

The Natural Death Centre's official magazine

more to death

ninth edition 2017

**THE
ETHICS OF
DIRECT
CREMATION**

Plus

**Do you
Love Your
Pet to
Death?**

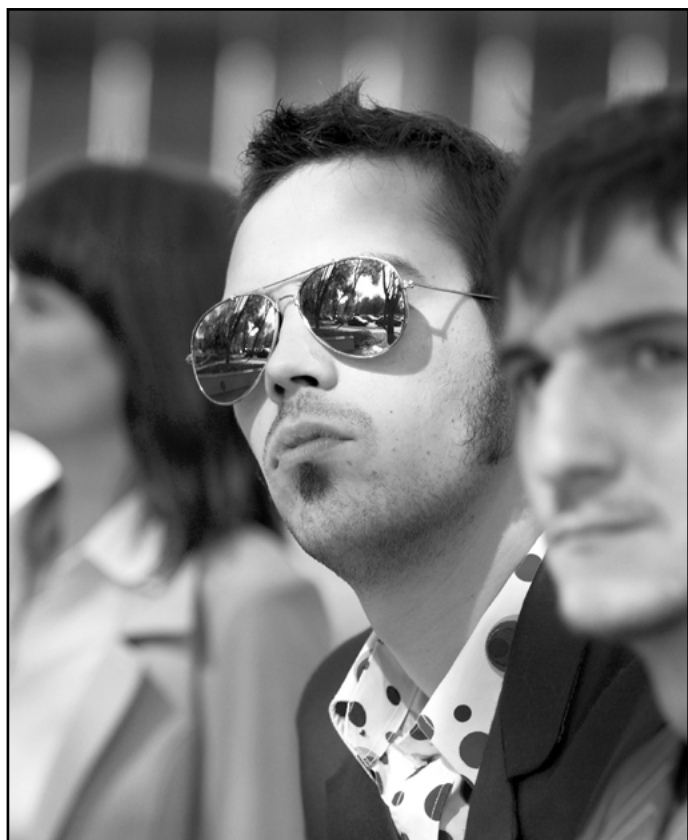
**Ideas for-
TRIBUTE
FUND
SCHEMES**

UNCOVER HIDDEN AND AMAZING OPTIONS
SURROUNDING DEATH AND FUNERAL PLANNING

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Editor's Comments

Rosie Inman-Cook



Another six months has rattled past with some extraordinary global shifts. There is another one, closer to home.

At last, one of the corporate giants is responding to the changes that are afoot. Dignity funerals have just started to roll out a UK wide, Direct Cremation Service, Simplicity Cremations, at £1500 plus doctors fees. This is recognition that demand is changing. Possibly they feel under pressure from the specialist independents who have been offering this service for a few years. Up until now they have been charging £3.5k for the service. Well done Dignity.

The specialists can still beat them on price but with regards to the public having access and maybe, actually getting to hear that this, considerably cheaper option, exists. Hallelujah.

There are two things that I would like Dignity to ensure:-

- That this option is offered to everyone regardless of whether they ask for it by name or express financial hardship.
- That it becomes a published funeral plan option and even gets through the Age UK gates.

Time will tell.


The ignorance of gatekeepers continues to be a source of frustration. Recent examples:-

- Hospital bereavement support staff denying a family contact with the mortuary regarding a DIY collection, insisting that 'by law' they had to have an undertaker.
- The manager of an area's district nurses believing that the dead have to be embalmed, teaching all the nurses under, for years, that this is fact.
- A funeral firm in London telling a relative that direct cremation is not available in the UK yet. Even though the lady knew it was and asked for the service by name.

We still have a lot of educating to do.

Lastly. Will some of you lovely celebrants please stop criticising the rise of direct funerals. It may be the case that a ceremony with the deceased present is important psychologically for some but for 50% of callers to our helpline, wanting direct funeral information, they couldn't give a fig about having a ceremony and quite often there is no one to attend anyway.

You can still get the job of putting together and facilitating a memorial service for those with a family so please don't impose your "we know best" attitude. That is what the funeral directors have done for years!!

A black plastic bag lies on a pile of trash in a natural setting. A bloody handprint is visible on the bag. The background shows green foliage and a clear sky.

if you can
get there,
you can
die there

Anywhere & *Everywhere*

I'm sure many people sit comfortably with the Victorian oil painting depiction of death. Peacefully surrounded by nearest and dearest, alert enough and not too sudden to allow some meaningful and memorable last words to be uttered. But not too long, painful and drawn out. The time of death then naturally and gracefully leading into the time of mourning and funeral ritual.

However, in reality many deaths are unexpected, sudden, suspicious, or result from accidents, criminal activity, substance abuse, self harm or misadventure gone badly wrong.

After 11 years or more of removing deceased from these circumstances under Police contract (Coroners contract), I have reached one conclusion. "If you can get there, you can die there."

Be it industrial or agricultural settings, marine vessels, highways, byways and waterways, the great out doors, loft spaces or cellars, and every imaginable domestic circumstance we have been there.

The challenge of obesity of course is not limited to this role, but certainly adds a dimension to our work.

Sometimes attending within hours of death, on other occasions, months even years after death.

Over the years we have developed a broad skill set in recovery of the deceased, usually being left by the police to work out the most appropriate method of removal, trying to balance dignity, privacy, health and safety and general efficiency. Sometimes, maintaining the forensic integrity of the scene is vital.>>

>> Just occasionally we find as funeral professionals we are not invincible after all as we step back and allow the superior expertise, training and equipment of coast guards, mountain rescue teams, fire brigade or specialist police teams take over.

This work can be difficult to recruit for. Applicants must clear stringent police vetting. Many talented funeral professionals have no stomach or interest in the harsh realities of this physically and emotionally demanding specialism. And of those who have the robust determination to service this contract, not all have the softer, creative skills often needed in regular funeral directing and arranging.

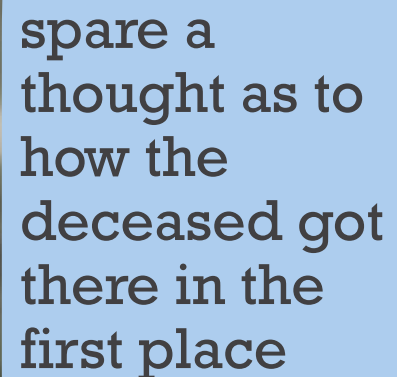
The police work us hard, expecting our attendance within one hour, day or night, sunshine or blizzard, at times needing us to cover two incidents in different directions at one time. This is understandable however, with the deceased often in public spaces, causing distress and anxiety to the bereaved, and of course with many other aspects of a police investigation beyond the removal of the deceased to be completed.

While contractually prevented from initiating contact with the bereaved (least we should insensitively tout for business) we come face to face with the raw emotions of the very newly and suddenly bereaved. It takes its toll, and so often I have longed for magic words to make things seem better for them. But if such words exist, I haven't found them yet.

Usually we move one case at a time, but multiple deaths do occur. This work has lead me to sit in on some of the planning done in preparation, should our region ever be faced with a mass fatality incident. Much as our resources would be stretched and tested in such circumstances, our role would only be a very small cog in a major operation.

So if you are a funeral professional, next time you go to the public or Coroners mortuary, spare a thought as to how the deceased got there in the first place.

By Mark Shaw FD in Aberdeen



spare a
thought as to
how the
deceased got
there in the
first place

CRIME SC

A young child is seen from behind, standing in a sun-dappled forest. The child is wearing a blue and white horizontally striped tank top and a grey and white vertically striped baseball cap. They are holding a yellow caution tape that stretches across the frame. The tape has the words 'SCENE DO NOT' printed in bold black letters. The background is a dense forest with tall trees and sunlight filtering through the leaves.

SCENE DO NOT

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st Editions



Didn't We Do Well?

What a swanky event it was this year, packed to the rafters, including a few suited folk from the conventional side of things; good to see them venturing out into the modern, progressive funeral world. [**See here for the brilliant introductory talk given by Ru Callender.**](#)

We were delighted to see several NDC recommended companies take to the stage to receive their 'Death Oscars'. Best embalmer and funeral caterer was never something we were going to entertain but the Good Funeral Guide did a fantastic job of managing and choosing **this year's winners** in twenty five diverse categories.>>



>>Firstly it was good to see **Musgrove Willow receive Coffin Supplier of the year**. This company is one of those who will sell directly to the public and is featured on our website.

Best Alternative To A Hearse was won by our very own Gordon Tulley (direct funeral provider, natural burial ground manager, shroud manufacturer). His beautiful, green, Bentley didn't see that conversion coming!

Low Cost Funeral Provider went to a young woman who we featured back in edition 2 of More to Death. Lucy, the powerhouse behind, Coulbert Family Funerals works and campaigns tirelessly for clarity, flexibility and honesty. Right up our street! She is based in Oxford.





Green Funeral Director of the year went to **Jo Vassie** from **Higher Ground Family Funerals**. The famous Jo Vassie who also won our 2016 NDC's Peoples choice award for the best natural burial ground in the UK. What a year for Jo and son Tom.

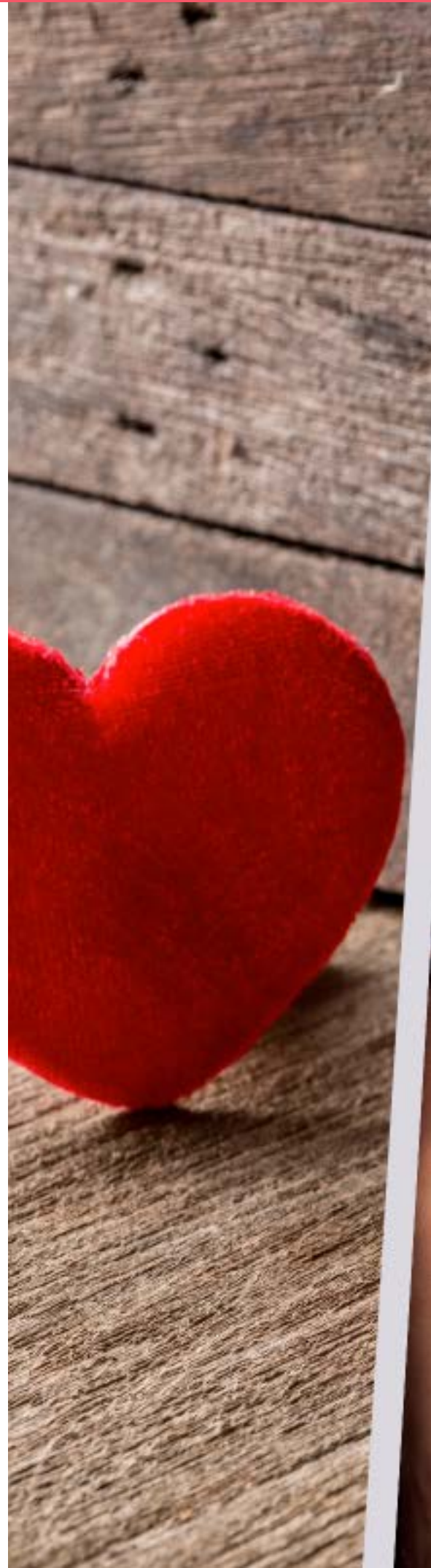
Most Promising new funeral director was awarded to the lovely **Judith Dandy** from **Dandelion Farewells** in Horsham. A much needed bringer of gentleness and love to funerals in Sussex.





**Modern Funeral Director of the year
was won by Fran and Carrie at A
Natural Undertaking, Birmingham.**

What a rapid rise to success these wonderful people have experienced whilst breaking into the funeral market.





And finally, finally, after waiting for some recognition, after all these years; our founder **Nicholas Albery and the Natural Death Centre won the Lifetime Achievement Award.** Our Death Oscar, in the form of Anubis, God of the underworld, now stands, fittingly 12 feet underground, watching over me in the NDC office.

Rosie Inman-Cook
Manager







Caer Caradoc sunset from Enchmarsh

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Putting the Tiger Amongst the Turkeys

To rethink our approach to death, and to challenge the myths that surround it, it is vital to question the purpose of the funeral director.

The human face of the funeral industry, and the gatekeeper to our funerary experience, funeral directors take on many roles and require varied skills to meet the practical, ceremonial and emotional demands of a funeral. *There is however no legal requirement to employ one in this country*; the work you put in yourself to arranging and preparing a funeral can be a critical part of the bereavement process.

So what are the functions of the funeral director?

Event Organiser

Somebody with a clear head and an eye for detail can help you organise the event and make it all happen without a hitch on the day. Managing paperwork and materials, finding venues, coordinating and liaising and so on, amount to a significant job. Having some organisational support can free you up to have the necessary experiences around the funeral day.

A professional will be reliable and familiar with the process, but they needn't manage you or filter your options. You can share the work amongst as many who want to be involved. Make it personal - tailor and tweak the proceedings yourselves; be creative in choosing a place and a style. Let the funeral director help you achieve what you want.

All the answers don't have to come from a 'professional'. They can come from your family and friends, from you. Trust your intuition. >>





>>**A Medical Professional**

The needs of the body, for its care, have caused people to develop specific skills, from coffin making to embalming. Modern embalming has its roots on the battlefields of the American Civil War, where bodies needed to be transported over great distances in good condition. Funeral directors appropriated this practice, giving their profession a medical nature.

These days, you may be charged for 'Hygienic Treatment' as part of the funeral process, but there is no legal requirement or medical necessity for the deceased to be clinically embalmed or sutured. In most cases, with prompt action and simple resources, bodies can remain in their natural state without intrusive and complicated methods of preservation.

The body of your loved one can stay at home - they can be washed and dressed there. It's entirely safe, hygienic, and avoids unnecessary expense. A funeral director might help and advise you, and liaise with medical professionals on your behalf, but should only take over at your direction.

Spiritual Leader

You want your funeral director to know what to do with your grief. It is good to have someone who understands the importance and benefits of ritual, who can guide the mourners through their experience, who does not judge or assume emotion, who can sensitively and diplomatically work out the differing needs and expectations of the group of people affected by a death.

A funeral director might fulfil this role, or they will be able to match you with the correct person to guide you through the ceremonial element of the funeral, reflecting the beliefs and expectations of the gathering, and of the deceased. And again, these roles can be taken up by anyone willing and able within the group.

There are many different types of religious leaders and lots of secular celebrants and interfaith ministers who can help you put an appropriate funeral service together, or perhaps you could put the ceremony together yourselves - collect some favourite readings and music, write and deliver a life story in your own words, with your own voice.>>





>>Business person

Funeral directing is ultimately a business, often operating with other businesses to supply you the relevant materials and services. This can result in them offering streamlined packages that might make practical business sense, but might also de-personalise the preparation and experience of the funeral. Worse, commission-led practices can lead to upselling and financial stress for the mourners.

It is not disrespectful to plan a simple send-off that doesn't break the bank, so avoid being coerced into spending unnecessarily. A flexible funeral director will allow you to take on tasks yourself if you want; this can lead to a cheaper and more personal funeral.

When even your body has become a vessel - somehow exiting the material world seems to have become a consumer act. When preparing a funeral, you can be presented with an array of add-ons, extra services, ornaments, venues, but these quickly become expensive and *in no way act as a measure of your love*. By taking control yourself you can have the best experience possible and incur much less expense.

Make the experience more participatory - you can even put together a crowdfunding campaign so people can offer support with direct contributions to the cost.

Of course it is wonderful to have people dedicated to meet the transport, care and storage needs of the dead at any time of the day or night.

Funeral directors can be an absolute blessing and support - they are familiar with the process and can guide around any potential problems in a friendly and caring way - but they are not in charge what happens to a dead person or what happens in the funeral - you are.

Choose the right people to facilitate your experience.

Conversations around these issues help the industry to respond to and facilitate your wants. Gradually we can affect the culture in a positive way and look after and memorialise our dead in ways that make sense to how we feel and live.

Article by Tora Colwill at The Modern Funeral.

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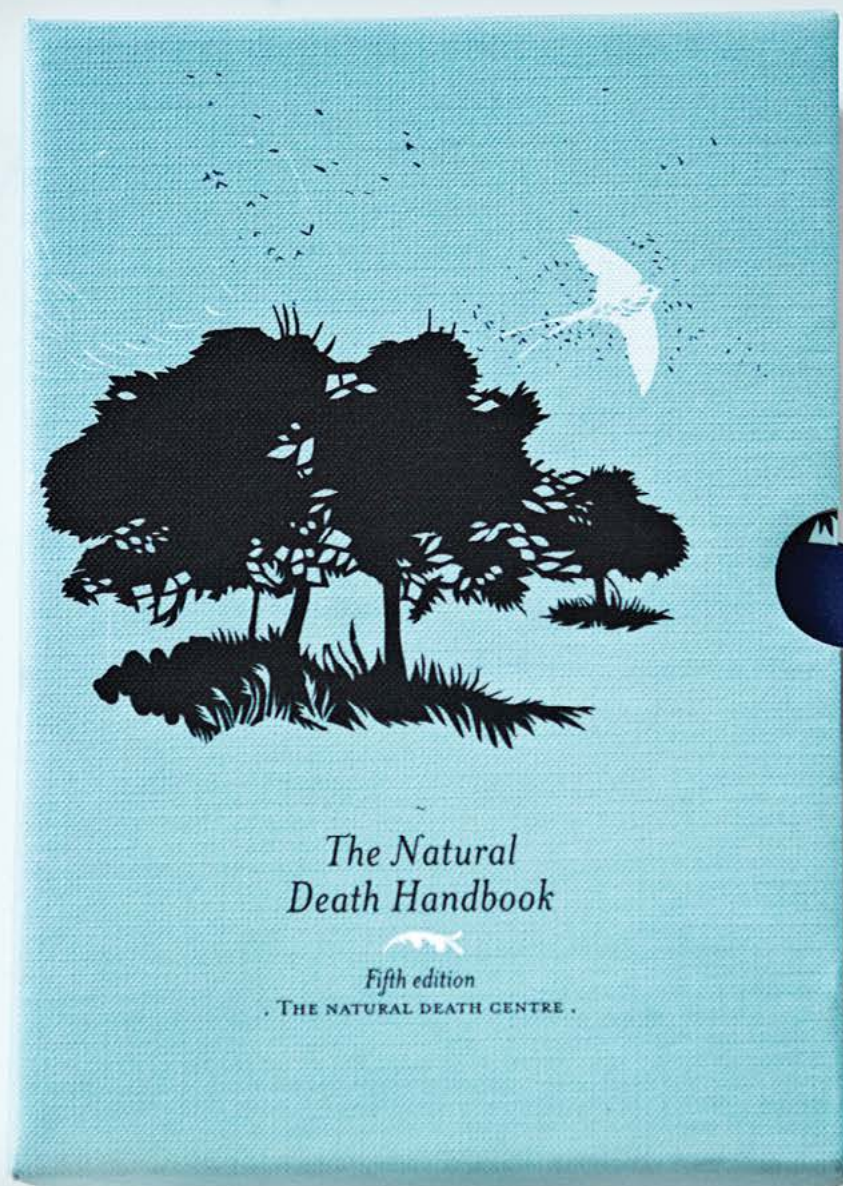
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Understanding the growth of Tribute Fund schemes supporting charities in memory of loved ones.

Jonathan Davies, Founder of the Tribute charity MuchLoved, outlines some ideas about the recent growth in Tribute Fund schemes being offered by charities and the possible benefits to Funeral Directors and the families they support.



In-Memoriam and Funeral Gifts

There's clearly nothing new about the concept of in-memory gifts, whether it is the deceased leaving a legacy in their will or the next of kin marking their death in some way, often through an in-memoriam donation to a chosen charity.

Over the last few years there has been a move towards greater personalisation of the funeral with an array of keepsakes and memorabilia offered such as jewellery, urns, memorial books and videos. There are many reasons for this and ideas include greater secularisation (a need to replace religious ceremony and iconography with something else), higher cremation rates (the decline of the graveyard as main focus of remembrance) and a more >>

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>>expressive society (where people are empowered to be more open with their emotions). For my own part, I wouldn't underplay the impact of an increasingly consumerist society and an associated snowballing of client expectations for all products, including funerals.

In tandem with this personalisation trend, there has been a growth in the requests for donations to be made to a chosen charity in lieu of flowers at the funeral. This might be to support a charity that researches the cause of death (such as a cancer charity), one that helped with care or treatment (such as a hospice), a condition suffered (such as an asthma charity) or one loved and supported in life by the deceased (such as an aid charity).

Through all of this, the Funeral Director has generally been happy, as part of the service they offer, to be the conduit for all of the donations through to the charities, despite the administration cost that this entails.

It is estimated that over £100 million a year is now donated at funerals and the growth in these donations is sometimes explained as a move away from wasteful cut flowers that bloom and then fade so quickly after the funeral. There is however a less negative explanation in that it is reflecting a proactive reaction by the bereaved wanting to do something positive and lasting. Both research and common sense demonstrate that it is helpful and beneficial in the grieving process to raise money for a good cause in their memory, at a time when you can feel completely helpless and bereft.

Recognising the motivation for giving

Charities have increasingly wanted to recognise this important and special motivation for giving - in essence that the reason for the donation is not the charity itself, but the person who has died. The desire to better recognise this distinct and unique motivation for giving has been the trigger behind the establishment of formal Tribute Fund schemes by many charities.

One of the earliest schemes was developed by the Motor Neurone Disease Association over a decade ago, offering supporters the ability to have a fund set up in the name of their loved one to act as a 'wrapper' for all fundraising in their memory. Crucially, this fund structure facilitates not just a one-off gift, but ongoing fundraising over a period of time, plus it welcomes participation by other family and friends, so that anyone affected by the bereavement can participate in the fund and have their contribution recognised.>>



>>The MND Association give their fund holders special prominence, in a sense treating them like VIP supporters, and they keep in regular individual contact through a member of staff at the charity with a specific responsibility for liaising with and supporting all their Tribute Fund holders.

One of the fascinating things about Tribute Funds is the wide range of fund-raising activities that people will carry out to support their funds. In addition to formal events such as sponsored runs and walks, people organise many personal 'Do-It-Yourself' events such as pub quizzes, balloon releases, cake sales and football matches. The beauty of these DIY events is that they can be arranged on special days such as an anniversary and at specific places such as their loved one's favourite pub!

Today many charities, and in particular medical research and hospice charities, now offer their supporters a Tribute Fund scheme. Good examples include The British Lung Foundation 'Breath of Life' scheme, Sue Ryder 'Incredible Memories' Fund, Bliss 'Precious Stars Fund' and Meningitis Now 'Forever Funds'.

The funds can benefit bereaved families in many ways, offering a focus for positive action, with schemes often building into substantial amounts creating a sense of purpose and achievement. Often the actual organisation of the fundraising events themselves are an important part of the benefit, with people taking great joy in arranging and promoting an event that is dedicated to and focused on their loved one.

Some charities offer tokens of appreciation and incentives, such as a named plaque or a memorial tree, once the fund reaches a certain level, and over time the fund holders themselves can go on to establish a personal and lasting relationship with the charity.>>





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Importance of technology and societal changes

>>A more tolerant society, a better understanding of the process of grief and particular events such as Princess Diana's death have contributed to significant changes in the way we view memorialisation in general. It has become much more normal, even expected, for families to create and share a public tribute, rather than keep to the newspaper announcement and funeral eulogy along with a heavy dose of stiff upper-lip.

Recent technology changes have also played an important part. You can now freely create and share a Tribute website and easily upload memories and pictures to commemorate your loved one, and these websites can be used as the basis for displaying and updating a Tribute Fund in their honour, with no geographical or time constraints for friends and family to access.



Increasingly, bereaved families are considering establishing a Tribute Fund at or around the time of death, rather than some time afterwards, and so the funeral can become the starting point for the fund, with the funeral collection effectively acting as the first fundraising 'event'.

As part of this, the Tribute Fund can notify friends and family of the funeral and enable them to donate online which is becoming the chosen method of donating for most people. This certainly helps reduce work for Funeral Directors in having to administer cash and cheques, however it also leads to other benefits such as increased donations and gift aid to the charities.

It also gives family and friends who live further afield or are not attending the funeral the chance to be involved, post messages and donate, even if they can't be there to say goodbye in person.

All too often after the funeral, the bereavement still can become a rather taboo subject which people find difficult to broach. A Tribute Fund can therefore act as a way of helping people continue to connect with each other about the deceased and keep their memories alive.

Through the establishment of a formal Tribute Fund, many of the families will then go on to raise significant sums of money for the charities, whilst in so doing helping themselves in their own grieving process.

I hope that this article has helped provide some background to the development of charity Tribute Fund schemes and encourages you to support and promote them to your families and clients where appropriate.

Jonathan Davies
Trustee of MuchLoved,
The online Tribute charity

MuchLoved run a Funeral Giving information site for Funeral Directors www.funeralgiving.org and a Tribute Fund information site for charities at www.fundraisinginmemory.org



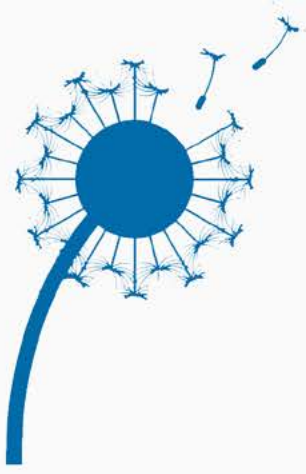
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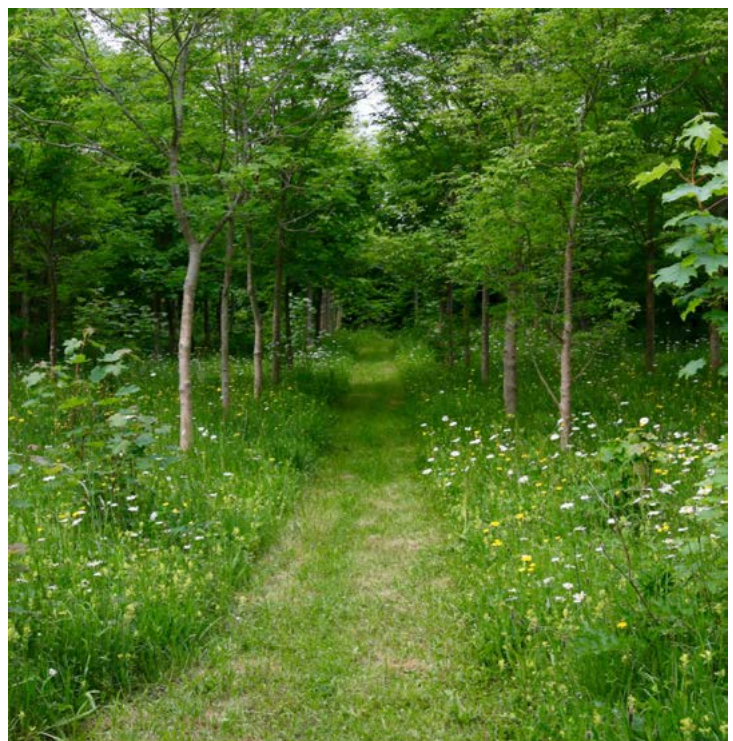
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The Ethics of *Direct Cremation*


A circumspect insight into this expanding funeral option, by **Nick Gandon**, proprietor of **Simplicita Cremations**.

It can now be said with some certainty that Direct Cremation has become an accepted option when choosing the way to depart from this mortal coil.

For some folk it's refreshing to have the choice of a break from the norm. Unlike the more traditional form of arrangements, it gives families a greater freedom to do their own thing – or indeed no-thing.

Five years or so ago, you could easily count the number of firms offering direct cremation on one hand. These days, an increasing number of traditional funeral directors, and several dedicated firms now offer the service, as a response to public demand. At Simplicita, the service we offer was devised back in 1991, and signalled the “birth” of Direct Cremation in the UK.

A recent survey by the National Association of Funeral Directors revealed that around 85% of their members now offer some form of Direct Cremation as an option.>>



less expensive
than the more
traditional
offerings





anyone can
open an
undertakers
shop on the
high street

>> As an outsider to “funeralworld”, you might think that all providers are broadly the same, delivering the same service in the same way. But, as with every other consumer purchase, there is a balance to be struck between getting value for money, and the quality of service provided.

Offering a funeral service, in its various forms, is not regulated in the UK, and apart from the crematorium operators themselves, there is no licensing or minimum legal standard for provision of service.

You might think it slightly worrying that literally anyone can open an undertakers shop on the high street, or promote their services on a captivating website.

One way of ensuring that things both “front of house” and behind the scenes are as they should be, is to select a direct cremation provider who is both established, and is a member of a recognised trade organisation, such as the NAFD or SAIF, or is recommended by the Good Funeral Guide. This means that their premises and methods of operation will have been inspected, and thus meet or exceed recognised professional standards.

Go one step further, if you feel inclined. Ask if you can inspect their full facilities, including their mortuary. You would probably never wish to do so, but, if a firm refuses, then ask yourself, why?

It’s a fact that the proprietors of some UK websites offering direct cremation have few or no facilities. No properly equipped transfer vehicle. No trained staff. Nowhere for the deceased to rest between death and cremation.

Perhaps that also means no professional indemnity insurance, no public liability insurance, employer’s liability insurance etc etc? It does make you wonder what would happen if matters got delayed or didn’t quite go to plan...>>

>>Direct cremation is much less involved than providing a full funeral service, hence, it may attract eager newcomers to “try their hand” at offering this option. Although every good business has to start somewhere, it is essential that those offering the service have sufficient experience and facilities to address the more complicated arrangements and situations that can occur from time to time.

Direct cremation is also less expensive than the more traditional offerings, and with it comes the inevitable scramble for providers to undercut their competitors, in order to gain new business. Low prices are good news for consumers, but buyer beware, there may be a pitfall.

Artificially low prices can be very tempting, except that there is a point where it becomes impossible to provide a dignified, professional service, which is sustainable. Some of the prices that have been advertised on the internet in recent months arguably fall into that category.

It could be suggested that the £1000 (or less) figure that the press have been quoting in past newspaper articles, and indeed, also by some consumer organisations, is a trifle misleading. Yes, some cremations will easily fall within that price zone, but most will not, and it could be argued that a guide of between £1200 to £1500 is more realistic for the majority of serious direct cremation providers.

As we're talking about direct cremation, then we can't ignore direct cremation **pre-paid plans**. Although plans aren't everyone's cup of tea, they certainly appeal to a very large, and growing number of people. A part of the funeral market that cannot be ignored.

There are direct cremation plans on offer from several sources. If you're looking into the possibility of purchasing such a plan, be mindful of the importance that



the funds you pay towards the plan are placed in a secure and recognised place, such as a trust fund. It is advisable that the plan provider is also registered with the **Funeral Planning Authority**, or similar financial body. It's also important that the plan you choose complies with the **Financial Services and Markets Act 2000**.

It can be argued that some of the plans currently on offer are priced at a level that (again) is unsustainable.

The fear is that some of these offerings may very well be unable to provide the service promised when actually needed. If the price of a plan seems too good to be true.... think very, very carefully.



It is always prudent to research the background of plan providers, in order to reassure yourself that all is well, before making that most important purchase.

Are they established?

- Do they comply with current
- legislation?

For those that want to delve deeper, the Companies House website, for instance, provides a wealth of information, such as identifying directors of previously dissolved companies, which can help identify risks that you may wish to consider.

The ethics of direct cremation may well mean different things to different people. It is truly important that those firms who provide this service do so, with care, sensitivity, and the dignity that all families expect, when their loved one is entrusted into their care.

It is equally important that those considering a direct cremation appreciate that without proper facilities, the websites that offer the lowest prices may not necessarily be the most prudent choice of service provider, for a very good reason.



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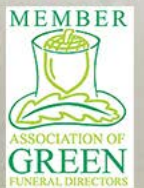
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Death on the Road

Here, Paul Sinclair tells us a bit about his motorcycle funerals.

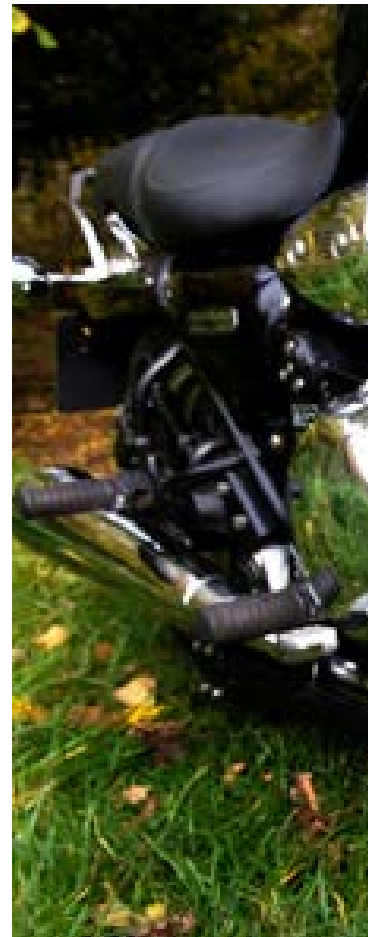
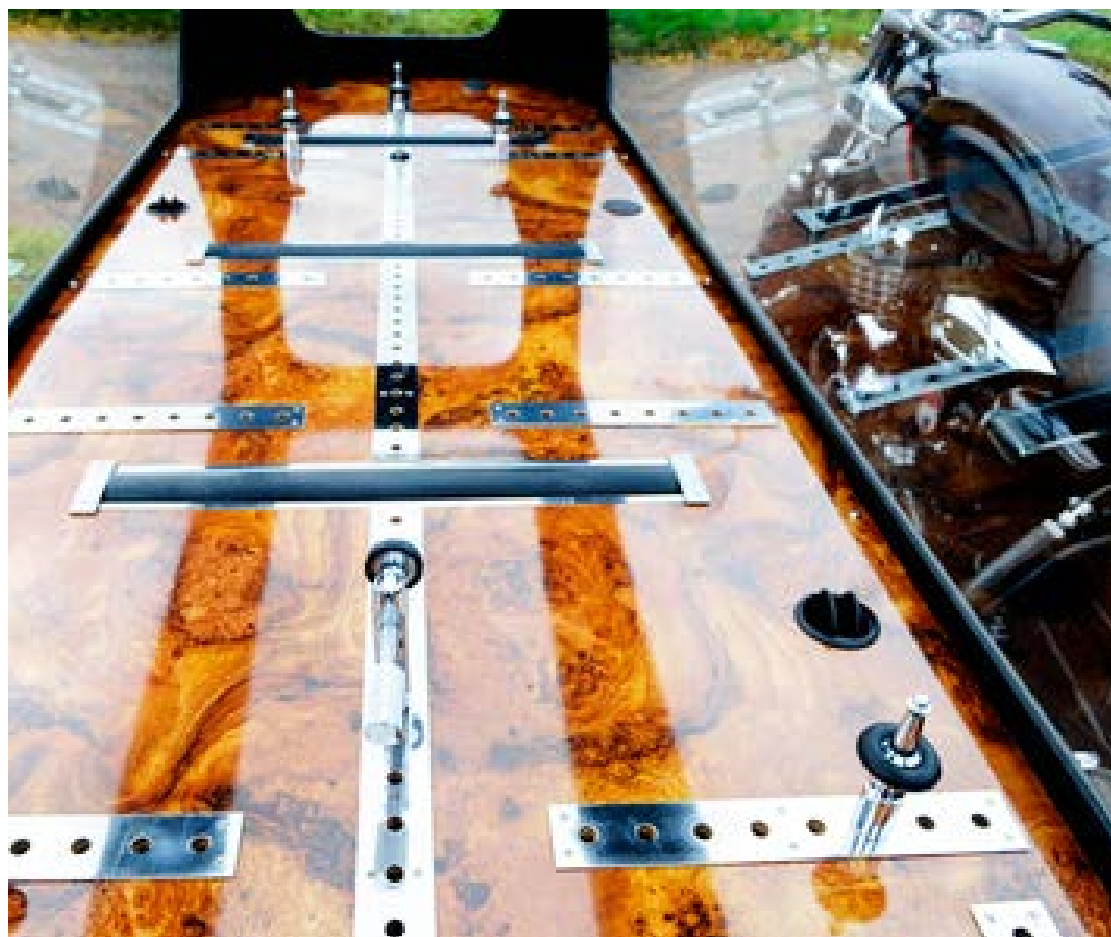
Before I started this business, the best a biker, motorcyclist or sidecar enthusiast could hope for in the British Isles was a floral display shaped like a motorbike in the back of a hearse.



In Australia they had a few sidecar boards with coffin stoppers. These were fine down there, where the weather is more predictable and at first I wanted to copy this idea. However, this posed a few problems.

Our weather can go through all four seasons in a day so the coffin would get wet and mostly with dirty water off the road. That would cause a safety issue, picking up a large coffin that is wet and slimy is highly unwise. Secondly, when traffic splashes muck onto the side of the coffin and if you try to shoulder it, your clothes get ruined.

There was a girl in New Zealand who started with one of these, she had to try and protect the front of the coffin too as it would get covered in dead flies on warm days.>>





>>Finally, cardboard and wicker coffins flex, so it is absolutely vital that the wind cannot get a grip of them and certainly not get underneath. When you sit one of these on rollers there are gaps where the wind can get hold. This could quite easily result in a coffin coming loose or in the case of cardboard being ripped. So, having looked at all this I opted for weather protection and sent in a patent application. After a world wide search etc. I got the patent granted.

I have a little adage, the *SAD funeral*. This means *Safe and Dignified*. We use proper leading link forks, these are used by sidecar racers for stability and steering. Without these the sidecar would sway around. In a photo no one knows the difference, but you soon would on a twisty road. To buy and fit these costs about £2000, but we think it is vital. Without them the outfit would be very heavy to handle, so you get fatigued. As a result we can do extremely long funerals (one was 220 miles with the coffin). That would be a good example of Safe.



Dignity is different, it is a bit like beauty, what is beautiful to one person isn't to another. As such you can't have too many hard and fast rules. Most people would think it right that we are dressed smartly and are careful in our communication. We clean the windows and polish the paint etc. Dignity is difficult to explain, but you soon notice when it isn't there!

It is interesting to note that many of our passengers are elderly, earlier this year we carried a 101 year old lady. Many of her generation were dispatch riders or had a sidecar outfit or a solo motorbike. At the other end we serve on children's funerals as we have what looks like a child carriage. The glass surround really helps here as we can carefully lay out flowers and stuffed toys. I am careful to ensure none of our riders carry out more children's funerals than the others as it is upsetting. >>



‘dignity is
different, it
is a bit like
beauty’

>>We are proud to serve and don't show how we feel as that is not our place, but it is still upsetting. We also serve at the funerals of bikers, motorcyclists, racers and so on. Quite a number of ladies ask for it as they like the style.

We also run the UK's first full length trike hearse, we find that for every 160 motorcycle funeral requests there will be only one trike request. Often we find the deceased was actually a motorcyclist and the person booking the funeral didn't understand that a trike and a bike are different, at that point they switch, but sometimes the deceased really was a trike enthusiast so this is just ideal.

Initially we bought a trailer for trikers, but it was never ever used as the trike enthusiasts tended to relate that to going down the tip. Once we had switched to the full length trike they were really happy.

In the winter, especially when there is snow about, we don't field the trike. The central wheel that you use to steer and brake is exactly where the ice and snow build up but we can use the motorbikes all year round. After all they made it to Stalingrad in the winter ... mind you... they never came back!

Samantha Lonergan
Althorne Hall Farm,
Althorne,
Near Chelmsford
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Do you love your Pet to Death?

By Gordon and Alison of Respect Green Burial Parks

We own and operate two natural cemeteries in the UK that are, unusually, licensed to accept both pet and human burials.

We opened our parks six years ago and decided that we would like to offer people the option to be buried with their beloved animals. We designated particular areas for this and called them the 'Togetherness Meadow'. Little did we know of the red tape that was to follow.

We were advised by the Environment Agency that we would need a Waste Management Licence and would have to undergo a Waste Management Course. We were also accountable to DEFRA and Animal Health. A little challenging but we decided to go ahead and two members of our team undertook courses at a cost of around £2,700 each!

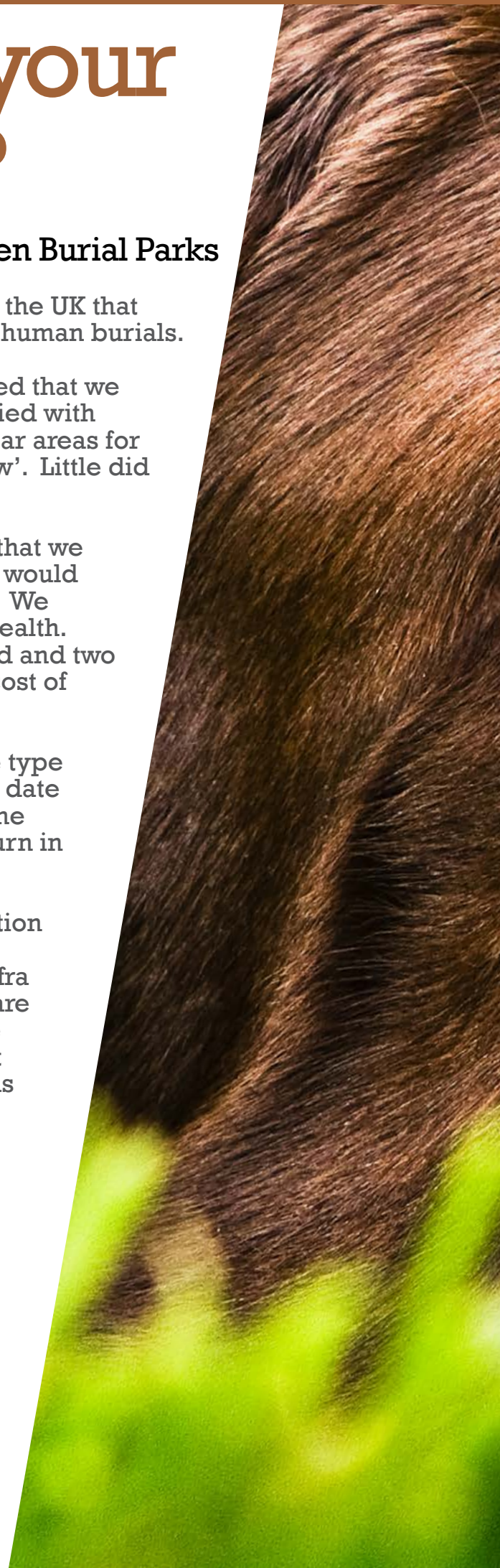
For each pet we bury we have to document the type of animal, its weight, whether carcass or ashes, date of burial and even the registration number of the vehicle it was carried in. We had to send a return in to the EA on a monthly basis.

Over the past two to three years the EA legislation has relaxed but we still have to keep detailed records, as we have unexpected visits from Defra and Animal Health, checking that our records are up to date and that each burial is logged in the correct manner. We cannot bury ashes without an EA licence which we feel is a little strange as ash is inert? But again we must log and keep permanent detailed records.

Another issue for us, is that unlike human burials where there is plenty of time to make arrangements, pet burials are usually required the same day as the pet dies or is euthanised.

This is a challenge as we have to action our grave digger and make arrangements with the owners to meet at the Park later that day.

This isn't an issue for us and the pet burials are treated with the same dignity and respect as human burials. >>





Why bother? you may say. Sounds like a whole heap of paperwork?

Over 46% of households in the UK own a pet?. These are not just pets but family members and more often than not if we bury a pet then the owners will book a plot beside them. We can even specify that they will be laid next to their head or by their hand and the comfort this brings to families really does make it all worthwhile. They also have somewhere to go to grieve where they know their beloved pet will be for eternity. Many people traditionally choose to bury their pets in the garden but this can worry them regarding what happens when they move. Indeed the EA set about banning this but found it too difficult to police.

As I say, we own two Green Burial Parks and are Funeral Directors too but the death of a pet can affect us all and this is our story:-

On the 18th August 2016 our beloved German Shepherd, Morton, was diagnosed with cancer. There was no cure but palliative care via steroid tablets on a daily basis. The anguish at the time of being informed was unbearable. Our boy came home from the vets, was given all his favourite treats, all the love that we had and was spoiled even more than usual.

On Sunday the 28th August Morton collapsed and was unable to stand on his rear legs. I slept downstairs on the sofa on Sunday night and Gordon and I spent the day caring for him on Monday. Gordon sat with him until late on Monday night and again I slept on the sofa so I could hear his cries if he needed anything.

Tuesday morning came and we both knew what that would bring. The telephone call to the vets is one no-one should have to make and to have my best friend euthanised was the hardest thing I have ever had to do. I have cried everyday since and the emptiness in the house is unbearable. He's not at the bottom of the stairs in the morning, he's not at the front door when we get home.

We had a pre-arranged holiday booked so that's what happened next. We joined our family with their dog and after two days I noticed the tears had stopped. However, getting off the plane on our return journey I knew that there would be no-one there to greet me at the door and give me verbal condemnation for going away! The pain started again.

We could never replace our loving family pet but we knew that having a dog in the house again would ease the pain somewhat. Not only did we find one, but we got two, 10 week old Belgium Shepherds this time, we didn't want to be comparing them to Morton.


All good you may think, but it felt disloyal and the guilt I feel is tremendous. Having lost human family members too this grief is no different and anyone who say's "it's just a dog" has never owned one.

Morton is now at rest with Granddad. Gordon and I will be alongside him when our time comes.





having lost
human family
members
too this grief
is no
different




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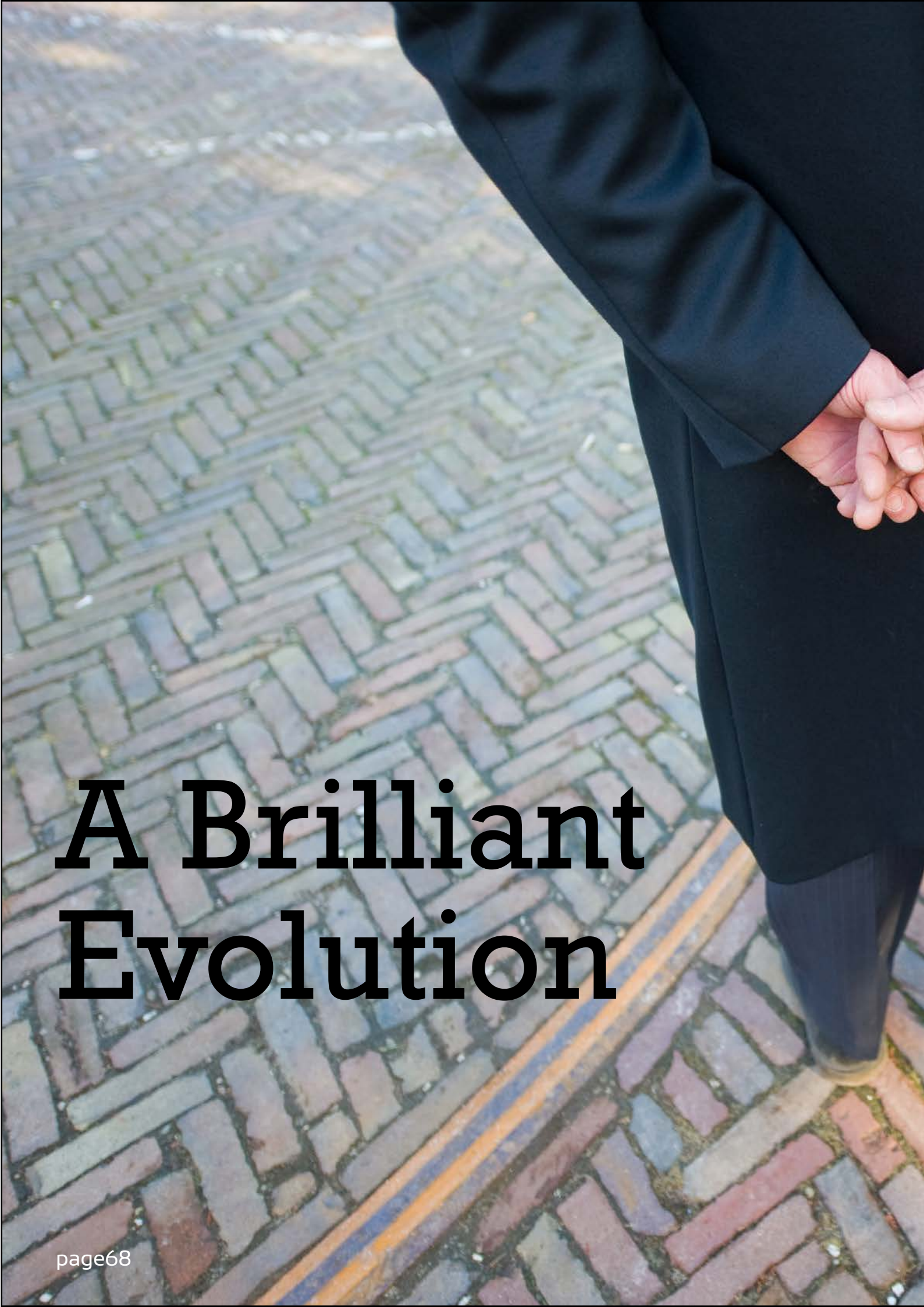
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A Brilliant Evolution

A person wearing a black frock coat is shown from the waist down, holding a hand. They are standing on a cobblestone street. The background is a blurred view of the street and other people.

Ok. Lean in. A little closer. I'm going to tell you something that everyone in this industry knows, but nobody wants to admit...

We Funeral Directors are a very old fashioned bunch. I know, I know, hardly a revelation is it? We turn up wearing our solemn expressions, dressed in our Victorian-style frock coats and clutching the regulation topper and gloves. Fossils all of us. Relics from the 19th century.

But why are we like this?

I'll tell you: people don't like death. Yes, we like to pretend we're comfortable with it, playing dress up at Halloween and collecting brightly painted skulls, but really, deep down, we don't like to think about it. Death comes for us all, but it is something that none of us really want to consider; heck even us undertakers like to think we'll live forever (we drink the embalming fluid don'tcha know). >>

>>And so, to avoid thinking about death and loss and grief you go and hand all it all over to us, your Funeral Directors.

Now, the problem is some of us like this idea of being 'in the know'. We've been doing it for a while now and we want it to stay this way. Well, I say some of us, what I really mean is most of us. *We don't want you breaking into our closed shops.* We don't want you to see the wizard behind the curtain. It is us who look after your loved ones, not you. Yes, we give you the impression that you are in the driving seat, but it is us who are really calling the shots.

I said most of us, I didn't say all of us. There needs to be a change in attitude? There already is. Some of us understand that we are an antique organization with antique ideas. You lot are starting to look at celebrating the life, not mourning the death.

Black is no longer de rigueur on a funeral. Heck, you are even having popular music played on a funeral service! For that small minority of us that are moving with the times, this is a very good thing (believe me, there is only so many times one person can sing 'All Things Bright and Beautiful', or 'Crimond' in a day without having to stifle a yawn). There are some of us who welcome the chance to do something different and break out of tradition.

Variety is the spice of life so it has been said, and a funeral these days should be just that: various. A funeral is not about following a set pattern. A funeral is not about re-enacting something that was originally written on granite tablets by our glowering Victorian forebears. A funeral is not one size fits all.

So why do 'they' want to keep a funeral service as something secret and hidden? Why do 'they' make you feel awkward when you utter those words no one should ever ask a Funeral Director: 'So, how much is this going to cost..?' >>





>>I'll tell you why. They don't want you to realise that it is really you who are calling the shots. It's your loved one. It is your opportunity to celebrate/commemorate/give thanks for their lives.

A funeral Director is there to help you with the reins, not take them from you. If you say don't want the hearse and two limos; if you say you want everyone to turn up in Hawaiian shirts and shorts; if you ask for anything slightly out of the ordinary and you're met with a furrowed brow or a concerned look... go elsewhere.

There are those of us who love doing something different. But the big boys, the traditional funeral firms with their dark wood panelled offices and long, thin, pale fingers, they don't like the idea of you having choices.

Oh, they may give you the impression that you can do what you wish, but secretly, they want to stay in control.

You know, being progressive these days isn't about having a Facebook page. It isn't about having a website. It isn't about being able to use emails. Being progressive these days is about being open:

Physically open: A funeral directors premises should (somewhat ironically) be welcoming. You are coming to us to give your loved one the send-off you want. Me? I would want to go somewhere that looked approachable.

No, not all show home perfect and cookie cutter corporate and certainly not all grim and foreboding. I want to go somewhere approachable, somewhere I would be comfortable spending a little time.





Spiritually open: Yes, it's that elephant in the room - religion (and I'll sidestep that topic for another day) but, if you want a service to incorporate your loved ones belief in the great Flying Spaghetti Monster (and yes, there is a religion that celebrates this particular deity) go somewhere that is open to these ideas. I know I keep saying this, but it really is your day.

Open in nature: Gone are the days of the stuffed shirts. We may still look smart (and you can't beat that feeling of wearing a good suit), but some of us are as down to earth as you are. Ask yourself this: when was the last time you laughed in a funeral home? Laughter is good. Like a good cry, a good laugh is food for the soul. And guess what? Your loved one isn't going to be upset because you are laughing with the Funeral Director whilst arranging their funeral. You want a celebration, so celebrate!

But still there are those of us who don't want to give you control. We have been your family's Undertaker for years. We have tradition backing us up. We have been doing this for years and years and... *snore*

So open those closed shops. Peak behind the curtain. Look for the funeral directors whose eyes glint when you say: 'I don't know if this is entirely appropriate but...' Take back control.

Yes, we Funeral Directors are a bunch of dinosaurs working in an old fashioned industry, but at least some of us are evolving.

Your friend,

**Mr. P. De'Ath
Funeral Director**

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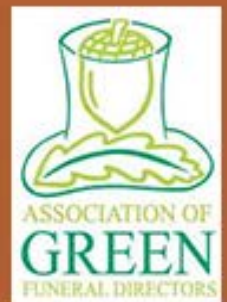
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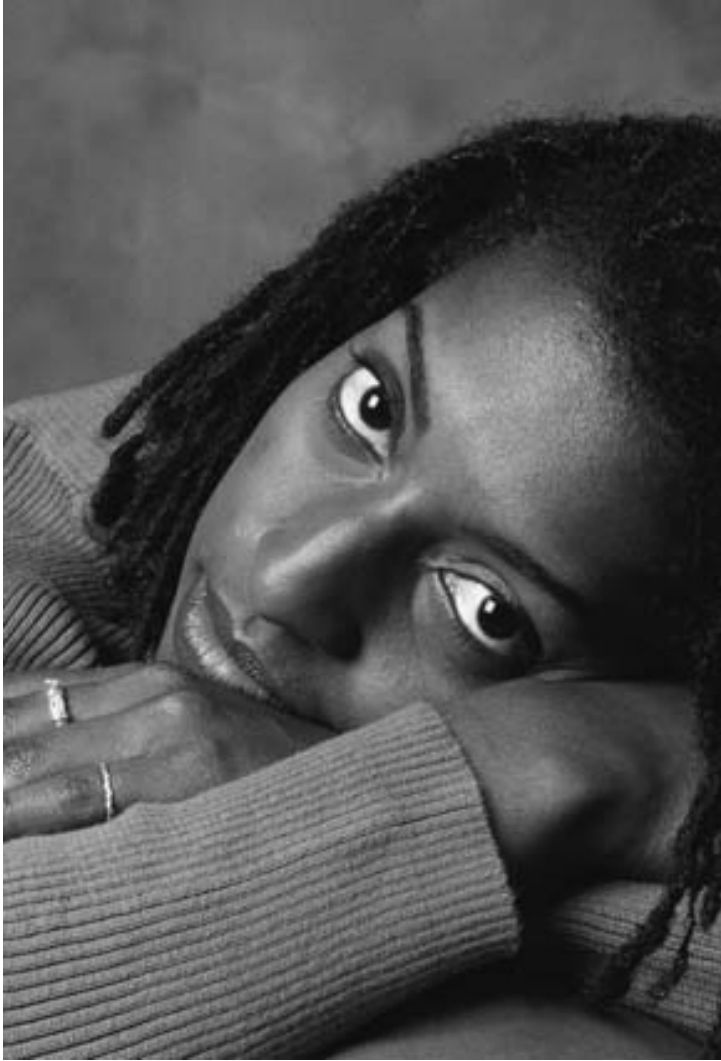


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Human Soup

the recipe for grief

There are many insightful glimpses into human nature that working around death offers, but surely one of the most comforting is that there is no such thing as a 'functional family'. It certainly cheered us up.

I honestly think the term 'dysfunctional' will gradually disappear from everyday use and simply remain a clinical term as we realise that really, there are only people, struggling with the enormous difficulties that an ordinary life in the 21st Century brings, and dealing with the complicated dynamics of the average modern family, few of which resemble the traditional nuclear family.

Instead they are a complicated mosaic of stepchildren, birth parents, new partners, some of whom may have little or no real contact with or understanding of each other.

And then somebody dies, and all of these characters have to come together to create something that satisfies everyone's sense of decorum, belief systems, sense of public identity, all the while grappling with the existential and emotional issues raised by death; the why's, the what next's, who gets what, and what exactly happened at last Christmas.>>

>>Often, when somebody dies, even if it is an expected death, an emotional vacuum is created. 'The first thing into that vacuum, is guilt, whether warranted or not.

There is nothing like the impossibility of any further communication, trivial or deep, to open up the imagination to what should have been said, what simple acts of reparation that might have smoothed over years of discord.

For many people, saying 'I love you' at the right time to a dying relative proves just too difficult, and so years of remorse follow, self flagellation, or simply feeling quietly distant when others talk warmly about the dead one. A lonely place, one of harsh self judgement.

Anger is the poor cousin of guilt, more easily accessed, more likely to flare up, and it is this anger; anger at people, the person who has died, anger at death itself that shows it's teeth.

For the average corporate funeral director, much of this is academic. Their contact with the family is sympathetic, accommodating, understanding and may go even further, and every funeral director has stories of families lashing out unfairly, but often this is handled through a formal system of complaint, but for the modern ceremonial undertaker, the relationship, and the anger, goes deeper.

In our case, the roles of arranger, administrator, undertaker and celebrant are rolled into one; the relationships become multilayered, genuine and often ongoing which, living in a small town are maintained on a daily basis.

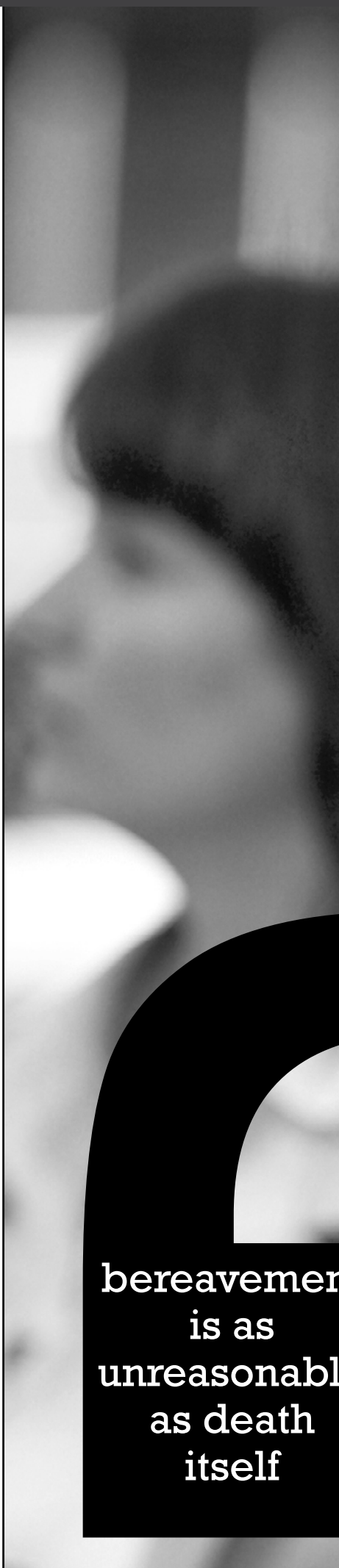
This means our work crosses some of the traditional boundaries between the undertaker and the family.

We risk what therapists and doctors might call emotional cross contamination, taking home much more of the pain, but receiving much more of the warmth and the realness in return.

It has nurtured and sustained us, given us our deepest friends, but taken us to the edge of burnout too. There is no place to pass the buck when mistakes happen.

'Bereavement is unreasonable, as unreasonable as death itself.'

It finds ways to turn an ordinary bad day to its advantage, blurs the logical mind, seizes on things that are, in the greater scheme of things, not really an issue.>>



bereavement
is as
unreasonable
as death
itself

nt
e

>> Funerals are highly charged events full of expectations which families see as something that should run like clock-work. If one thing goes wrong, either through human error or just because things do, then the undertaker is an easy and obvious target. Sometimes this is deserved; incompetence or straightforward malpractice happen, but often this is just life.

In the Tarot, the ancient pack of cards which depicts enigmatic archetypes and has been used as a system of reflection and divination for centuries, the first real card after the Fool, our hero, is the Magician. He is traditionally depicted with one hand raised to the heavens and the other lowered to the ground, as if channeling higher powers and then earthing them. Our hero, is the magician.

For me, this is as useful an idea of how we as people who work with death should deal with the currents of anger that pass through us as any.

It must take enormous strength and steadiness for him to stand there as these energies pass through him. Like lightning which takes the easiest and quickest route, surely these energies must pass through the heart, yet he remains undamaged, confident in his ability to handle them, aware that he is the link between these worlds, the messenger not the message, the wire not the current.

We who choose, or are chosen to work with death must accept that from time to time we will be the channel through which unreasonable anger passes, unfair recipients of years of resentment, substitutes for the person who has died, a hired stranger conveniently placed to receive a burst of fury. By and large these people are not dysfunctional, they are just angry at the terrible unfairness of death, but you must hold tight to the notion that you are not to blame, and that receiving this anger calmly and channeling it is part of the job.

The trick is to find a way to hold yourself securely in this role, to properly feel the ground beneath you so you can be that Magician, letting that anger be felt in both worlds, accepting that it is not you they are raging against.

It is part of the role, another service we offer to the families we help, though a difficult one to describe on any website.

How you hold that ground is a whole other article in itself.

it is not
you
they are
raging
against



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so in the eye of nature let them die"

William Wordsworth 1888



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a quiet place
for reflection...



Sacred Stones

Toby Angel of Sacred Stones shares with us his journey of creating their round barrow...

Two years into our journey I've concluded that there are two principle elements to our story. Firstly, craftsmanship applied to interpreting an ancient form of engineering. Secondly, and more importantly, the purpose and motivation behind the structures.



Having focused on the 'builds', the labour of love and majesty of the structure(s), both at The Long Barrow, and Willow Row Barrow (both of which were designed and built by the same team) we'd not recognised the 'real story'.

Quite naturally we've attempted to understand what barrows might have meant to our ancient ancestors. Calling upon professors of archaeology, anthropology, and faith to expound theories. Our basic understanding is that barrows were built to venerate the dead, act as territorial markers, and most importantly provide venues for community to come together. In many ways they were precursors to village halls and parish churches.

‘taking a walk through a beautiful setting to prepare the mind, to focus on the person we love, to be somewhere calm and peaceful is compelling’

My own personal experience with bereavement has, more often than not, been frustrated with the ‘all in one’ attitude promoted at each event. Scorched in my memory is the queuing at the crem chapel. Waiting to be ushered into a warm but soulless building knowing that there’s a line of other grieving families waiting to do the same. This for me, is where the assembled are expected to deal with both ‘disposal’ and commemoration in one go and I’d rather do it differently. I can hear the owners of natural or woodland burial grounds shout ‘hallelujah’!

Early seeds for change planted in the early 1990’s by the Natural Death Movement (NBD in Carlisle, and establishment of NDC in 1994) have very evidently germinated and established a much needed strong root structure. Flushes of growth witnessed latterly with Dying Matters and the Death Café movement are testament for the need for change, education and a holistic approach to serve community.



Our first testimony highlights the need for continued change, making reference to re-connection; “When we lose someone we love, the sense of loss distances us from the petty and immediate concerns that dictate our lives and we reconnect with the world in a profound sense... the thought of taking a walk through a beautiful setting to prepare the mind, to focus on the person we love, to be somewhere calm and peaceful is compelling; away from roads and gravestones and distractions and the doctrine of religion”.







Having pieced our jigsaw puzzle together we are keen to stress that there was no picture to work from. The completed puzzle acts as a blank canvas for others to paint, to mark loss as a natural progression rather than just an end. Thus I've discovered the greater mass of our personal iceberg. The top 10% is stone and structure, and frankly a distraction from the more profound sub-surface 90% which is about providing nourishment for the soul, and an opportunity to commune. A timeless and innate emotion in all of us. Physical reaction to our interpretation of ancient barrows is consistent. It begins with awe, the wonderment at the passionate physicality of a handcrafted structure. The longer people spend inside their own space, for example the central chamber, they find comfort from the intimate surroundings and begin to express deeper thoughts and emotion. I suspect this is exactly what families enjoy in natural open spaces when they are afforded a peaceful solitary moment or two.

Perhaps this begins to explain why so many cremation urns are left uncollected? The process of disposal is related, indeed connected with the start of a commemorative experience and families cannot fathom how best to honour, connect and ultimately celebrate life.

**'It begins with awe,
then wonderment at the
passionate physicality of a
handcrafted structure'**

Having purposely established a 'secular' environment at our barrow(s) we experience a space full of faith. This does not pertain to a specific religion or belief, nor does it exclude, but without doubt does connect to a timeless and perfectly natural need to be together and share.

For those professionals who might have gotten this far in my ramble (thank you by the way!) you won't be remotely surprised to hear the words of my pal Rachel, a palliative care nurse at our local hospital. When I asked about her work experience, suggesting it must be exhausting, she replied swiftly that 'yes, it can be very emotional, but the overriding experience is one of privilege'. To be part of a natural progression, not unlike birth or union, to be invited to help, listen and resolve at a humans most vulnerable moment is a privilege and I feel the need to apologise for not realising this earlier in our journey.

The last two years have, beyond welcoming my children into the world, been the most life affirming of my entire 49 years! We are not experts, and the bigger picture was there to view all along. For us it's about community, reconnecting with the world as we remove our digital personas, of course providing choice and not prescription. This is not exclusive to our venues, it's a shared common goal that we welcome.



Sacred Stones

For more information about
our barrows please contact us:

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E: info@sacredstones.co.uk

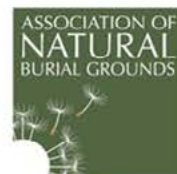
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Here, Helen Pearson explains how she became a natural burial ground operator and gives us a taste of the wide variety of funerals she has experienced.

In the late nineties, my husband and I purchased a seven and a half acre field opposite our house. In the millennium year we planted trees, mainly ash and oak, in one acre, with the help of the Wychwood Project (a local organisation which endeavours to re-establish the woodland in this area).

A few years later, a friend of ours asked if we would consider allowing him to be buried in our wood.

For his bedtime reading he had been perusing an old copy of the Natural Death Handbook. Following lack of definitive advice from our local council, I decided it would be easier to apply for planning permission to allow such a burial. I prepared and filed the application myself and after much to-ing and fro-ing they granted us permission for a change from agricultural use to a natural burial ground. Initially, they had no idea what a natural burial ground was and must have thought I was some sort of mad woman!

Little did I know that once planning permission had been granted, I would have to start using it within a relatively short period, and so without really realising what I was letting myself in for, I found myself thrown into the job of managing a burial ground.

The Association of Natural Burial Grounds, ANBG were extremely helpful and my first interment of ashes in 2007 went off without a hitch. However, my next funeral was a full burial. The husband contacted me on the Friday and wanted the funeral on the Monday. He didn't wish to use an undertaker but wanted me to arrange a vicar and a grave digger. I rang the local vicar, only to be told that she was away for the weekend and didn't work on Mondays. To add to my bad luck the grave digger wasn't answering his phone. I had an offer from a friend's son to do the digging by hand. Luckily it all ended happily, the vicar agreed to attend despite it being her day off and I found my lovely grave digger, Andy Slade.

Thank goodness the husband did not know of my inexperience and sense of rising panic, he gave a glowing account of the day on the feedback form. Phew!

I have learned a lot since then.>>

>>There have been nearly 150 funerals at Fairspear and I have sold numerous reserved plots, on the whole to people who have bought into the ethos of natural burial. I do get frustrated with a small minority of people who find it difficult to understand that Fairspear is a natural burial ground and that neither cultivated bulbs nor plants are allowed but mainly I do meet lots of lovely people and get a quiet satisfaction in what I'm doing.

The caption on my leaflet says 'Creating New Life' and I like to think that in some small way I am doing just that.

I have noticed an increase in the biodiversity having many more birds, butterflies and wild flowers; I hope this gives comfort to the bereaved.

Over the years, I have had a few unusual funerals.

One young man lost his mother, grandmother and grandfather in fairly quick succession, marking each successive funeral by presenting me with bones for my two dogs.

On another occasion, neither the wife or son turned up and the deceased had to be taken to a local funeral director for the night. The family, were informed of this and the funeral was rearranged for the next day, they still didn't attend.

Some funerals are sombre, quiet affairs but others have been more lively – one a little too lively, when the police had to be called as there was an altercation at the graveside.

A friend of mine who lives in the village lost her husband, William, and carried out the arrangements herself. He had been a racing driver and a very clever mechanical engineer. His funeral took place on a beautiful morning in May with bluebells strewn on his coffin. His best friend agreed to drive the deceased's 4 x 4 vehicle with William on board, from the village, as long as he did a 'ton'. He didn't make it the first time, so turned around and returned to the village and succeeded on the second try.

I don't know how normal this is, but I have had two double funerals and another when the deceased was buried at dusk having died earlier that day.

Another time, on a summer evening, I was showing a young man around the site as he was looking for a place for his late mother. Out of the trees flew an owl who led the way down the main drive. He exclaimed that his mother loved owls so was in no doubt that this should be her final resting place.

All funerals are sad occasions but I am always surprised and saddened at the number of young people who have committed suicide and also the number of babies and young children who die so young. I doubt anyone gets immune to being affected by such events.>>



>>On a brighter note, a funeral that took place earlier this year was the most noteworthy I have experienced, and for positive reasons. The family and friends arranged and carried out the funeral with the help of a local celebrant, it really was a celebration.

Watch the ceremony here.







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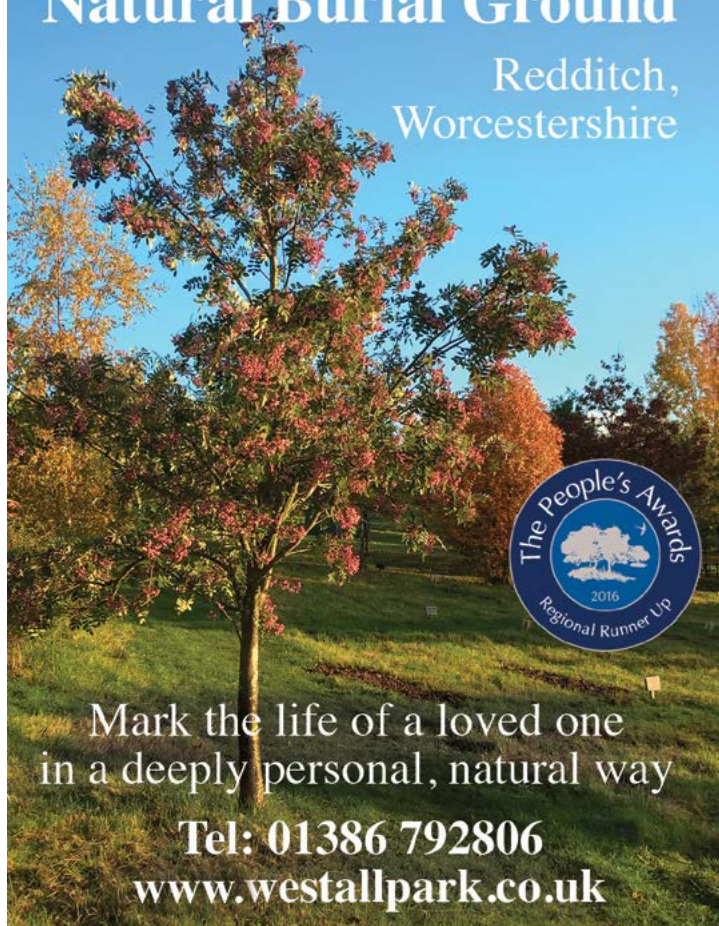
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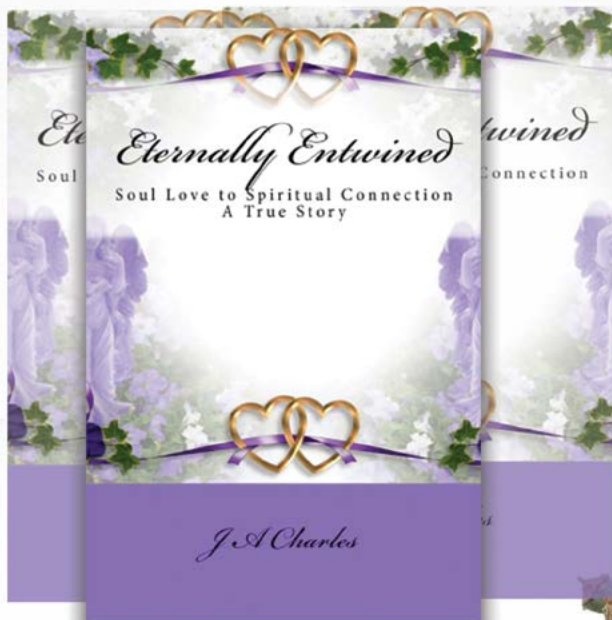
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Building the Bridge, our USA – UK connection



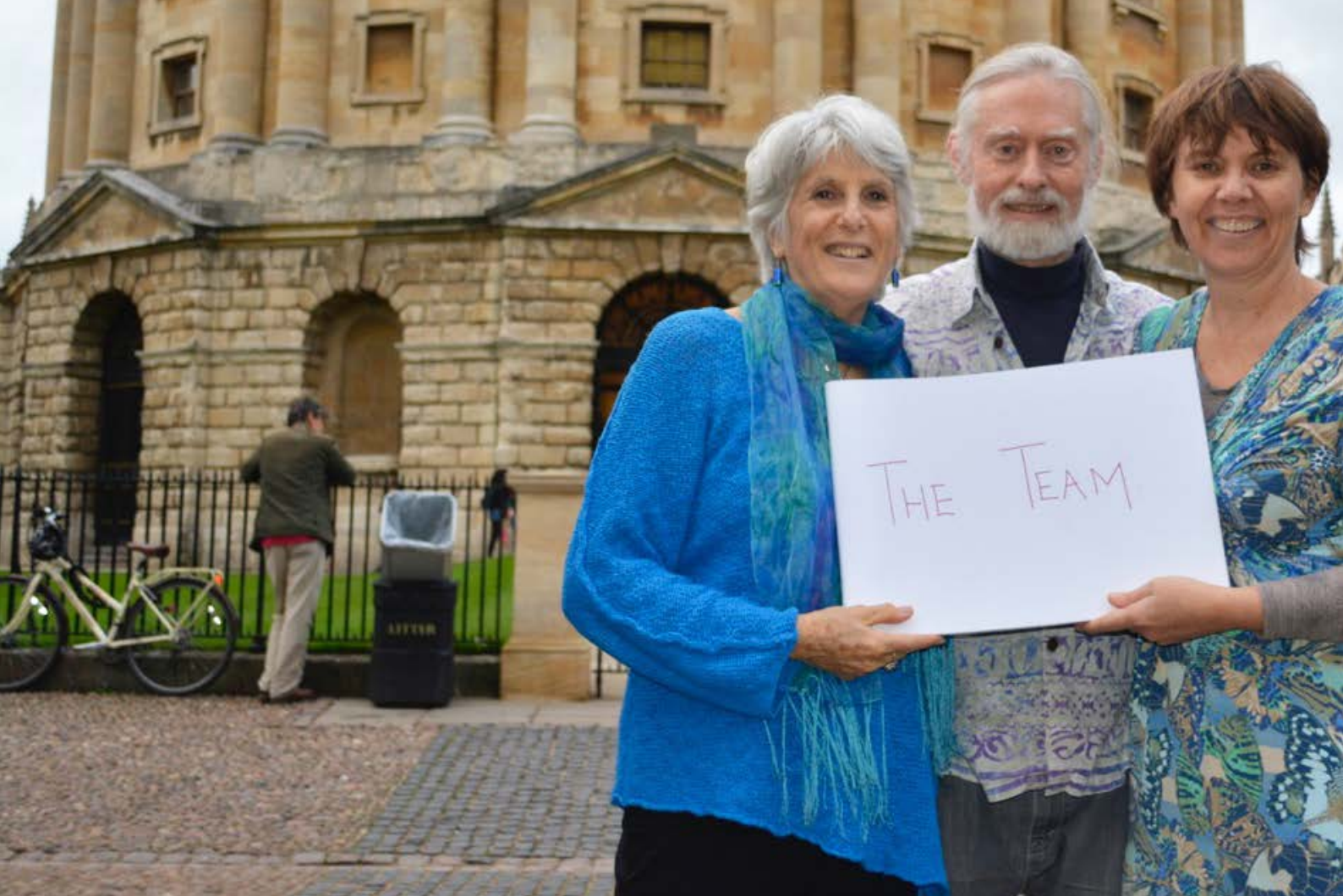


Each of us in every moment of our lives has the opportunity to reach out and share our stories with other people. After the profound experience of caring for my dad at home in New Zealand I came back to England wanting to talk to everyone I could about this most transforming time and to discover as much as I could about birth, death and the meaning of life in between.

I was given the Natural Death Centre Handbook by a friend. From the very first page, everything I was reading just made sense. The words of Josefina Speyer and Nicolas Albery that death, like birth is a natural part of life, gave me great comfort and resonated deeply. It was also within that wonderful resource that I was introduced to the wider Natural Death Movement and the leading pioneers within it.

One of the most meaningful connections I made began with a telephone conversation with a trail-blazing death midwife and home funeral guide from California, Jerrigrace Lyons.

She explained how she had also come into this work after the powerful experience of caring for her friend Carolyn, how she and close friends washed and dressed Carolyn and spent time with her body. She described this time as being profoundly healing and filled with gratitude and love.>>





>>From our very first conversation, we seemed to have much in common, and so began a natural friendship based on our shared beliefs, visions and values.

In 1995, a year after Carolyn's home funeral, Jerri-grace founded Final Passages, an educational not-for-profit organisation dedicated to helping people rediscover and return to family-centred green home funeral traditions. Since then she has been involved in guiding over 400 families with home funerals and training over 1000 people at workshops around the world.

We first met at the **National Home Funeral Alliance** conference in South Carolina in 2013, I was inspired by her gentle presence, generosity and grace. It was here that the concept of **Only With Love** was born, and I could see a way to bring all my life experiences with birth and death together to guide, educate and empower others. I had found my passion, my tribe and my calling as a home funeral guide and death care educator.



I invited her to come to the UK to teach and we planned to offer a series of home funeral workshops as part of the **Kicking the Bucket Festival of Living and Dying** the following year. Many of the wonderful, creative people who came to those first workshops have since developed their own independent funeral services and are now award-winning funeral directors, celebrants and home funeral guides, as well as founder members of the newly launched **Home Funeral Network**.

In the last year we have presented Home Funerals 101 together at the NHFA conference in Los Gatos, California with Home Funeral Guide, Anne Murphy and hospice nurse and co-founder of **One Washcloth**, Susan Oppie.

The US has seen much growth in the conscious dying and home funeral movement. Within the UK we are also experiencing a sea of change with a strong, growing interest in and awareness of a more personal and participatory approach to death, dying and funerals. >>





>>A wave of mostly female, dedicated natural death care facilitators who are each bringing fresh and exciting energy to this movement which is rapidly gaining momentum.

This positive energy was very clearly present at the first conference of the Home Funeral Network in November 2016: **Funerals To Die For - That Won't Cost The Earth**. Over 75 people joined us from all over the UK for a day of inspiring talks, personal stories, home funeral films and creative workshops.

Our focus for the day was on connection, participation and choice for everyone, simply because death affects everyone.

Listening to everyone's stories and talks we were reminded of what is truly possible. We all have everything we need within ourselves and our communities to reclaim the rite of passage of caring for our own dead.

In a similar way to when a baby is born, we each hold the knowledge instinctively to care for them; when we move as a society towards bringing death care and funerals back home into normal family life, we will all reap the benefit.

It is like finding the missing part of a jigsaw, which can add meaning, richness and depth to our lives, birth, death and all that lies between.

Claire Turnham,
Chair

www.homefuneralnetwork.org.uk

Jerrigrace Lyons
Founder

www.finalpassages.org



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.



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- 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.

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

Claire Turnham



Many of you will have seen Virginia and her family both on the One Show and on Channel Four news. When featured by them she was preparing for her Mother's death and doing all the necessary research. As you will read below her Mother died in July and Virginia has kindly shared her experience and detailed how they got on.

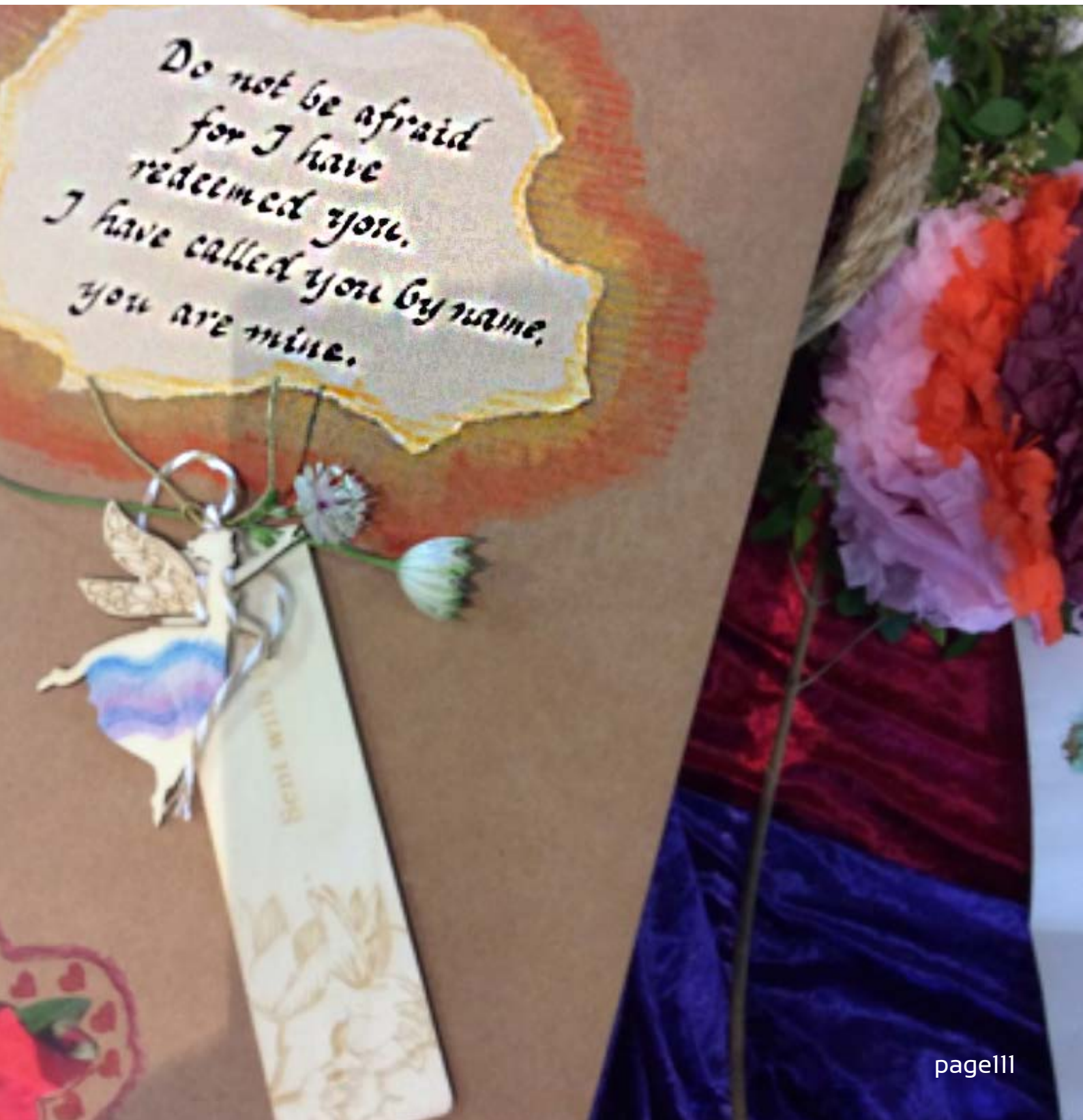
As I have said many times, in my 17 years of guiding families through the ins and outs of funerals I have never had a family get back to me regretting their decision to do fully or partially DIY, Direct It Yourself funeral.

Virginia has been so inspired and empowered by her experience that she is wanting to help other families in the Ipswich area. This desire for a supportive, home funeral movement does seem to be gaining ground and if anyone would like to get in touch with Virginia please contact us at the NDC.

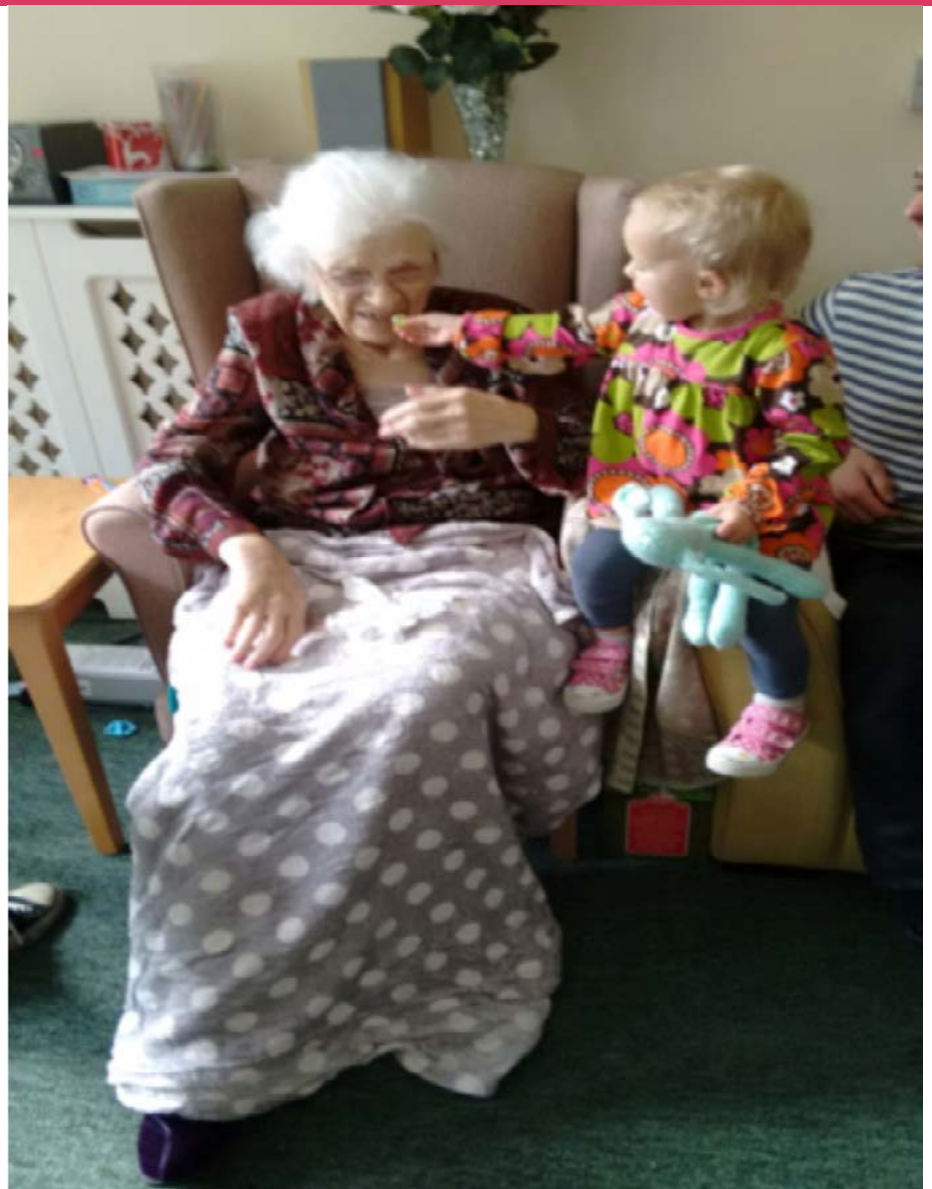
Thank you Rosie of the Natural Death Centre and Tracy O'Leary of Woodland Wishes. You gave me the help and confidence to carry out my plan. Thank you also to David and Rachel Owen, the Pastor and his wife of Capel Community Church who helped with and accommodated, at very short notice, our somewhat alternative funeral arrangements.>>



Lady Barbara's Leaving Party



it was
not a
complicated
process



>>On the 7th July 2016 at 1am in the morning, the long expected phone call came. Mum was failing and we needed to go immediately to the care home if we were to be with her when she died. She was 96 and had been ill for quite some time.

For many years I have been interested in alternative ways of saying the final goodbye to someone I love. It does not fit well with me to hand over to others, the care of a person who I have known intimately all my life. Illness and death are hard enough to cope with, in so many ways, but to have little control over the practical details of caring when someone close dies does not make sense to me.



Why would I want to hand over my final opportunity to provide loving care and let strangers who did not know my mum, take over at the end of her life? To arrange mum's funeral myself was the obvious choice for me.

So, after some research into the subject of self-directed funerals I devised a plan and I am pleased to tell you that with the support of my family we were able to care for my mother almost from the moment she died until we buried her in our local church grounds.

Before the event I experienced a fair amount of opposition to my desire to handle the funeral arrangements myself, mostly from people in authority, but with encouragement and accurate information from a few enlightened people, (see dedication above) we were able to carry out our plan simply and perfectly. It was not a complicated process and nothing was beyond our capabilities, despite the warnings some had previously given.>>

芭芭拉

>>Although we arrived at the care home 20 minutes too late to be with her when she died, my daughter, Danielle, and I said our goodbyes to my mother, (Lady Barbara, her nickname), by caring for her body.

We were helped by Nicky the care home owner, who had known my mother for several years and loved her too. We washed mum with perfumed water, lavender and geranium oils added, dressed her and then brought her back to our home in Capel St Mary.

Here we kept her body enshrouded and cool with special ice packs, until five days later it was time to take her on her last journey to her 'Leaving Party', and then to her grave.

Through doing all these things we were able to grieve together as a family and put our efforts into making her funeral an intimate and very special occasion. It brought us all closer together.

We had had time prior to her death to choose, buy and decorate her cardboard coffin, with pictures of flowers cut from her numerous garden magazines; gardening was her last and most favourite hobby. We wrote words of love and Scripture around it and painted her name in Chinese writing (another of her hobbies was painting Chinese characters and scenes). The children were involved in cutting and sticking on pictures and even Rhodie our two year old great granddaughter was able to join in.

We shared our tears together and laughed too as we recalled special and funny times. My mother loved parties, dancing and family gatherings. She was very artistic and was always exploring new crafts. We attempted to incorporate these aspects of her personality in the way we organised her 'Leaving Party'. She was quite a character and once spent a month on the island of Maui about twenty years ago, mostly lazing on the beach and sleeping in a car, accompanied by our teenage son and his mates. She was in her seventies at the time!>>

we shared
our tears
together
and laughed
too..

>>It was my mother's wish that we did not spend lots of money on her funeral and she only wanted family present, (a few special people who also loved her were invited too). She told me she wanted us to have a party.

So that is exactly what we did. We had the party in our lovely church with drinks to start, sitting at tables, decorated with garden flowers and baskets of craft materials.

She was in our midst, as far as she could be, in her beautifully, decorated coffin!



We sang a song of love and shared a few of our personal memories of her, before inviting everyone to make their own tribute, if they wished, from craft pieces and labels in the baskets. We suggested they might like to attach their messages to a flower and these could be taken down to the grave. Spontaneously people placed their tributes on her coffin whilst still in the church and their tributes were carried with her to her grave.

We played a song called the Wedding Waltz, which describes dancing in Heaven with Jesus and then as Christians we celebrated Communion.

Finally we ended our party by dancing to an old war time favourite, Vera Lynn singing 'We'll meet again' as mum was carried out of the church by our four children, our son-in-law and our grandson.

Her funeral was such a blessing to us all and quite an achievement, bearing in mind that for practical reasons we arranged it within five days of her death, in order to avoid the need to use mortuary facilities. We did not want her body to be out of our protection. >>





>>Apart from a small scare when we were told that the coroner had to be involved regarding a technical issue, and therefore I could not register the death as planned, everything went well.

Registering the death had to be done on the day of the funeral which felt a bit tight for timing but otherwise everything went smoothly. Mum was a great knitter and I had the inspiration to knit a rainbow for her the night before the funeral, only just finished it in time!

I learned so much from the experience and really enjoyed mum's funeral. Now I want to encourage anyone with similar thoughts; arranging a funeral yourself, really can be done. It is not complicated, especially if one has a clear plan in advance. It is so much more personal to carry out your own arrangements and for us all it was really therapeutic and healing.

There were no strangers present, just family and friends. It was quietly joyful and even our sadness was mingled with very happy memories.

Now, just about a month later, I am reminiscing and have real contentment that my mum had the best send off we could possibly give her and no amount of extra money would have improved her 'Leaving Party'. I am sure she is looking down on us now and saying 'Well done all of you, you did me proud!'

How pleased I am to have followed my instincts and not settled for the compromises offered. I am sure my feelings could have been so different if I had given way to the accepted norm and employed undertakers to do everything. I would have been a lot poorer too.

Goodbye mum and God bless.

how pleased
I am to have
followed my
instincts



reports

Positive Start to the Coffin Certification Scheme

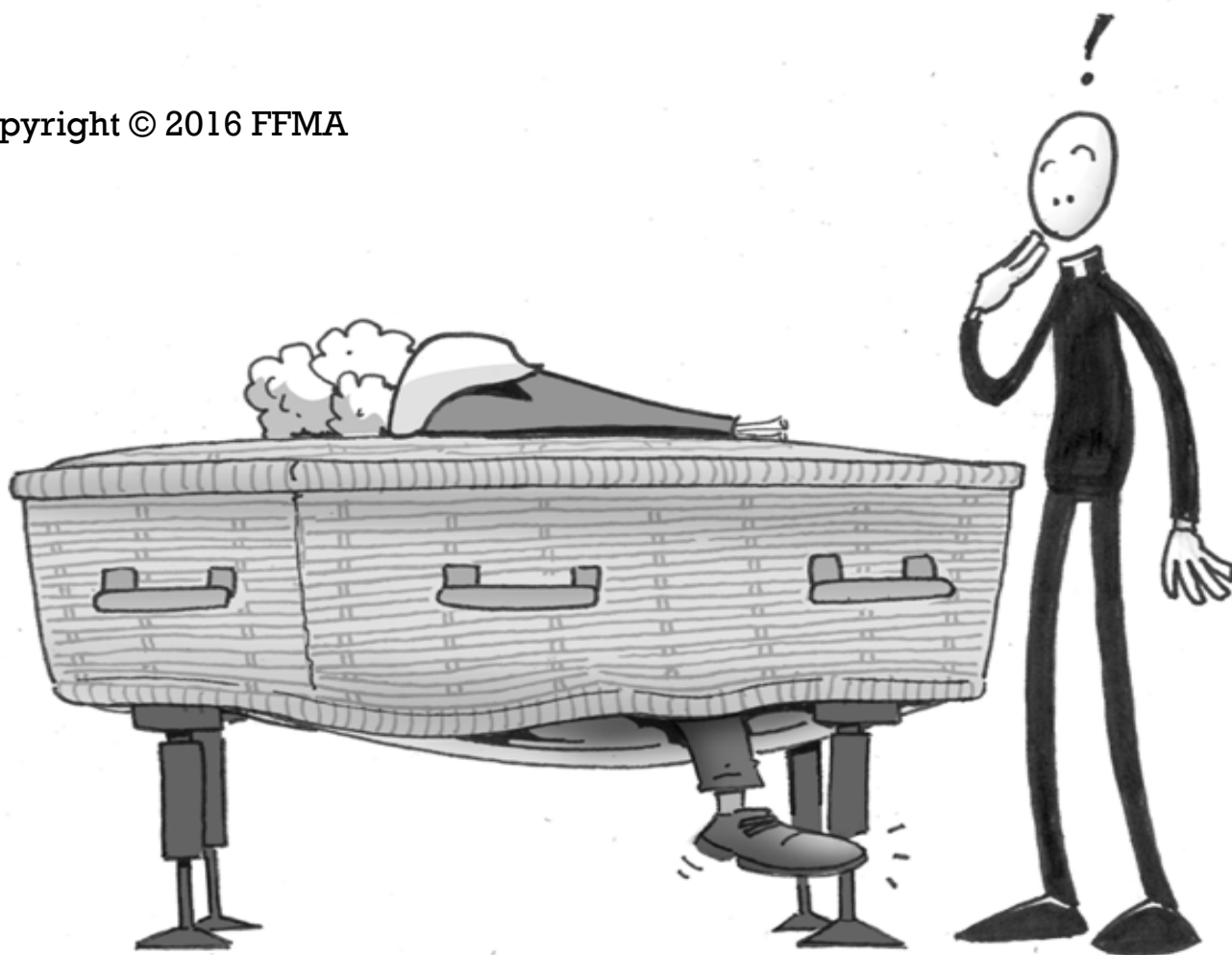
at the AGM.
2016

The funeral industry body, The Funeral Furnishing Manufacturer's Association (FFMA) has reported a very positive start to its coffin and casket certification scheme at their Annual General Meeting on the 2nd November 2016.

David Crampton – President, in his opening remarks gave thanks to everyone who has been involved in its development and to all of the FFMA members for their patience whilst waiting to submit their coffins for testing.

David said “The FFMA scheme has been developed to meet concerns raised by the cremation sector organisations, namely, health and safety issues. Our scheme has been fully endorsed by the cremation sector associations who have worked in partnership with us since requesting our support 4 years ago.

The scheme is fully transparent and most importantly, anyone can visit the FFMA website (www.FFMA.co.uk) and view the growing number of coffins which have been issued with a unique certification stamp”.



To date 56 FFMA members have uploaded their company profiles to the new and improved FFMA website. 136 coffin, casket and shroud products have been uploaded, 41 of which have already passed the testing protocol. Another 26 having been received by Intertek and are awaiting testing.

The vast majority of UK coffin manufacturers have committed to the FFMA scheme. An estimated investment of over £250,000 will be made by those members to certify their products fit for purpose and allay any concerns of the cremation industry.

Julian Atkinson gave a presentation aptly illustrating (with light hearted humour) the key points of the tests. The aim of the presentation is for the FFMA to communicate the basic principles of this highly detailed testing protocol in an easy to understand

manner. The scheme ensures “coffins” are safe to carry and load, are fully combustible, render a compliant amount of ash volume and can therefore be deemed as fit for purpose.

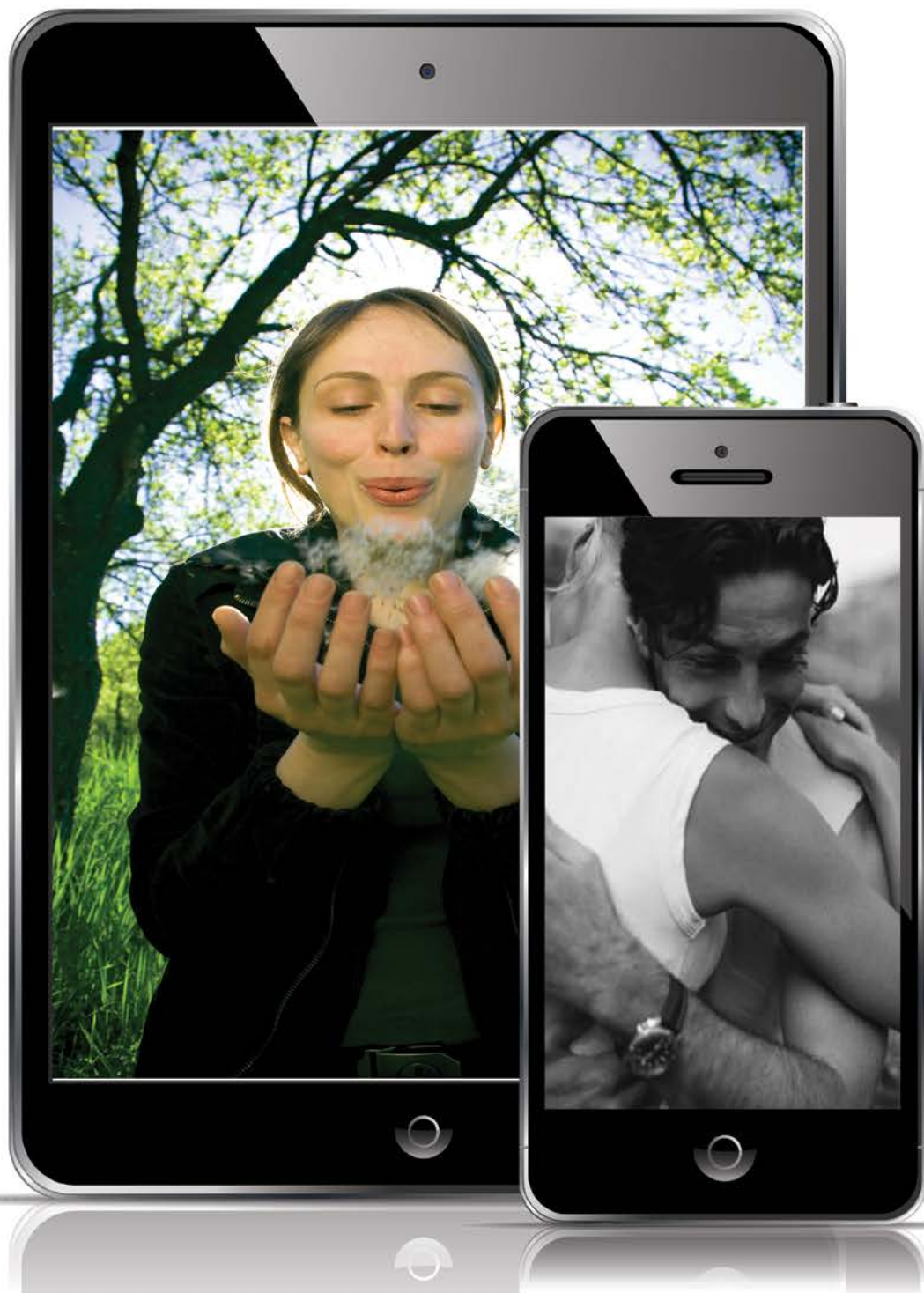
[For more information, please visit www.FFMA.co.uk](http://www.FFMA.co.uk)

For more information, please contact:
Sue Bullock (FFMA Secretary),
bullocksuee@gmail.com

Established in 1939, the Funeral Furnishing Manufacturer's Association (FFMA) is the link between manufacturers/suppliers of goods and the end users - the funeral directors and the crematoria.

Its aim is to ensure that quality goods are produced and the traditionally high standards are maintained within the profession.

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