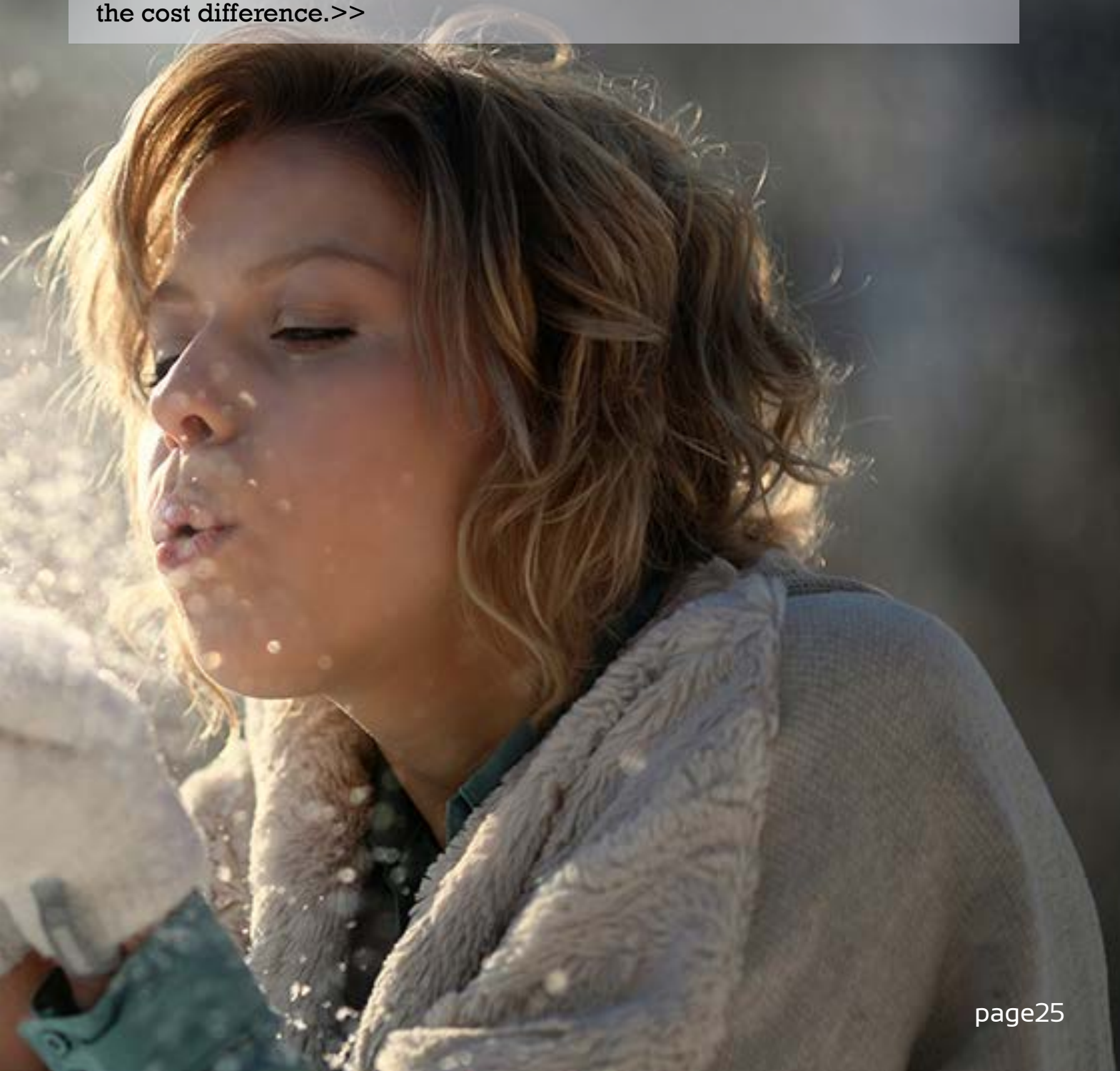
The main considerations, and the reasons for cost variations are:

- Has the death occurred in hospital or outside a hospital environment.
- Is the Coroner involved
- The geographic location of the death
- Instructions relating to the ashes (cremated remains)

Local cost of cremation i.e. the crematorium's fees

Certain firms offer all-inclusive packages, whilst others prefer to cost the service according to circumstances.

Several direct cremation providers utilise the nearest crematorium, whilst others may be inclined to work with one or more regional facilities – hence the cost difference.>>



>>Some will allow attendance by family or friends at the crematorium – whilst others do not.

Also, there can be a variation. Whilst the service is usually directly provided by the firm that you instructed, one or two direct cremation providers use a sub-contractor. Be mindful that some of the UK websites offering direct cremation are just agents, and not actual funeral directors.

It's sensible to know from the outset just who will be providing the actual service, and it is reassuring that an increasing number of such providers are members of a recognised trade organisation, such as NAFD or SAIF, who adhere to a code of practice, and whose standards have been audited by inspection.

Most direct cremation providers will need payment prior to the cremation going ahead, with some insisting upon payment at the time of instruction, over the phone, by card. The main reason for this is to keep administration costs to a minimum, thus keeping down the final account cost.

The most asked question about direct cremation is usually “how long does the process take?”

With so many recent newspaper articles wrongly implying that the person that has died is taken immediately after death to a crematorium, it's easy to understand the confusion. That may be the case in the USA, but in the UK, the death has to be registered, and the cremation certificates provided by no less than three doctors, have to be in place first. In theory, the whole process could be provided within 24 hours. In practice, the time frame is likely to be typically 7-10 days.

Choosing a direct cremation can not only simplify what may be seen by some as an ordeal, but it opens up the options for a less pressured, softer goodbye.

Nick Gandon

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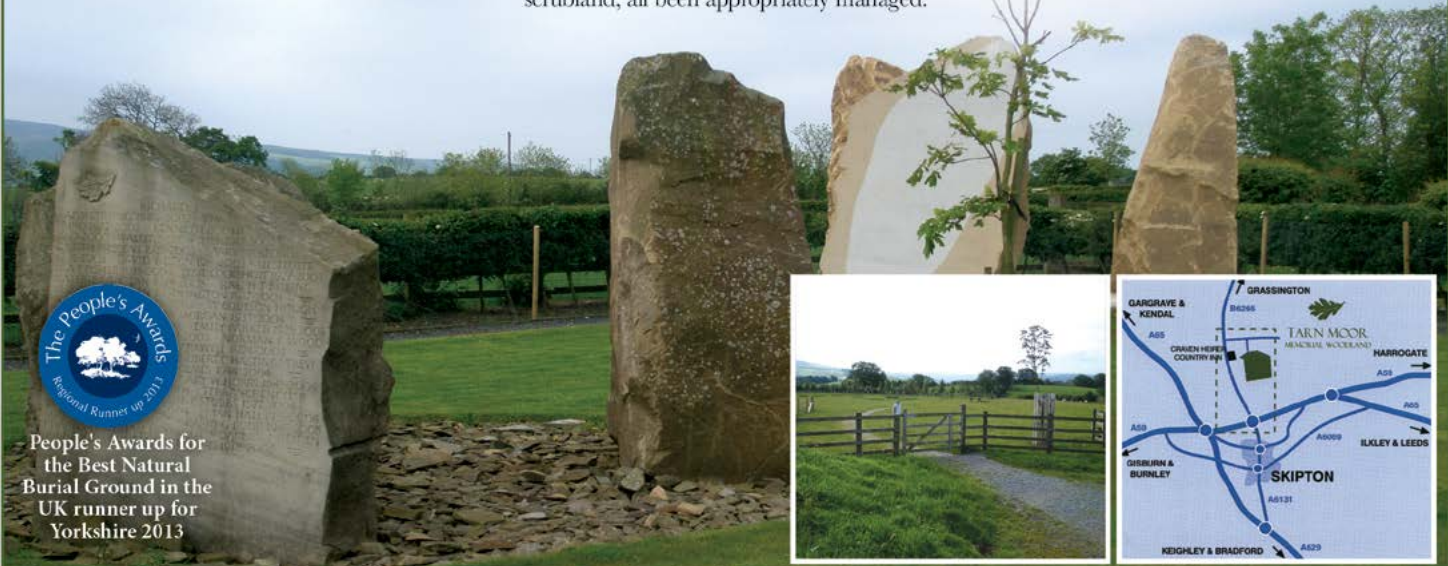
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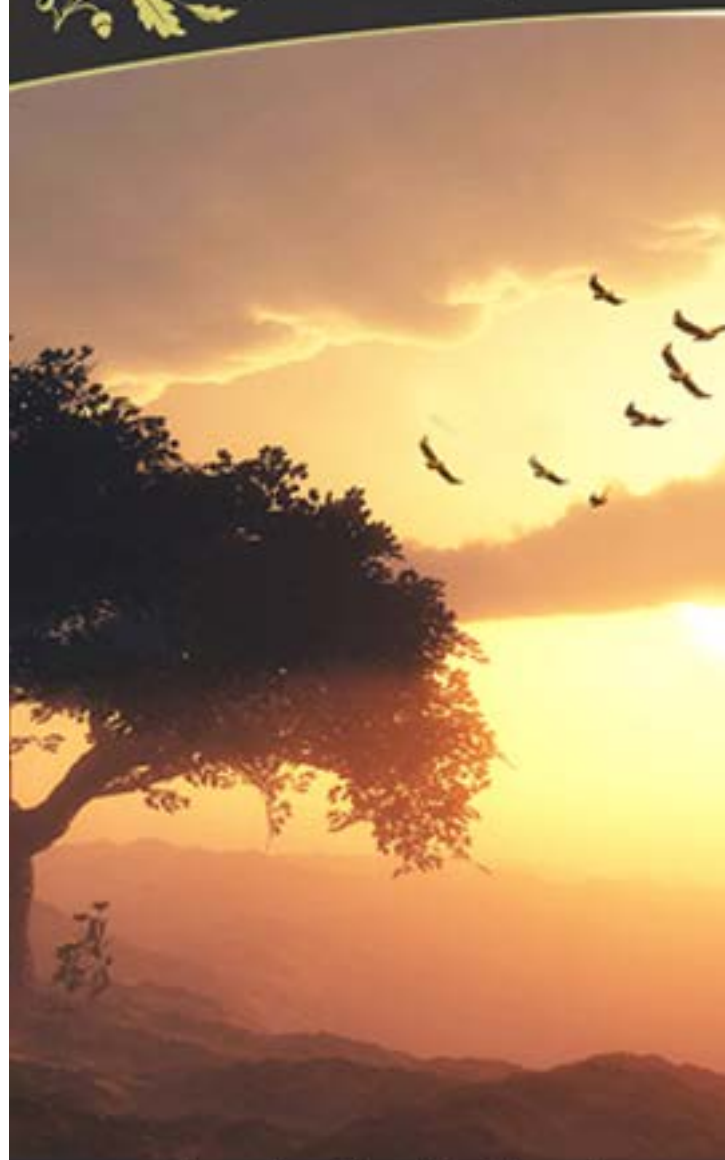
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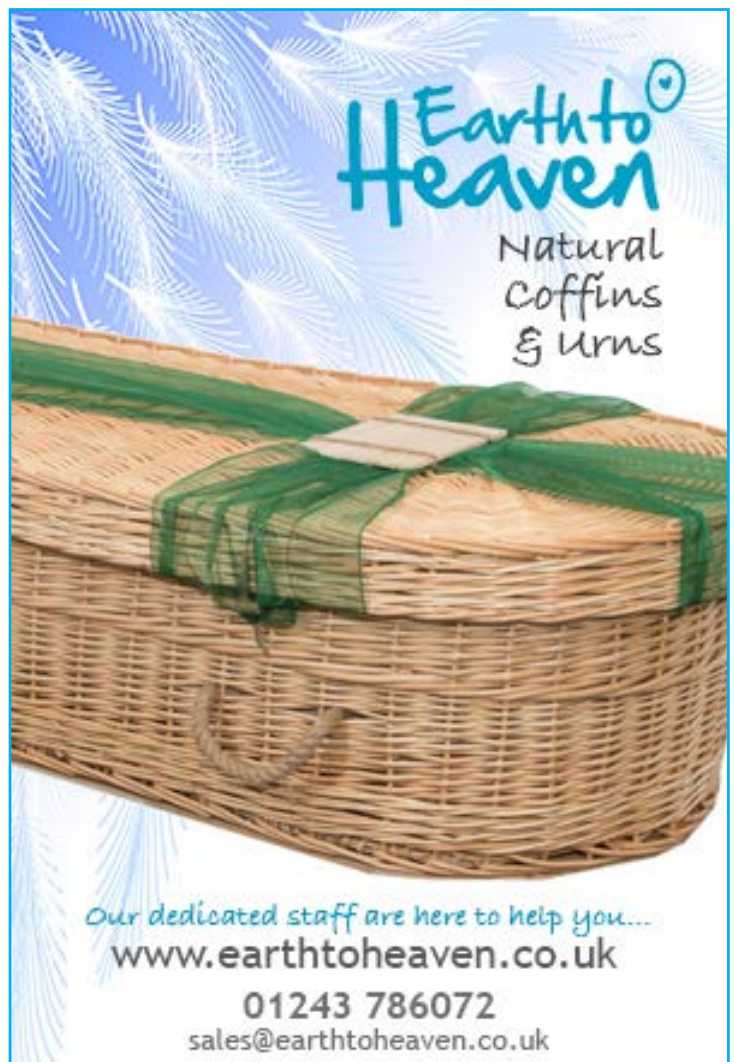
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Who Looks After Me?

There's no such thing as 'just another day in the office' in my book. Every day is different, refreshing, challenging, rewarding and yes exhausting.

We all know the funeral business is full on and can be extremely stressful. My ethos is, as in life generally, you only get out what you put into it.

As an independent 'one man band' funeral director, I know only too well the pressures a funeral director can experience. Being part of a family's life for a few weeks, feeling their emotions, their pain, their concerns, helping them make special choices, supporting them unconditionally, being constantly available and for a short but vital time, being their friend during very sad circumstances.>>





>>All this helping, guidance and caring can be a strain. Funeral directors look after their families, but who looks after us? The simple answer is 'we do'.

Our tasks are endless right from that initial contact. Personally, I love to meet families in our conservatory looking out over the Yorkshire Dales, a relaxing environment for all concerned come together.

The practicality of administration; making sure the family are given choices; managing to fulfil all their wishes; arranging the ceremony; maybe helping with the flowers and the order of service; encouraging family involvement; having that listening ear; giving clear, simple, but well intentioned advice - right down to emotional support and empathy.

Whilst these roles can be extremely rewarding and satisfying, they are at times, intense and exhausting. I am more than aware that to be able to fulfil my work, I have to be on top form, fit and healthy in body and mind.

So who looks after me?

My husband, my friends and my family, and me. I make a conscious effort to make time for me. Working from home helps being able to pop tea into the oven during a computer break, being able to take Mum shopping on a quiet morning or simply having a friend round for coffee eases the pressure.

I'm a list sort of a girl, whether for business or pleasure. How satisfying getting through the list, and what a feeling when you tick one of those 'things to do' off.

My lovely husband always knows just when to take me out for tea or sit me down with a glass of wine. We make time for short breaks in our caravan and walks with the dogs in The Dales. We are always close enough to come home in the case of an emergency or at the other end of the phone.>>







>>Of course the much needed longer holiday is covered by Having said that, I have organised the preliminaries of a funeral from a beach on The Isles of Scilly and another from Iceland!

The simple tasks around the home are a joy and quite therapeutic. I love dead-heading flowers, scraping newly dug potatoes, feeding the chickens and dare I say it, even ironing. A ride out on my tractor and time spent with friends brings normality to what can be a busy and challenging role. It is lovely to do a talk for a local group or some voluntary time with a local hospice or nursing home.

I suppose the ultimate indulgence I have, is a relaxing, revigorating hour or so in the hot tub. I have even been known to be in it, watching the sun rise with a cup of Yorkshire tea, a couple of hours before a funeral! It is time to touch base with nature and reflect on the day ahead. The importance of caring for yourself, when you care for others is paramount – you need clarity and balance to be able to remember all those tiny details that make a funeral special.

Take a leaf out of my book. Take time to smell the roses..

Article by Wendy Clarkson.
Find out more about her work -
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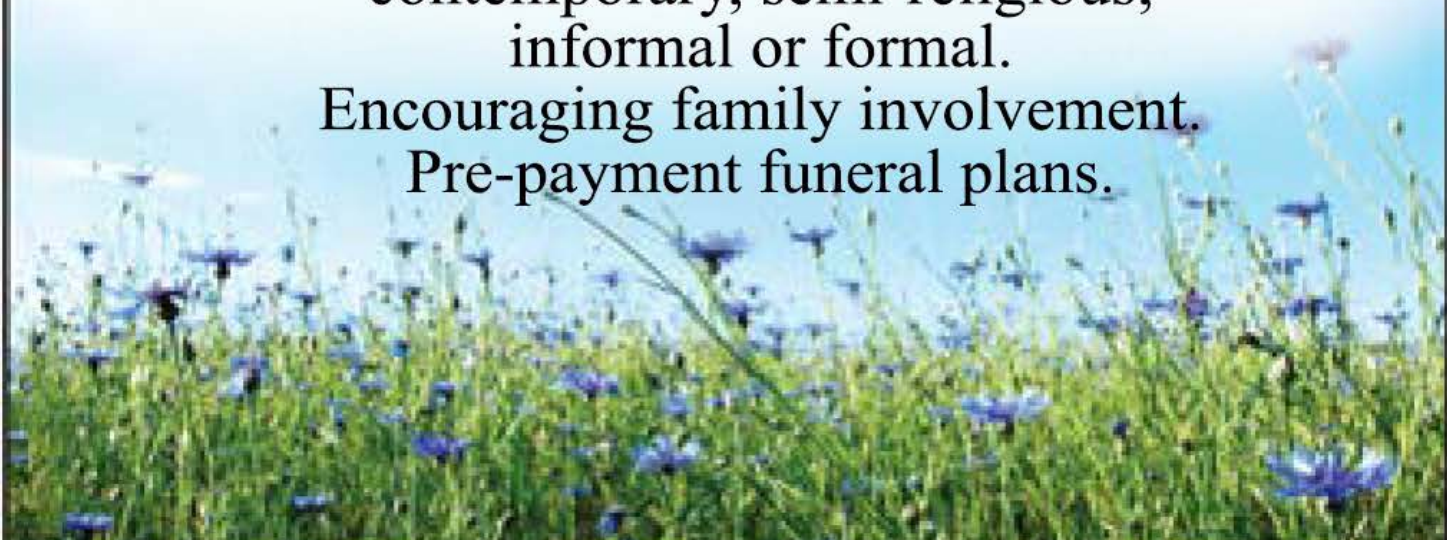
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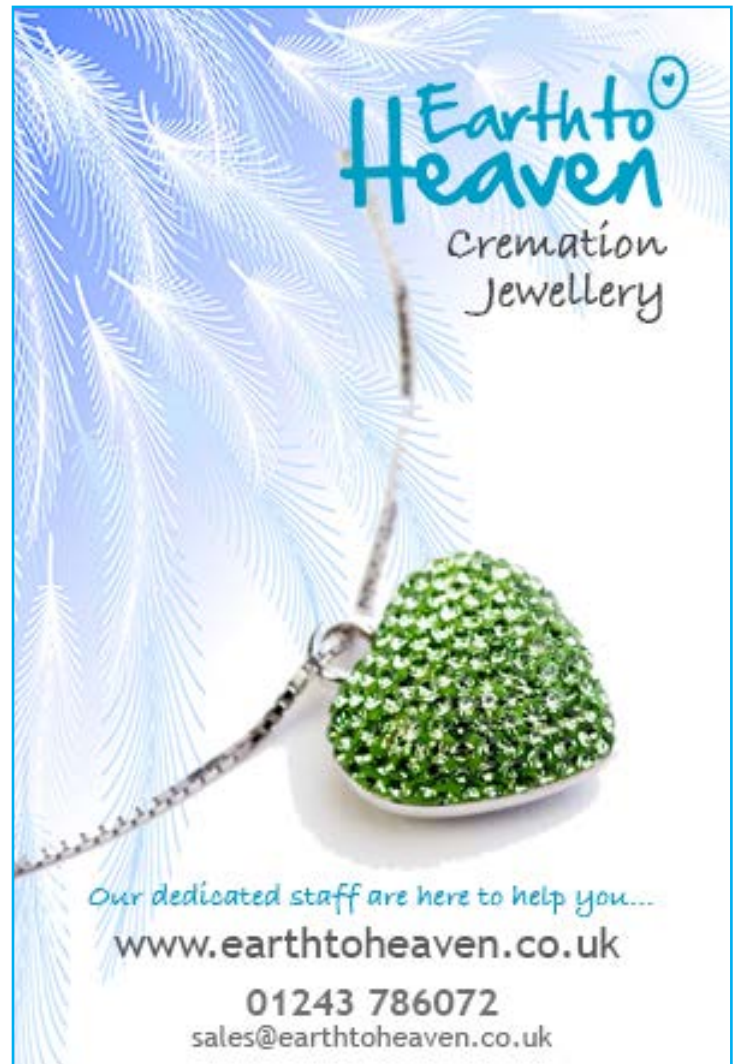
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The Late Jon Underwood



newyorktimes

I was on a night bus home through London with a phone that was rapidly running out of battery when I received a text from Jools, the sister of a friend of mine. She asked if I was available to speak to her as it was rather urgent.>>

>>“We’ve had some terrible news,” she told me, after I’d rushed home, charged my phone and called her, just before midnight. The line was crackling and I couldn’t quite make out what she was saying. “... had a brain haemorrhage and died this afternoon.”

“I am so sorry to hear that,” I said, wondering who she was talking about and wondering whether a friend of a friend of a friend had died and perhaps their family needed some advice about funerals. “Sorry, who did you say had died?”

“Jon.”


The Jon she was talking about was Jon Underwood - her brother, my friend and colleague, and the founder of Death Cafe.

It was inconceivable that the man who had started Death Cafe had died

But it was true; Jon had died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 44 from undiagnosed acute promyelocytic leukaemia on 25th June 2017.

Back in 2011, Jon invited a handful of people to gather in his front room for an open and honest conversation and death over tea and cake. Just six years later, over 5300 Death Cafes have been hosted around the world. The movement received international press coverage, even making it to the front page of the New York Times.

One week Jon was taking his two children to school and planning the future of Death Cafe; the following week, we were helping to plan his funeral.>>

A man with a shaved head, wearing a red and white floral patterned short-sleeved shirt and dark trousers, is sitting on a large, moss-covered gravestone in a cemetery. The gravestone behind him is dark and has some text on it, including "M. JOHN WILLIAMS" and "who died the 22. Febru". The background shows other gravestones and trees, all partially covered in moss. The image is framed by a teal wavy border.

thetimes

**‘over 5300 Death Cafes
have been hosted
around the world’**



>>Jools, his sister, asked me to step in and announce his death to the press in relation to his life's work, the Death Cafe movement. Inevitably, the matter of his funeral came up during my discussions with his family and I passed on the many offers of support from the funeral community in London and beyond, as so many funeral professionals had known and loved Jon and his work and were keen to do everything they could to give Jon a beautiful goodbye.

Hasina Zaman and Allistair Anderson from Compassionate Funerals in Wanstead were the obvious choice to take care of Jon and help his family with the funeral arrangements.

They were not only friends of Jon's but had also spent many hours wandering around the City of London Cemetery with him discussing the launch of their funeral service in Wanstead.



He'd given them a particularly hard time about the use of the word compassionate in their company name and how that would be reflected in their work. They were and are exemplary funeral directors who were local to Jon's family home in East London, and I couldn't think of anyone better to take care of Jon and his family.

Allistair and I were invited to Jon's house on a Saturday afternoon to discuss the funeral. I'd been there several times before, either to enjoy a cup of tea with Jon in his garden or to discuss matters related to Death Cafe. Standing outside his house on the street in Hackney preparing to go in, we took a deep breath and knocked at the door.

It was like Jon was there, only he wasn't. He was there in the faces of his children, in his sister's and his mum's eyes and in the features of his lovely wife Donna, who he had talked about with such pride whenever I saw him.>>

>>“What will be the role of the funeral director?” Jon’s step-dad asked, as we all sat around the kitchen table discussing the funeral.

“To be as unobtrusive as possible,” Alistair replied. “I’m here to facilitate you doing whatever you need to do.” I nodded at him. He was the perfect choice of funeral director - gentle, supportive and discreet.

Jon’s funeral took place in the beautiful setting of the Jamyang Buddhist Centre in London on Thursday 6th July. Jon had managed the centre from 2000 to 2002 and had studied under Geshe Tashi, the centre’s resident teacher. It had been Jon’s dream to hold funerals at the centre; he’d been busy putting together detailed plans for how that might work. With an irony he would have appreciated, it was the plans he’d put together that formed the foundation of his funeral.

Jon arrived at the centre in an electric eco-hearse made by Brahms - a Nissan Leaf which had been converted into a hearse and was on its first ever outing as a vehicle available for hire for funerals.

He was carried into the centre by his friends and colleagues from the funeral profession and the Death Cafe community. Jon’s rainbow willow coffin (from Ecoffins) stayed in the main temple space whilst everyone drank tea and ate homemade cake from Jamyang’s beautiful cafe in the sunlit gardens, preparing for the funeral ceremony to take place.>>



**‘it was the plans he’d
put together that formed
the foundation of his funeral’**





>>Jon's funeral took place in Jamyang's main temple space, a converted courthouse. The ceremony was led by Geshe Tashi, who paid tribute to his student and friend of many years. Jon's wife, mother, father, step-father, sister, brother and children all paid tribute to Jon with moving speeches.

After the funeral, everyone travelled to Jon's local pub, the Chesham Arms, on his street in Hackney to continue singing, playing music and sharing tributes. Jon had been part of a community initiative to save the pub from being taken over by property developers and he lived just a few doors away.

Jon was cremated the following day at the City of London Crematorium.

Jon's funeral was beautiful, touching and personal. It reflected how important Jon had been to so many different communities. All of his family, including his two children, were involved in every part of the funeral from choosing his coffin to being part of the ceremony on the day. It was every bit as inspired, inspiring and memorable as Jon himself.

Article by Louise Winter of Poetic Endings.

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A Day in the Life of

Higher Ground Meadow

**For the past two years Joanna and Tom Vassie
have won the prestigious 'People's Award' for
being the Best Natural Burial Site in the UK from
the Natural Death Centre.**



With fierce competition from other excellent sites across the UK, Higher Ground Meadow has had such glowing reports from their families - the award is so well deserved. I thought I would spend the day with Jo and Tom and see how the 'experts' do things.>>



>>Jo's welcome is warm and she wastes no time in taking me on a tour of the burial site in her buggy. Dressed in her jeans and T shirt, and the obligatory wellies, I quickly realise that Jo is happy meandering up and down the country lanes in her buggy, passing through her meadow and woodland, taking care of her land and her 'guests' with a sharp eye for detail. This lady has more energy than a woman half her age.

There is a peacefulness about the meadow, a silence, a sense of being at one with nature. The wind blows through the trees, the grass sways elegantly with it – it is the perfect place to be 'laid to rest'.

Jo and her husband have a long history of being in business; a hair salon; boutique; farm animal food supplies...the list is endless and the journey of buying, selling, gaining momentum and learning to work the land seems to have been preparing them for all that Underhill Farm has become. Not just a working farm (Peter is a sheep farmer), this one hundred and thirty acre farm is the home of the award winning, Higher Ground Meadow Natural Burial Site.

Following the birth of the burial ground, there quickly followed a funeral director side of things enabling them to look after a family's wishes from start to finish. but of course they can still accommodate other funeral directors in the area.>>



there is a peacefulness about
the meadow, a silence...





‘We don’t run it as a business’ Jo tells me.
‘We just do what feels right. You don’t need
qualifications, just treat the deceased as
you would like to be treated’.

>>It is obvious these people would look after your loved one with great care and dignity – that their body would be handled with gentle respect and their final journey would be one to remember.

With many awards under their belts, Jo and Tom offer the cheapest, most bespoke and personal service to their families with hundreds of people having already chosen and paid for their burial plots in advance, keen to know they will rest peacefully in this special part of England’s green and pleasant land, and it really is the most exquisite countryside – on a good day you can see as far as Glastonbury Tor, just over 20 miles away.

In the heart of lush, green, abundant Dorset, there is an air of anticipation as Jo and Tom prepare for a big funeral at their beloved Higher Ground Meadow - the day starts early in their beautiful, timber framed barn, tastefully designed and furnished to accommodate funeral ceremonies, comfortably seating up to 100 people.

Jo hands me a feather duster on a long pole to look for cobwebs. ‘I do this for every funeral’ she says. The cushions are fluffed up and all pointed in the same direction. The windows are gleaming.>>



>>With compassion, discretion and experience, Jo and Tom guide the family through the process of the ceremony, the journey through the meadow, carrying the coffin on the bier to a carefully chosen burial plot.

‘How would **you** like it to be?’ I hear her ask the son who is a little bit overaught with the task of planning his mum’s funeral. ‘I have some flower petals here’ she says gently, showing him a basket of freshly picked petals. ‘Would **you** like them to be scattered on mum’s coffin?’

His mood changes immediately, the tension dissolved – professional, appropriate, compassionate. Wow!

The barn looks out over the meadow – people arriving in the car park are impressed immediately. As they settle, the anticipation of something special fills the air, music plays, there are tears, memories, a slide-show and something else... a sense of peace, a feeling of acceptance, the celebration of a life passed.

I look at Jo and there are tears in her eyes. Even with over three hundred funerals under her belt, these moments still move her.

The family request that the actual burial remains private, but as the mourners return up the gentle incline of the meadow, back to the barn, I listen to their reflections of the day. 'So beautiful'. 'Peaceful'. 'It's what I want'. 'Grandma would have loved it.'

Wow, I think to myself – truly impressed.>>



>>Jo and Tom wait until every single person has left the burial ground before they even think about closing the door – they hold the space almost invisibly, answering questions people may have patiently, giving directions but never moving people on before they are ready.

They have a busy day ahead of them, they have to fill the grave in (they even do that themselves!), there is another family to see later, one of the meadows needs mowing....

What comes next?

The next adventure is a round barrow - a stone burial chamber in which ashes can be held, forever. It is the first such building in Dorset for thousands of years and Jo and Tom are keen to get started on the construction having waited a long time to have their planning permission approved. A round barrow consists of a round of earth raised over a burial site and the structure, to be built on Higher Ground Meadow, will consist of stone chambers and passageways on the inside.

Its walls will be formed with niches where urns containing cremated remains will be placed. Once the stonework is finished the whole structure will be covered in earth where wild flowers will grow, leaving just an entrance point .

Purbeck stone will be crafted by local tradesmen to create a beautiful, comforting and spiritual resting place.

‘We expect it to be completed by mid 2018’ says Jo.

There really is no stopping her...

Report by Jayne Lea

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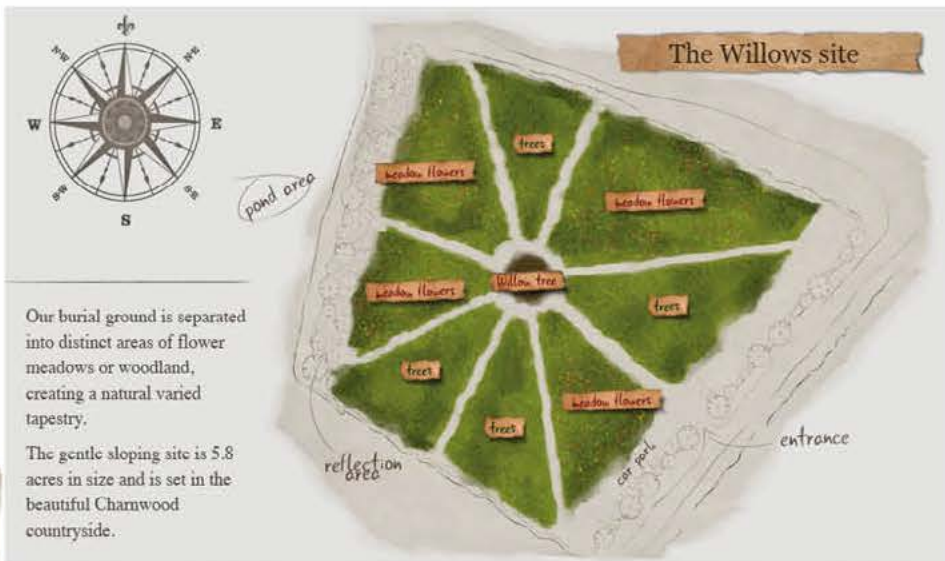
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for burial or interment of ashes, and all
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Where are we?

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Office address:
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**The site is owned and operated by
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Chris and Jenny Scroby and their
son and daughter.**

**The family's vision is to create an
area of natural beauty, which over
time will develop and mature into a
fitting place to reflect and
remember your loved ones.**





Domain of the Feminine?

There is a growing trend of new businesses offering open, flexible, friendly funeral support. These new death professionals are often, but not exclusively, women - my business The Modern Funeral operates with a mixture of female and male ceremonialists and funeral directors.>>

>>Those of us who work to evolve our modern experience of death and dying may be associated with the 'Death Positive' movement - this movement is founded on activism, science, art, entrepreneurship and has been linked to feminism.

Women are playing a key role in this new evolution towards a more realistic approach to the inevitable.

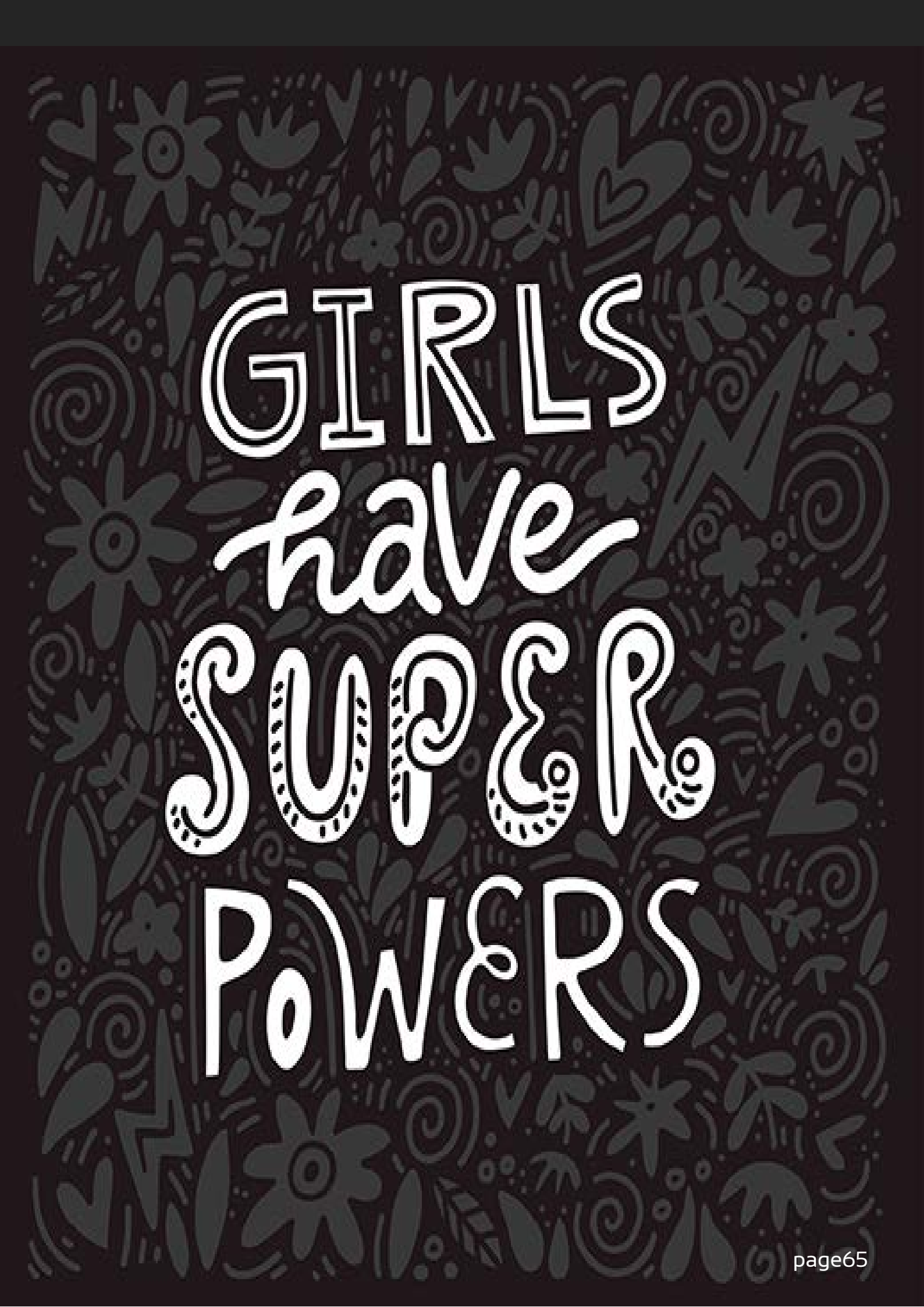
It might seem obvious that caring for the dead is intrinsically a role full of empathy and compassion, and caring for the bereaved who often surround them is a nurturing job too. Supporting people through the logistics, paperwork, creative rituals and events that surround a death is also a very meticulous and detail focused job. We should note that none of these excellent abilities or characteristics are intrinsically gendered.

We may well conventionally associate care-giving and empathy skills with women, though they do not have to belong entirely in the domain of the feminine. I often don't view my job as work at all, it just feels like the type of stuff you help with as a human.

Cultural responses to death and dying vary greatly around the world and throughout history. Often people deal with their dead in closer quarters than our current norm. Out of practical necessity, more of this 'work' used to play-out within the home.

Women would often take a leading role in the preparations - the care surrounding the body, and the arrangements of any gathering to mark the death.

Some people theorise that in ancient societies, such as Egypt, there were more matriarchal systems at play. Perhaps then women had a strong role in the rich experience of death and dying in that culture. In more recent history, though, men have been central in the arrangement and performance of funerals.>>



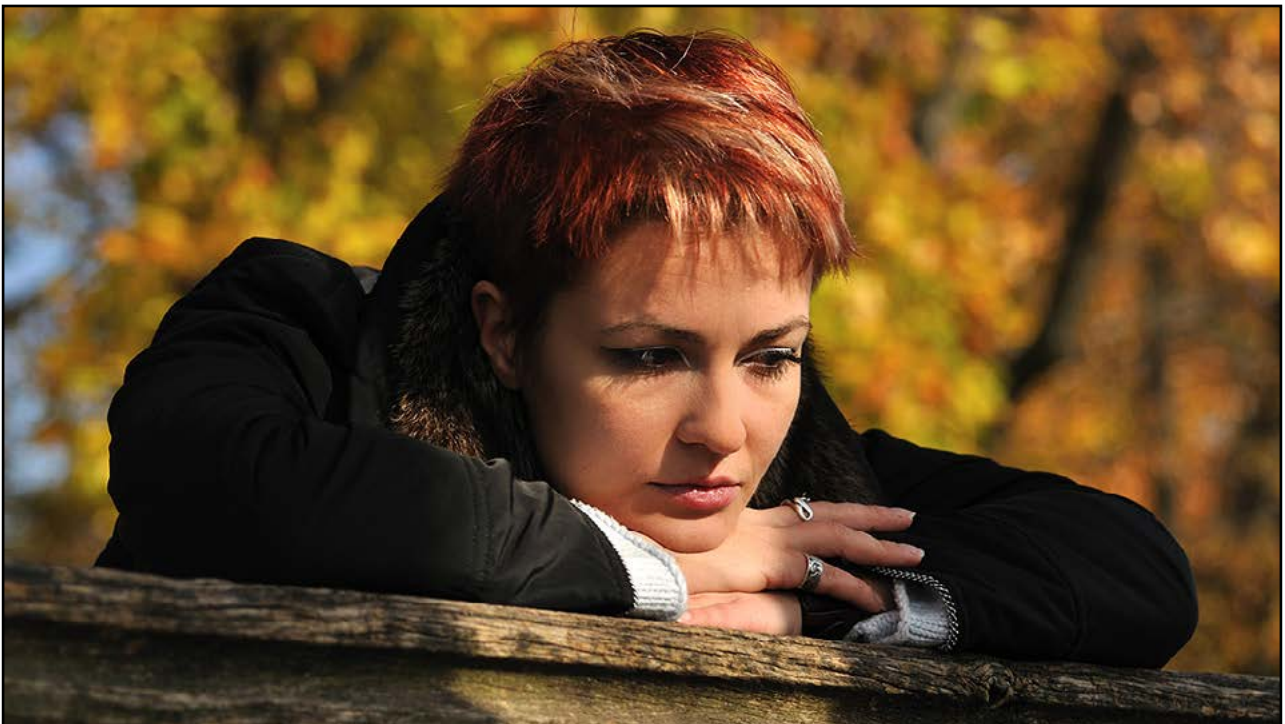
GIRLS
have
SUPER
POWERS



>>The death industry as we understand it today was born from the professionalisation of death that followed the American Civil War. Treatment of the dead became more medicalised, consigned to the hospital, death began to be treated as an illness. Funeral directors became businessmen and salesmen and ultimately gatekeepers with a kind of moral authority over our dead. This widened the gap of our experience of mortality, and might have a negative impact on us psychologically as individuals, and on the tone of our society.

In a capitalist patriarchal world this industry could only be dominated by men, with women often operating more passively as mourners.

Today's Death Positive movement wants to challenge these recent traditions of the funeral industry - restoring helpful transformative ritual processes, sometimes with the body itself as a central focus.



While youth and artificial beauty are prized, the natural realities of time and its effects are unhelpfully hidden from our culture, leaving important, unavoidable aspects of our lives to our imagination. Being more involved in the funeral process can lead to positive healing experiences. This is the time to come together, lend support to one another and do kind jobs.>>

**the conventional funeral can of course
still be positive, but people must be
allowed to make new conventions**

Feminism also seeks to alter long standing perceptions and behaviour that damage us while pretending to be normal. *It is unsurprising that women are taking a leading role in changing the death industry*, aligned as we are with feminist thought and action. But, it is not the goal just to achieve a gender balance in the industry. Equal pay and working opportunities for women are fundamental rights and perhaps there are a lot of women acting within the Death Positive movement because it aligns with these important causes.

**death is the great equalizer -
in the end, a reality
for all genders and classes**

Once you go so far as challenging how we deal with our dead in order to have a more healthy experience of something that we can't ultimately control, then you really can begin to explore how we want to live.

To affect a positive evolution in the way we experience death and dying is an enormous undertaking and it will take an army of like-minded collaborators.

The important thing is that we all get more comfortable with the inevitable - if in some way this has a positive impact on the culture we live in and how we treat each other...Well I could live with that too.

**Contribution from Tora Colwill,
founder of The Modern Funeral**



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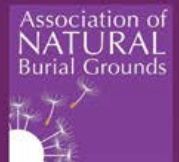
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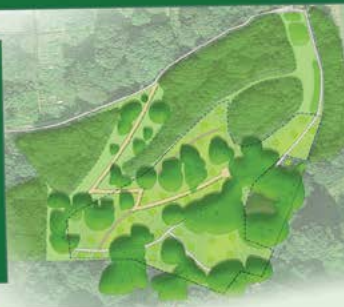


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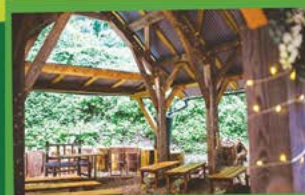


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Natural Burial Woodland

The Natural Burial Woodland is part of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds (ANBG) adhering to the code of conduct to promote Natural Burial best practice, the first of its kind in Bristol.

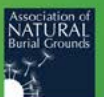


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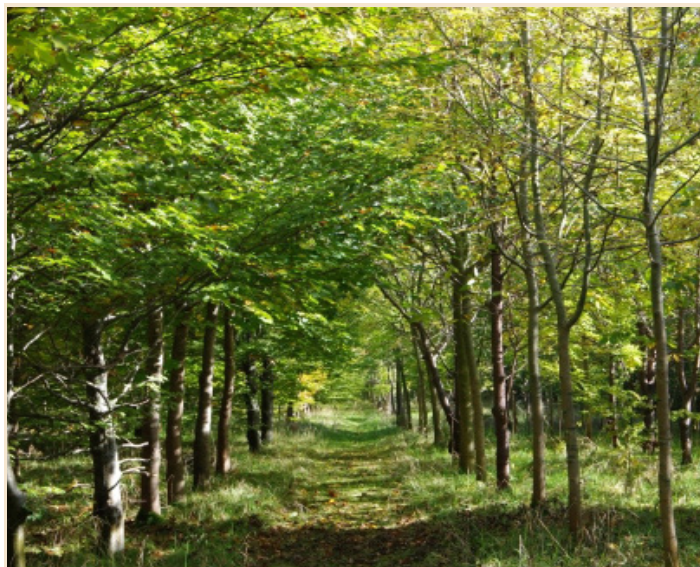
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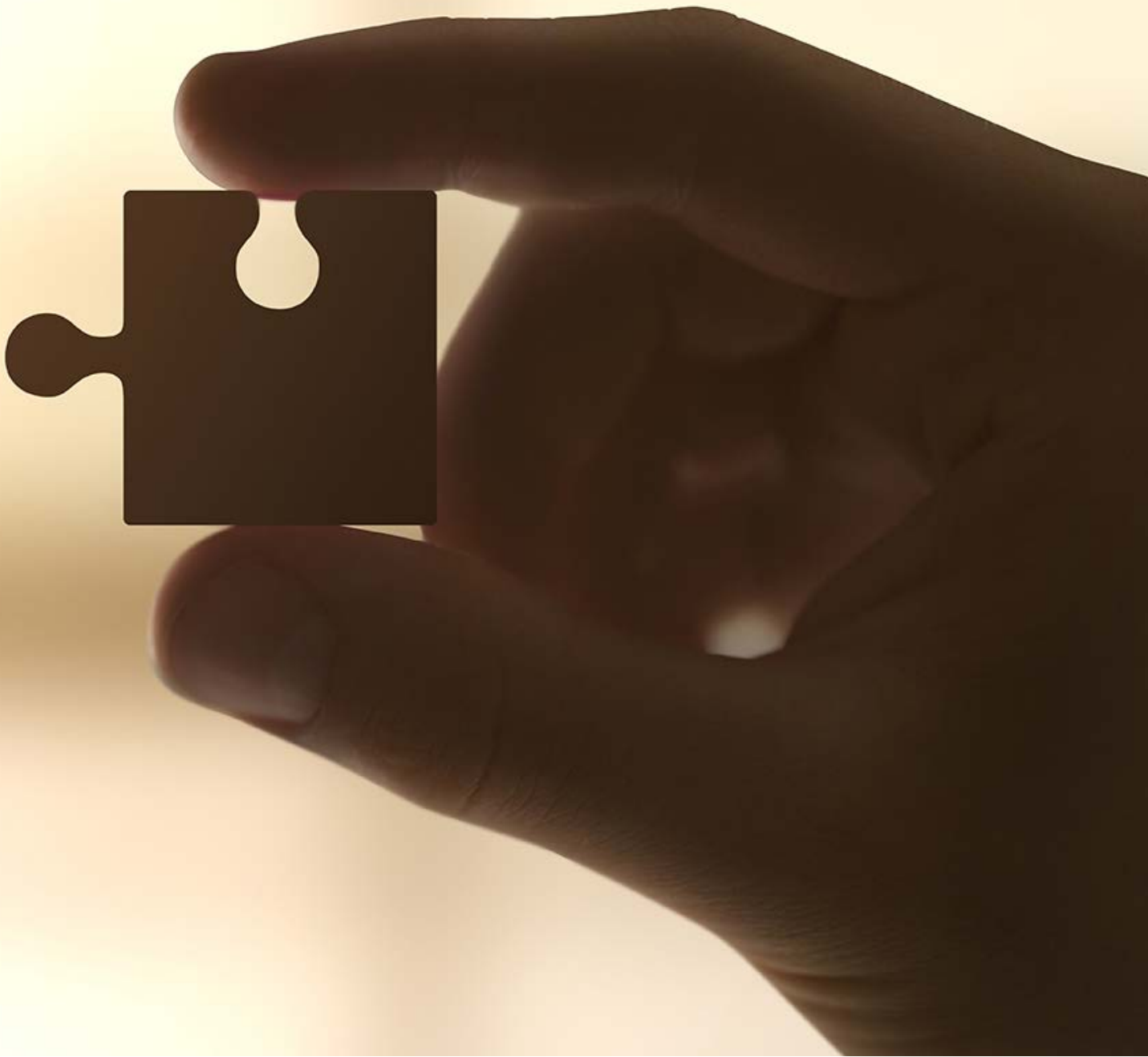


We comply with the the ANBG Code of Conduct

A hand is shown holding a single puzzle piece against a warm, golden sunset background. The hand is in silhouette, and the puzzle piece is a dark, solid shape with a notch on one side and a bump on the other. The overall mood is contemplative and suggests a piece of a larger picture or a transition in time.

Changing Times

It still must be said that although refreshing new changes are sweeping the country, there is a steady rise in the interest and demand for Woodland Burials along with an explosive growth in the (not so new) concept of Direct Cremations with virtually every funeral director now advertising low cost cremations.



Most funerals are still traditional in style – with either a religious or secular celebrant in charge of conveying the departed soul onwards on its forward journey.

95% of the time, the coffin is brought to the crematorium in a formal black hearse, carried into the chapel on the shoulders of four elderly men, dressed all in black, led by a man or woman in formal clothes; designed and patterned in a style first created over a hundred years ago – frock coat and top hat and often carrying a silver topped black cane in one hand.>>



But Why? What is it about death than forces so many people to believe that this is ‘the way it should be done’? Why are we stuck in this loop? Even with a secular celebrant leading the ‘service’, 9 times out of 10 the funeral director is still dressed in black.

But things are changing, and the old ways are not always the best ways, and as funeral directors we have to be prepared to take the first step.

With one of the very first funerals I took as a fledgling funeral director, I sat with the gentleman in question as we discussed how he would like his funeral to be conducted. Part spiritualist, part druid, in a wonderful woodland setting on a hill by the coast.



Not knowing any other way, I located a local celebrant to speak at the interment, who duly came, met the gentleman and planned his speech.

It was a completely non-traditional service that was deeply spiritual, and with great thought and care, together we created his plans for the perfect send off.

When the time came several months later, we were called to his home in the early morning and brought his body back safely into our care. We referred carefully to his plans and on the day, we were blessed with a beautiful summers' afternoon. >>

>>Every thing went exactly according to plan, as the coffin was gently lowered into the open grave beneath the scented pine trees and to the gentle wash of waves on the beach just half a mile below us.

Feeling rather pleased with myself, having managed every detail of the funeral and spent many hours with the gentleman's family, I walked with his daughters back down the hill to the car park.

At this point, one of them turned to me and told me how pleased everyone was that Dad had had every wish fulfilled and then asked me why on earth we'd employed this stranger to come and take the 'service'. Someone that they'd barely met and certainly didn't feel they knew. They asked me why I hadn't taken it myself. After all, they said

'You're the one that spoke to Dad and organised everything. You're the one we've all come to know over these past few weeks. You're the one who has looked after Dad, washed and dressed him, placed him in his coffin. You've been with him every day since he died, and you were the one who collected his body from his home.

"It would have been much nicer if you'd closed the circle and taken Dad's service for us too, instead of this stranger who'd only met Dad once."

I was rather taken aback at first, worried that they were feeling that they'd been let down. I'd never considered the funeral you see from their perspective. I thought my job was to be the planner, the organiser, the overseer. To make sure everything went as it should. I'd not thought how there was still one piece missing from the puzzle.

I'd been accepted into the inner circle as a virtual family member.

As with most funerals since that day, as the funeral director/arranger, I'd been accepted into the inner circle as a virtual family member. Spending time with them, planning and discussing the arrangements for the funeral, caring for and preparing the family's loved one for their visits to say their last goodbyes, offering suggestions for the service, guiding them through the process, being a listening post when needed and a shoulder to lean on when it all became too much.>>



>>We shared in their highs and lows together during those two weeks between that first meeting - when, arriving out of the blue as a stranger to them, at a moment in time when they are awash with grief or in a state of shock, to carry their loved one away in the back of an unmarked private ambulance or estate car.

But when you look at everything from their point of view, the perspective changes and you stop being a funeral director and instead become a 'funeral support provider'. Then it makes perfect sense to be there to help them to celebrate and remember their lives together as a family.

Your job isn't to 'direct' the funeral or to 'undertake' the handling of the deceased. It's to be whatever is needed, whenever it's needed.

Five years down the line and I've helped over 300 families through their special day, sometimes the most amazing of occasions, sometimes deeply sad but always uplifting both spiritually and emotionally.

In the last five years I can say honestly that I've only ever received two complaints. Both were given to me face to face after leaving the crematorium, both complaints from the same elderly couple. And on both occasions, their complaint was that I didn't speak loudly enough and because they were stone deaf, they couldn't hear a word.

So, all you funeral directors out there, why not send your funeral arrangers on a celebrancy course and offer the complete package?

And when you leave the family's home for the first time, don't shake their hand and offer them your deepest condolences.

Why not offer them a hug, it might be the most caring thing you can do.

Jonathan Mees, Oak Funeral Services





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and subsequent delivery

e test burns.

can
YOU
HELP

The text 'can YOU HELP' is rendered in a 3D, blocky font. 'can' is in a light grey color, while 'YOU' and 'HELP' are in a vibrant cyan color. A large, 3D cyan question mark is positioned to the right of the text. The entire graphic is set against a white background with a subtle reflection effect below it.

It was four years ago when mum finally died, aged 63 years old, following a 36 hour bedside vigil after developing pneumonia. **Dare I say - It was a relief.**

Six years earlier we had decided to put mum into a nursing home, Multiple Sclerosis was slowly destroying her, but not her heart.

It had become too much, caring for her at home

We just hoped she would last six months so we did not feel the guilt of having killed her off.

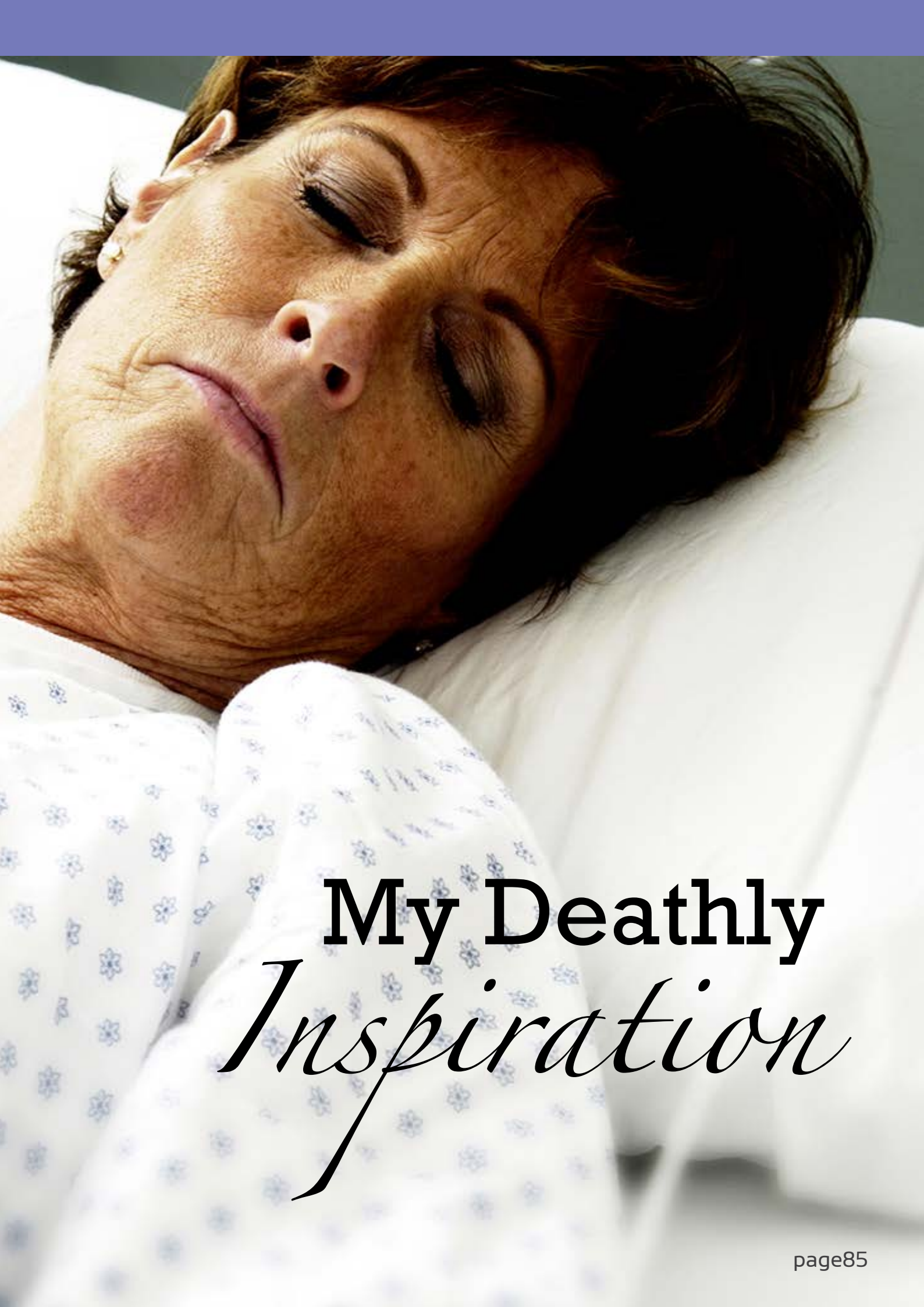
Every few months we would be at the hospital because mum had a chest or water infection. Having to go through the 'Do Not Resuscitate' orders each time – wondering if this was the time death was going to take her.

Having to make the decision to have all her teeth removed because of the infections in her mouth caused by bad oral hygiene was so hard.

It was six years before 'that' chest infection

We were called by the nursing home to go to the hospital. Although we had been in this position so many times but this time something felt different....>>





My Deathly
Inspiration



>>I remember so vividly looking at the x-ray machine and seeing a dark shadow over her lungs, listening to her raspy shallow breathing, watching the doctors' faces. All they said was 'we are keeping her in to get some fluids into her'. We were sent away and told to come back the next day.

Arriving the next day, we wanted to talk to the doctor. Clearly Mum was not responding to anything they were giving her and she looked bloody awful. It was a couple of hours before the doctor arrived and we went to a private room to be told 'your mum is not well.' 'Err clearly.'

We had been in this situation so many times before and watched her pull though. We had to practically pin the Doctor against the wall to get a straight answer out of him. Why do doctors struggle with telling families the truth about end of life?



We just wanted some honest answers to be able to prepare

Finally, after putting him in our situation and making him think of his mum and what he would do in this situation (it's now 10.00pm at night and I have a three year old and a one year old at home) came an admission that Mum had pneumonia.

'Would you leave?' we asked the doctor.

'No' was his reply.

Finally, we agree to have her moved to a private room and asked the doctor to be honest and open with all that was happening. At 10.00am the next morning when another doctor came into the room, we insisted he was brutally honest. >>

>> 'Your mum will pass today but I am not able to say what time. I am sure before my shift ends, she will have taken her last breath' he told us frankly.

We were able to prepare, to tell those that wanted to be there. It was a very emotional day – but we wouldn't have changed it. It was 5.30pm when the vigil ended and Mum passed over.

We had planned as much as we could for the funeral – she was always going to be buried with our dad who we had lost suddenly as teenagers.

In the days that followed, I suddenly felt out of control

I had always done my mum's nails and bizarrely got it into my head I had to have my nails done spending twenty five pounds on this luxury only to completely ruin them the next day cleaning and bleaching the house from top to bottom. I picked them all off and totally ruined my nails.

The hearse and limo arrived. 'They're here.' someone said. We joked about it being like something out of a poltergeist movie.

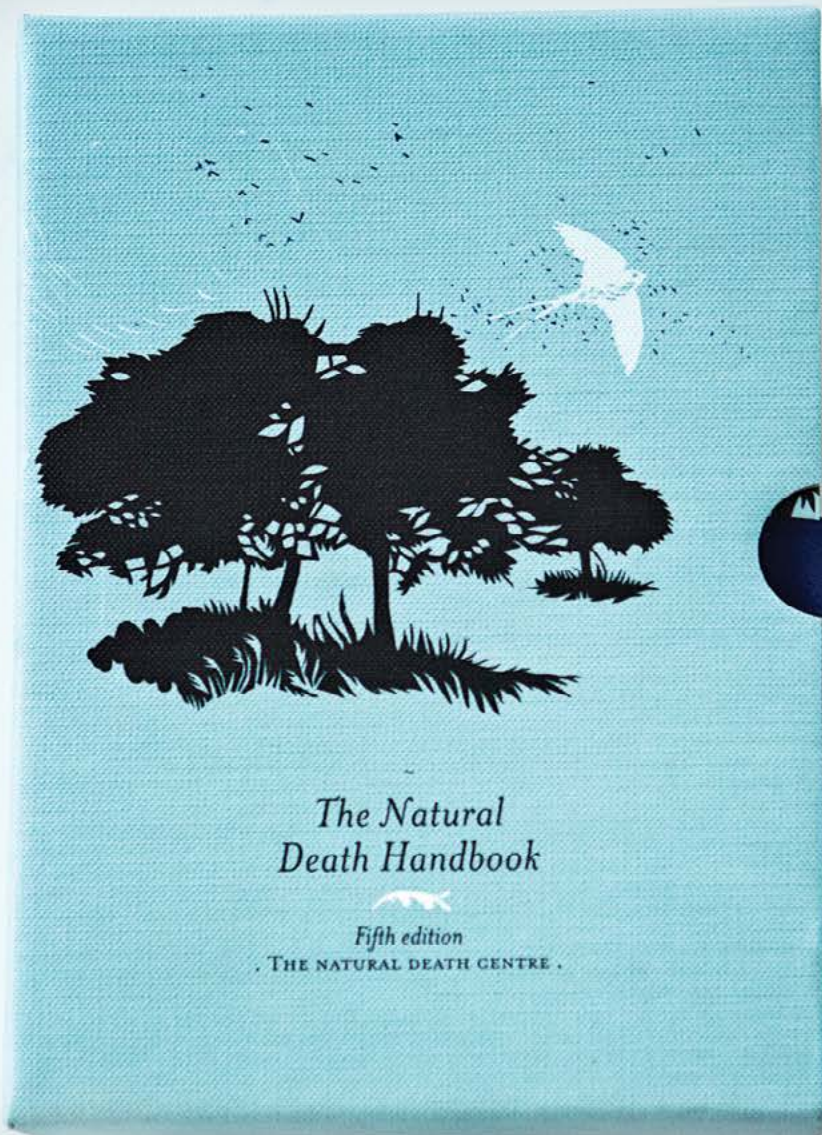
Pulling up at the chapel, we noticed people that we hadn't seen for years. There were family members who could not be there for her or us before 'because it was too painful for them to see her like that' – the feelings do turn to anger. What a joke!

The following weeks and months saw me researching, reading and discovering the Good Funeral Guide and the Natural Death Centre. It was a real eye opener.

I hadn't realized how much choice there is when planning a funeral.

I felt cheated that I hadn't been able to drive mum to the burial ground, instead of these big black flashy cars – It was just never an option. Oh how differently we might have done things..>>

The Natural Death Handbook



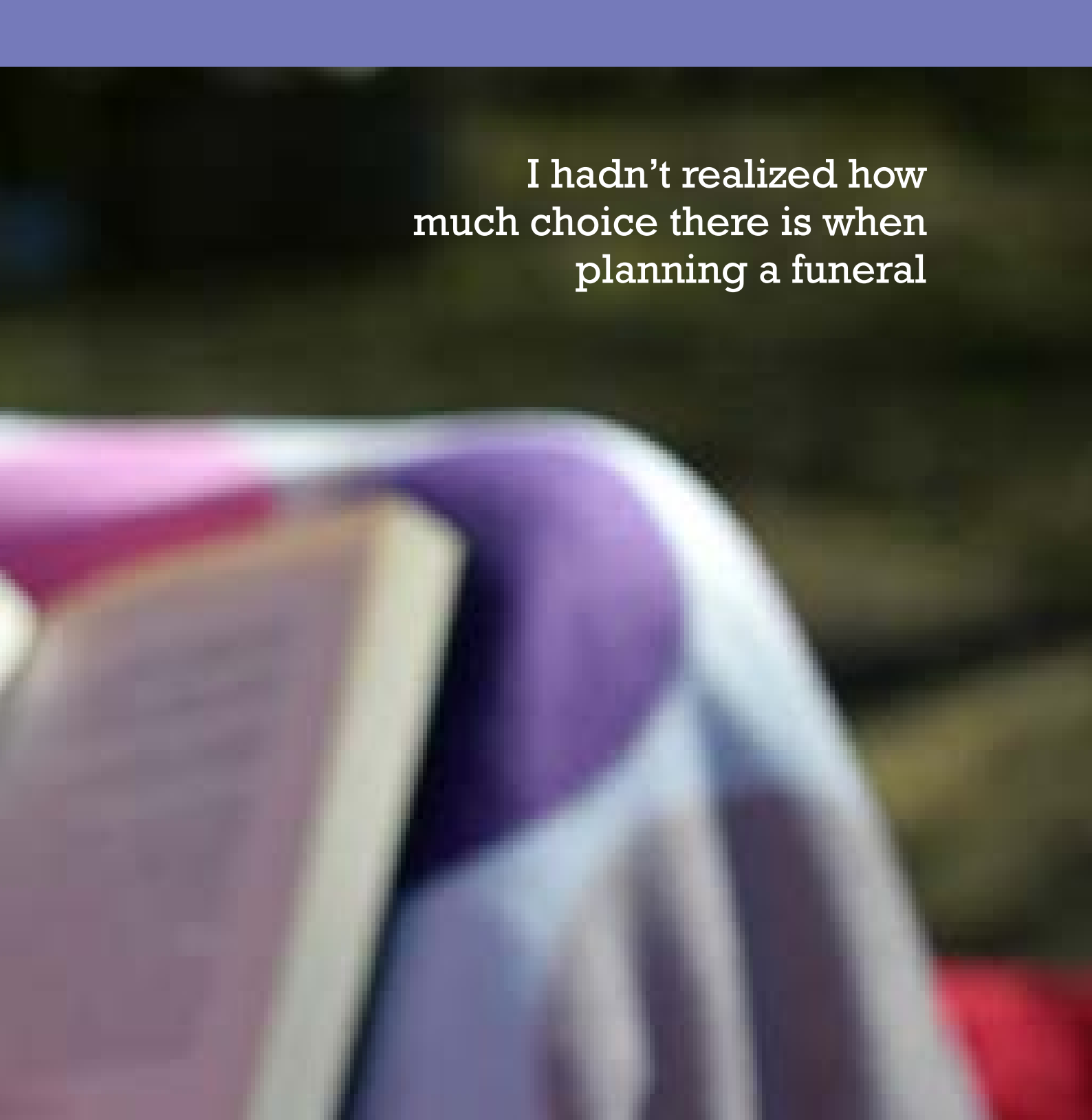
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>>Every funeral director had the same traditional set up – there were no options for anyone to do things different. There were no options for direct cremation – the closest being 90 miles away.

Time passed, and one night, in the silence of nursing my daughter in the early morning hours, I reflected on how much more personal it all could have been, what I could have done if I'd had more information and understanding. By dawn, 'Final Journey' was born.



I hadn't realized how
much choice there is when
planning a funeral

Last year saw us come 'runner up' in the Most Promising New Funeral Director at the Good Funeral Awards and we have just won 'The Innovation Award' at the Carlisle Living Awards.

Pretty awesome for someone who had never been in the industry and just wanted to use their experience to help others.

Special thanks to Tracy Lazonby of Final Journey Funerals for sharing her experience so honestly.

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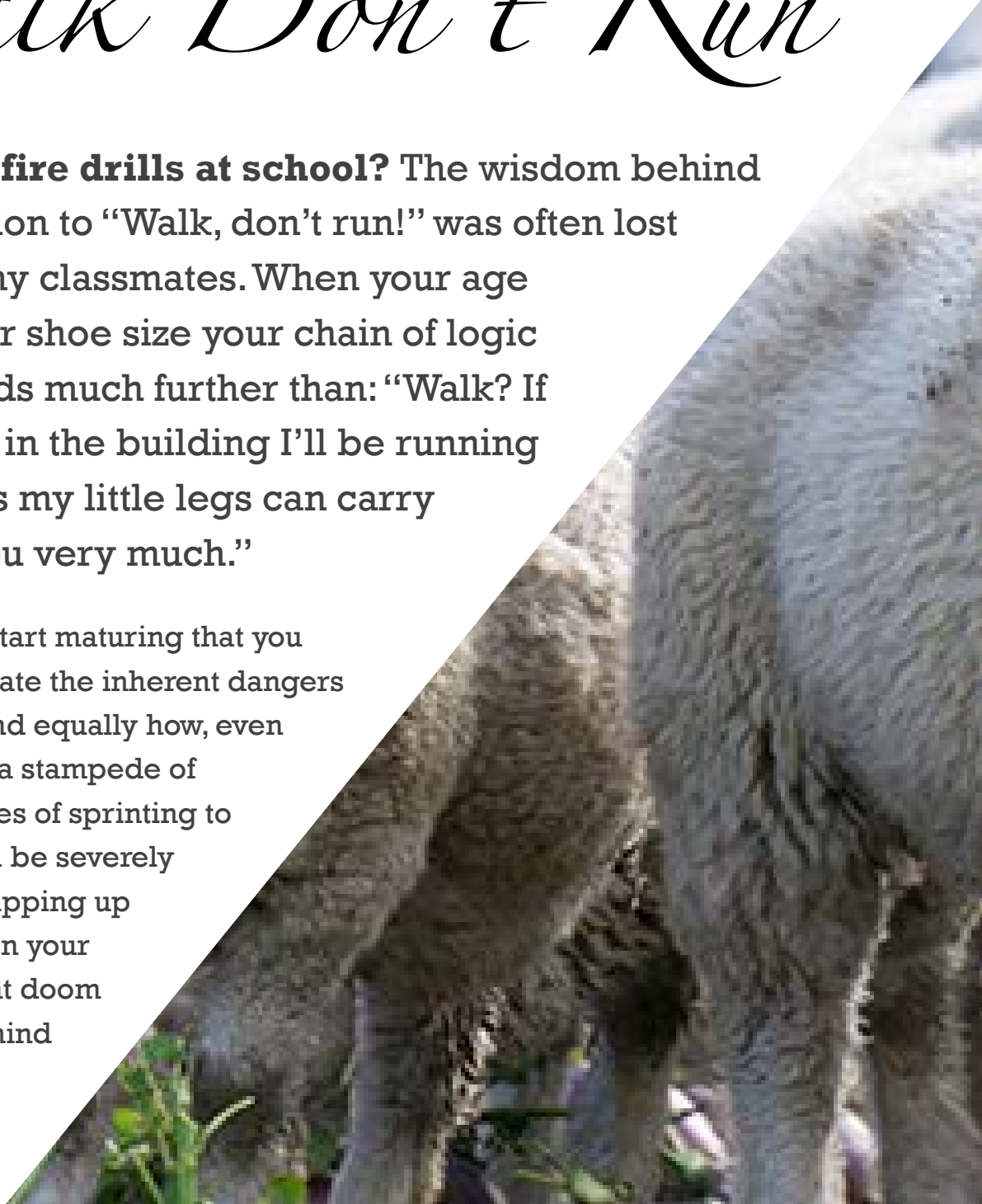
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Walk Don't Run

Remember fire drills at school? The wisdom behind the exhortation to “Walk, don’t run!” was often lost on me and my classmates. When your age matches your shoe size your chain of logic rarely extends much further than: “Walk? If there’s a fire in the building I’ll be running just as fast as my little legs can carry me, thank you very much.”

It’s only as you start maturing that you learn to appreciate the inherent dangers of mass panic and equally how, even if you’re only in a stampede of one, your chances of sprinting to safety could still be severely hampered by tripping up and falling flat on your face as imminent doom thunders up behind you.>>







>>There's an urgent need for funeral professionals to start demonstrating a similar type of mature, clear-headed thinking around the increasingly contentious issue of funeral pre-payment plans.

Currently the very mention of pre-payment plans is enough to send us scattering in all directions: non-believers like me are moving calmly towards the emergency exits; whilst others have succumbed to smoke inhalation by breathing in the plan providers' marketing hype and turning into **Corporal Jones's** - **"Don't panic!"** and **Private Frazer's** - **"We're doomed!"** before surrendering themselves to the forces of self-fulfilling prophecy. Meanwhile, a disturbing number are ignoring the other golden rule of fire drill by running into the flames hoping to salvage what they can, convinced they can still make it out alive.

pre-payment plans are actually bringing malignant levels of commercialism and unsustainability

Funeral directing is a constant balancing act, challenging its best practitioners to act honourably and honestly in deliver a caring, personal service in a commercially sustainable way. But this delicate eco-system is under threat from pre-payment plans. Far from bringing 'peace of mind' to forward-thinking consumers, into what has always been an acutely sensitive marketplace.

There are so many different kinds of bad embodied within the concept of the funeral pre-payment plan that it's difficult to know where to start. From the purchaser's point of view, pre-payment plans don't really do what they say on the tin. The vast majority of plans only offer a partial guarantee, freezing the funeral director's fees but treating the amount paid towards third party costs as an allowance requiring a supplementary payment at the time of need. >>

>>**Although the plan holder assumes their funeral is bought and paid for, their relatives still find themselves with extra to pay.**

By the same token, the actual ratios of financial growth as set against inflation render the majority of pre-payment plans hopelessly uneconomic for the funeral directors who will one day be responsible for carrying out the funerals.

These abysmally low rates of return were one of the many reasons I began setting off the smoke alarms, the realisation dawning very early on that pre-payment plans all come with the smell of burning. Since then it's come as no surprise to me to hear increasing amounts of evidence that funeral directors are resorting to corner-cutting and/or raising prices for their at-need clients simply to subsidise loss-making pre-payment plans.

requires an aggressively proactive approach to selling

From the perspective of the pre-payment scheme providers, financial sustainability is equally fraught, because it can only be achieved through maintaining sales volumes. I'm not suggesting that plan providers are running ponzi schemes, but the simple fact remains that they rely on sales volumes to fund returns for their participating funeral directors.

This not only leaves funeral directors dangerously exposed to unquantifiable future risks (bearing in mind the plan providers themselves get their money at the time of sale), it also requires an aggressively proactive approach to selling.

The pre-payment scheme providers play on the herd instinct, stoking an artificial sense of panic:

“Attention funeral directors: if you don't sell enough plans your competitors will take your future market share.” >>



YOU
CAN
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>>**However, the providers face a fundamental problem: good funeral directors make very bad salesmen.** To combat this, the providers have resorted to using direct marketing and third party sellers, along with cajoling funeral directors into somewhat dubious marketing activity: retirement seminars become opportunities for exploiting captive audiences; the over-50's are hounded at every turn and bowls match sponsorship is getting like Formula One and tobacco. This has resulted in the funeral profession being reduced to 'buy now, die later' commercialism.

at best questionable and at worst brazenly parasitic

Third party selling has also corroded the essential relationship between plan purchasers and their intended funeral director. While pre-payment providers and their sales agents take the money and run, plan holders and their families are left with misinformed and grossly underfunded expectations; meanwhile long-established, reputable funeral directors are amassing ever-growing financial liabilities with consequent risk to their long-term future, all courtesy of a fundamentally ill-conceived product being mis-sold on their behalf.

I'm all for folks leaving a record of their funeral instructions; and if they want to set the money aside too then all power to their collective elbows. But my advice would be to put those instructions somewhere safe, or better still distribute copies to trusted representatives, and put the money into a savings account or an ISA, where THEY keep control of it - topping it up periodically if they so wish.

Their family (and their funeral director) will love them for it. But more importantly it will keep their money away from the hands of the financial products sector, whose self-imposed contribution to the funeral market is at best questionable and at worst brazenly parasitic.

James Baker

A Gloucestershire
Funeral Director



A hand holding a white pen pointing at a digital dashboard with various charts and graphs. The dashboard includes a line graph, a bar chart, a world map, and a table. The word 'TRANSPARENCY' is prominently displayed in the center.

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An elderly couple is seated together, facing each other. The man on the left is wearing a dark blue suit and a patterned tie. The woman on the right is wearing a teal dress. They are holding hands, and the man is looking towards the woman. The background is a light-colored wall with a subtle pattern. The text "Love at the End" is overlaid in a large, dark blue font on the right side of the image.

Love at the End



Ernie was typical of a successful man of his day. Tall and handsome despite advancing years, he exuded charm and the confidence of someone who knew how to get what he wanted. When I went to meet Ernie, it was to talk about the funeral of his wife, and create with him, a service that was just right for her.

I listened to him talk about their life together, and all the wonderful things they had done especially in early retirement. With plenty of money and no children they had travelled the world and he clearly adored her.

As he talked about the last twilight years he spoke enraptured about her beauty, charm and elegance and it was clear there had never been anyone in his heart but Dorothy. That he still loved her beyond measure was never in doubt-

Dorothy's final years had been clouded with illness, and due to his inability to give her the 24 hour care she needed, Dorothy had been moved to a specialist care home where she had been for the last twelve years.

Ernie had been to see her every day of those twelve years, setting off prompt at 11.20am to be there to give her lunch. Before he left home he would always give a photo of them on their wedding day a quick kiss. 'I'm on my way my love' he would say and off he would go on the bus to arrive in time to give Dorothy her lunch at 1.00pm. He would spend the next five hours sitting beside her just holding her hand. >>

It transpired Dorothy had not even known who Ernie was for the past ten years. It is maybe only in the last few years that we as a culture and society have begun to look at love and sex in the relationships of old people.

Only a few very touching films dealing with the subject have recently been released, 'Amour' and 'Iris' come to mind, and it is my experience that some of the most enduring love stories are found by listening to the elderly and enjoying their stories.

In the young, love is often equated with 'worth' and 'value' - a kind of erotic capital in which we trade our looks or money or power with those we instinctively feel to have an equal 'worth' to our own. We ask what someone can do for us, and are they 'good' enough. We have 'deal breakers' of behaviour or attitudes and we look for someone who is 'right' for us.

For Ernie, there was no 'value' in Dorothy per se in the sense of what was he getting from the relationship - at least of the things we look for when we are young; conversation, money, children.

It may be that years of companionship had created a strong bond or mere habit and familiarity. What Dorothy was giving Ernie was complex, a sense of himself and his place in things, a reminder of what had been and of a life well lived. But so often it seems more than this, it is about the nature of love itself and its deep capacity to bring out the very best in us; the need in us not just to be loved but to love unconditionally and selflessly.

I have found in my work many such examples of devotion, sacrifice and service in love at the end of life, and have been humbled by these 'lessons in love'. The gentle care of a partner in illness and suffering; the acceptance of frailty and humanity; the endless capacity to give without return; humility, forbearance and commitment, none of which are particularly 'fashionable' traits in our culture. I believe it is love at the end that can reinspire a jaded and cynical world with these remarkable ordinary people and their love affairs, if we took the time to listen and be touched by very simple acts of loving kindness for which there is no reward.>>



John and Dora

>>John had married Dora when they were both at University, she training as a primary teacher, and he as an engineer. Together they had two beautiful children and a couple of dogs, enjoying holidays in France and bridge evenings until Dora was diagnosed with cancer at just 43. John left a good job to take care of Dora and the children but despite rounds of painful treatment, Dora was in and out of hospital, immobilised and had a stoma fitted.

For five years John rarely left her side and for both of them their social activities slowly dwindled.

They lived with death as if it were a companion, bravely and lightly

He said it was the physical intimacy he missed most, but somehow through everything they laughed every day and shared a bond that saw beyond all the physical infirmity and into the heart of each other's souls, a sacred temple around which each had circled the other in protection.

When I came to do Dora's funeral there were so many people who spoke of John's unerring and unswerving strength, his devotion and caring. Just six months later I was called back to the house to arrange John's funeral.

All through Dora's cancer John himself had been suffering with a brain tumour about which he had known

He had refused treatment, as he had not wanted to be too ill to care for Dora. He wanted to give her the best possible last few years and the best possibility of recovery. He had not told anyone in the family and had carried the burden alone. By the time he sought treatment, it was, of course, too late. >>

they laughed every day
and shared a bond



>>I have read that love is an action, not a feeling and this is never more demonstrable than in the vulnerability of old age and death. The love stories of those I have spoken with have humbled and touched me, not just by the great acts, but in the very ordinariness of life too.

It takes a great deal of courage to be just ordinary and happy with that. To accept that most of us will live a mundane existence, lifted to nobility and greatness in the love we share with each other and in the limits of our small selves that we push through in loving another.

I have read that love is an action, not a feeling

With my families I am reminded again and again that love is truly our heaven on earth, and that it is not the first love that counts, but so often, the last.

**article by Angela Ward
Go Simply Funerals**





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value

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developing a strong and nurturing
relationship with one person who
supports you throughout

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connected, participate and give back
to your community

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Claire Turnham



If you would like to know more about
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on the video above and see how you feel
afterwards.



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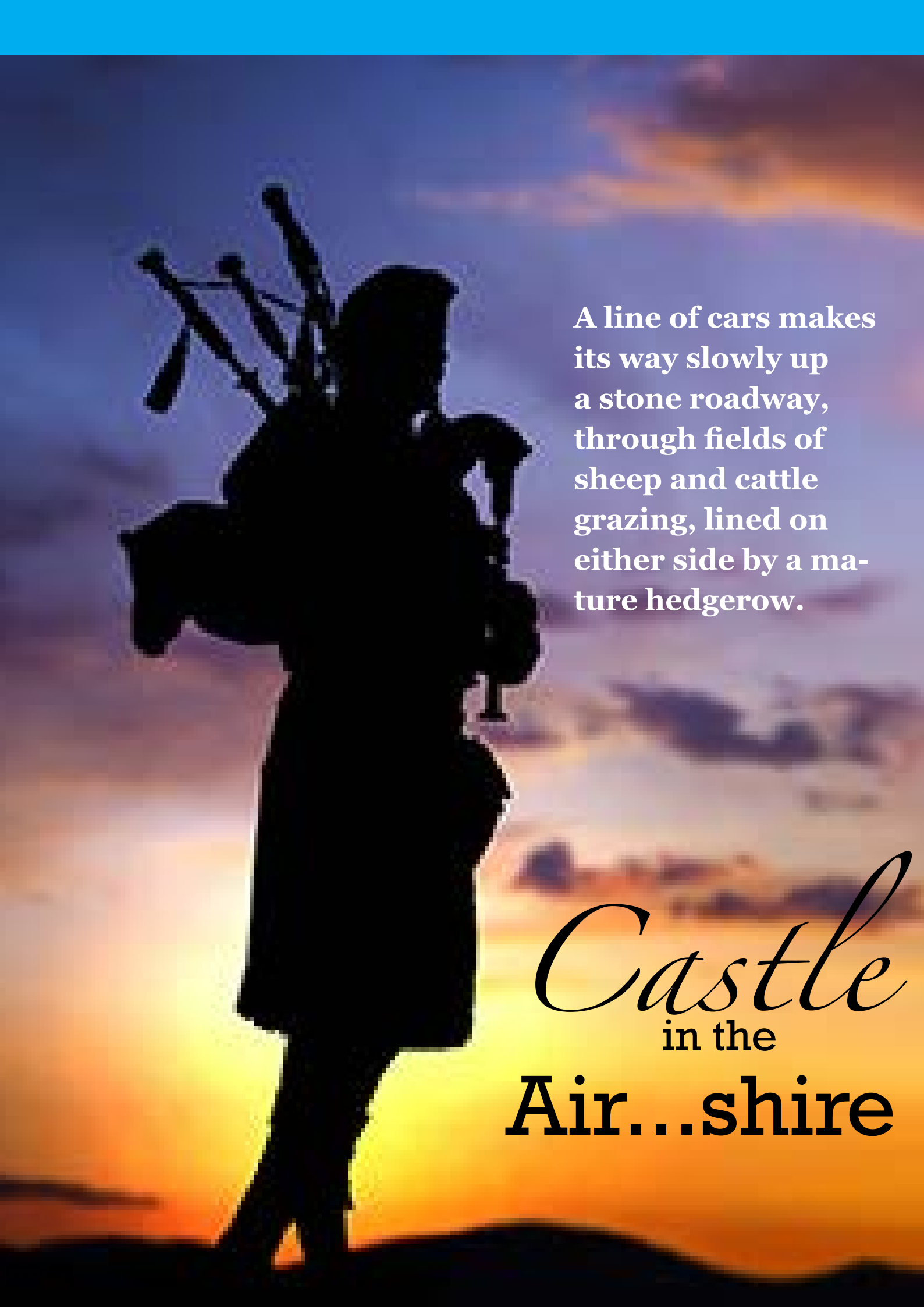
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A line of cars makes
its way slowly up
a stone roadway,
through fields of
sheep and cattle
grazing, lined on
either side by a ma-
ture hedgerow.

Castle
in the
Air...shire

The cars stop and the occupants emerge and greet each other warmly. Next a wheelbarrow, black painted frame with a pale blue body case is taken from the back of one of the cars, and a large woven box placed carefully on top. A small cordless speaker is placed into the wheelbarrow, and with some simple taps on a smart phone, serene, classical music starts to play.

Before they move off, one of the party, smiling, says ‘Dad always joked that he didn’t really mind what we did with him after he died.

**“Wheel me down the street in a
wheel-barrow for all
I care!” he often said’**

Accompanying the rousing classical music, is the distinct sound of the wheel-barrow’s slightly squeaky wheel, and the chuckles of a loving family on their way to say farewell. Once at the graveside, there are tearful, heart felt personal stories, which sound more like reminiscing than a eulogy. There is a pause to listen to a loving granddaughter, playing her classical guitar, singing her own composition, in English and Welsh.

A lifelong friend talks of passions and love, of family and of a life of purpose and achievement, but most of all, he talks of love. A daughter recounts a rather surreal telephone conversation that she has written as a poem, of history and youth. Lastly, as the tears and laughter subside, a classic and rousing hymn is sung, not for religious reasons, but for love of the tune, sentiment and country.


Together they depart to a warm fire at the castle for a funeral tea to share memories and celebrate in private, the end of a beautiful life. >>



Our interview with Adity Houison Craufurd opens the door to Craufurdland - Adity was happy to tell us all about their natural burial site and castle - one of only a few proper Natural Burial Grounds in Scotland.

So, who set this Natural Burial Ground up?

Craufurdland Woods was set up by Dad, Peter Houison Craufurd, after Mum, Caroline, wondered if it was possible to be buried under the cedar on the front lawn. They both wanted a natural funeral and after some research, Dad set up the natural woodland burial ground, where he now rests, amongst the trees he planted.

A black horse-drawn hearse with a casket on top, parked in front of a stone building. The hearse has four large spoked wheels and a red harness. The building is made of light-colored stone with several windows. There are trees in the background.

No two funerals should be alike or need to be alike.

How are things going ?

It has been an iterative process, more and more people come to us because they can have their funeral the way they want it. As we always say “We are all used to choosing how we celebrate our birthdays, wedding and anniversaries, but our choices for funerals often appear to be more restricted or dictated”. The natural burial ground and the services associated with it give a much greater flexibility, and allow individual celebrations, for individual lives. No two funerals should be alike or need to be alike. >>





>>When someone rings who is likely to pick up the phone?

Simon Houison Craufurd, managing director with overall responsibility for the estate, Adity (Simon's wife and Sales and Marketing Director) or Catherine our marketing/office assistant.

As we are a family business with a big emphasis on family, either Simon or Alex, one of the Craufurd brothers, is always present at the burials.

Where are families travelling to you from?

We are very accessible to most of central Scotland. 25 minutes from Glasgow city centre and only 5 minutes off the M77.

With close connections by road to Glasgow and Prestwick airports, we offer a suitable location for international visitors returning to Scotland with their loved ones. Our families have come from as west as Dunoon, Edinburgh in the East and even as far afield as Northern England.

What do families usually comment on when they arrive at the site? What can they hear and see?

Our stunning location in the beautiful Ayrshire countryside, is surrounded by mature ash trees and hawthorn hedgerow, has views only interrupted by a scattering of farms far off in the distance, with the sound of just the birds in the background. Our families love the tranquillity, peacefulness and the beauty of the place.

Everyone also likes the fact that the funeral is about what they want rather than fitting into a process.

How do you see the burial site usage and tree planting changing the view over the decades to come?

As the burial ground is about a woodland in the making, in decades to come we envisage a thriving indigenous, deciduous, wood with the burial ground gradually encompassing the central parking area. There is now a very healthy raptor population thriving here, particularly buzzards and sparrow hawks.>>

How long do you expect the site to be active and who will inherit the operation once you are also in the ground?

We expect it to be active for at least another decade. It will be passed onto the next generation. The estate has been in the family for 29 generations and we hope it stays in the family for another 29. It is part of a limited company, and the shares will be passed on to the next generation.

Do you offer pre-need plots? If so, who is your typical purchaser and do you let them choose a spot?

Yes, we do offer pre-paid plots. A typical purchaser is difficult to identify as we have people of all ages and denominations choosing their final resting place here. We offer reserved plots along-side family and friends already laid in the ground.

Have you seen a change in the types of customer and the types of coffin being used over the years?

No we haven't, our customers are varied in background, age and religious persuasion, however, the one thing we have noticed is most new customers come to us by word of mouth or recommendation.

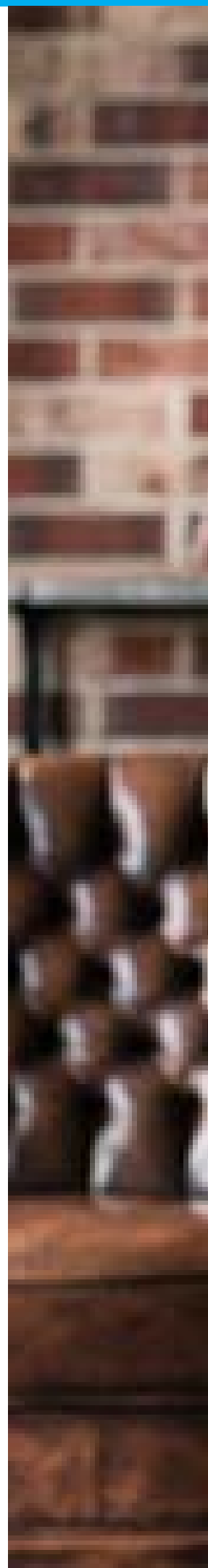
What percentage of burials use your other facilities at the property and how many are simply coming to you following a ceremony elsewhere?

In the past it has just been burials. Funeral teas at the castle is a new venture for us and growing in popularity. As we only do one burial a day, the castle can be used for a beautiful and secluded venue for an intimate and exclusive funeral ceremony, and/or the funeral tea.

Can you tell us about the most breathtaking and unusual funeral, one that you will never forget?

Oh that's a hard one; there have been so many 'lovely' and varied services; from religious services where the ground has been blessed, to a biker funeral with a sidecar hearse, to a wheelbarrow transfer.

We also have lots with a Scottish twist, employing pipers or a ceilidh band, often toasted with the 'water of life'.







**Are you noticing more demand for ashes interments only?
What about DIY funerals, many of those?**

We haven't seen a rise in either ashes interments or DIY funerals, though we do get a few of them. We also do get asked "What about a funeral director- do we need one?" The simple answer is no - it's about what's important to you and how you want your funeral conducted, with or without the assistance of a funeral director, all are welcome.

Having tailored options is what makes Craufurdland Woods special for so many who have come to rest in this tranquil setting. We do have good working relationships with several funeral directors around central Scotland.



What is the most satisfying part of your job and what is the most annoying/frustrating?

The most satisfying part has to be when a family thanks us for letting them say their final farewell in the way they wanted. The most frustrating is when we get told by people we meet “we didn’t know we could have this”, referring to the natural burial option.

Interview with Adity Houison Craufurd.

INFE

2017

What was on show? Earlier this year, Rosie visited the National Funeral Exhibition at Stoneleigh Park. 'I said I would report back in the last edition of More to Death. Did anything catch my eye this year? What was innovative or groundbreaking?

A surprising amount really, amongst all the usual funeral bling and sea of old and mostly friendly faces I found.

The worlds largest coffin, neatly turned into a champagne bar thanks to our intrepid friend Will at **Greenfield Creations**. This was a most welcome port, helping me through two days of non stop talking!

Clarke and Strong who normally produce the nasty, shiny, frilly, synthetic, coffin liners so beloved of the industry – but not the public - have created **the most beautiful, authentic Harris Tweed liners**. Simply stunning and such a neat fit with the country loving public choosing natural burials. (I would like this please). I have it on good authority that they went down so well, selling all their stock which has only just been resupplied from the Hebrides. Hence I couldn't see them on the C&S website.



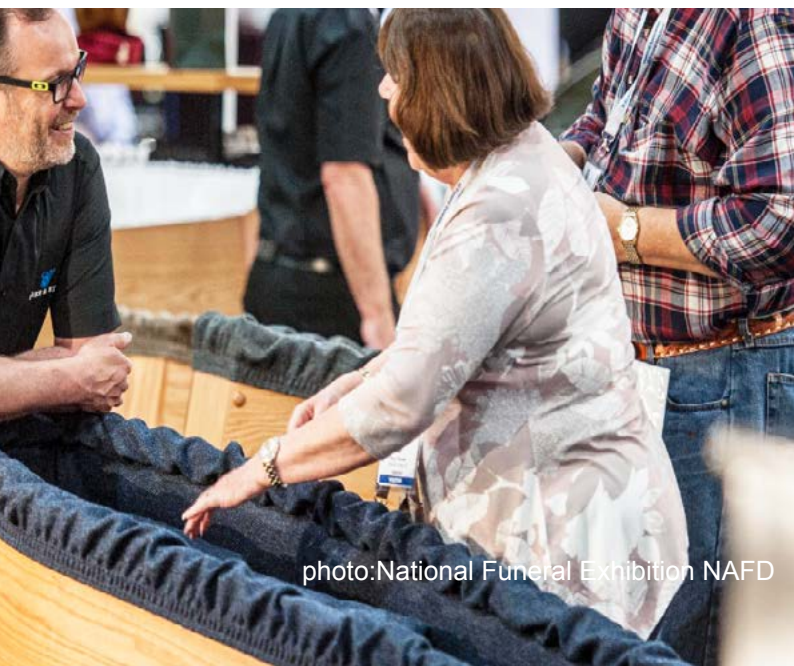
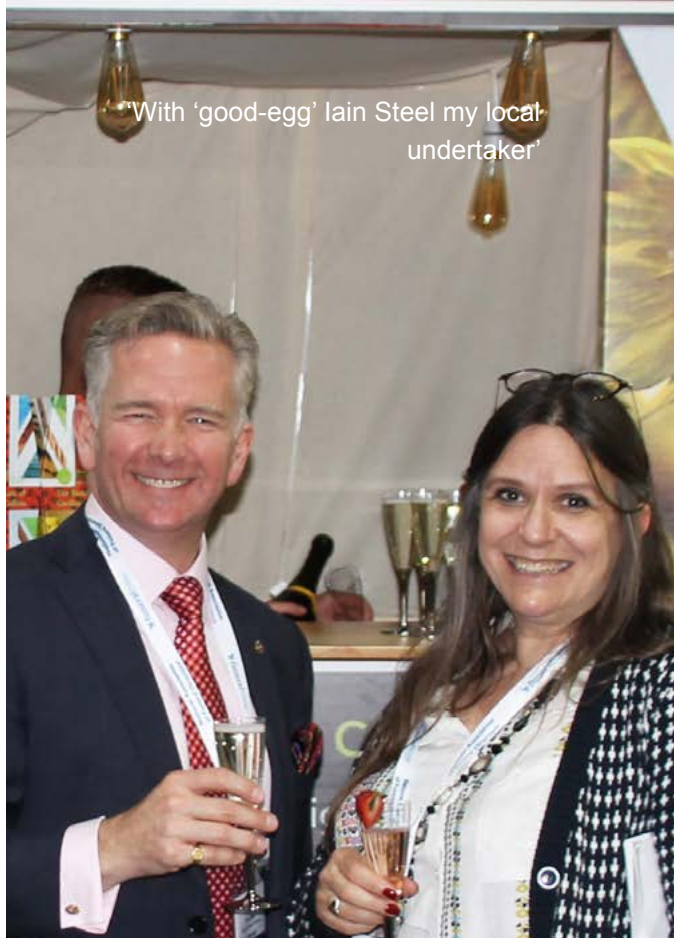


photo:National Funeral Exhibition NAFD



photo:National Funeral Exhibition NAFD

World's Largest Coffin



"With 'good-egg' Iain Steel my local undertaker"



photo:National Funeral Exhibition NAFD



There was a young start up, Ascension, who are offering to release your ashes 100,000 feet up on the very edge of space, thus spreading you around the world in the jet stream. They even film the ascent and release, anywhere in the world – at a price.

There were a few internet companies determined to get people talking and planning ahead – good luck with that!

Some beautiful finger print, silver jewellery, very nice but not exactly an essential. And the Brahms electric hearse.

images:www.ascensionflights.com

Then there was Gordon....

Our friend and ally Mr. Tulley. Not satisfied with his :-

- two natural burial grounds,
- shroud business,
- direct cremation business
- the only UK wide direct burial provider.
- vintage hearse
- pet burials.
- lowering sling for baby coffins and urns
- printed, colourful palls

He, and only he, would think about turning the coffin on its head

His newest product elegantly disguises the outline of a shrouded body, for when families require a simple shroud cremation or interment but want to protect the possible sensitivity of some mourners. The wicker coffin is reusable. As Gordon points out, we live in the houses of the dead, drive their cars, even wear their clothes - so why not reuse the expensive outer coffin and simply hire it for the funeral.

Normally removing a body from within a deep sided coffin would present a problem, I can't see the crematorium staff doing that, so Gordon has designed it upside down so the body is simply lifted from the upturned lid using the shroud's integral handles, so much easier.

As you can see from the photos the coffin has two sets of handles so that it can be used either way up.

Ingenious and obvious but it takes Gordon to do it. Hats off to you mate.

Rosie



photo:National Funeral Exhibition NAFD



photo:National Funeral Exhibition NAFD



the only funeral magazine
that really cares...



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www.naturaldeath.org.uk