

Keeping it real

Everyone is different. For this reason, all funeral ceremonies ought to be different.

All funerals are sad, some sadder than others. People's responses to death, and the feelings they bring to the funeral, differ according to the circumstances.

When someone dies peacefully in extreme old age, those who come to the funeral may well be feeling that what has happened is in the order of things: "He had a good innings, a good life. In the last few years his mobility hasn't been great and he's been getting very forgetful. Really, he'd had enough. Nothing could be more natural than his leaving us." There is much to give thanks for, much to look back on with pleasure. Sadness is softened by a feeling that all is for the best.

When someone dies young, people feel angry, shocked and cheated. When they come to the funeral these feelings will still be very raw.

When someone dies suddenly or violently, it is possible that the funeral will happen too soon for people to have been able to begin to deal with their emotions. They may be in denial or shocked disbelief.

All lives are different. People's responses to death differ, also, according to their own ideas of life and death and their feelings for the dead person. Some people are more lovable than others. Some people are funny, some are glum. Some people live rich, busy lives; others go to work, come home and watch telly.

The lives of all are measured by what they mean to those who love them.

A good funeral ceremony will be as unique as the life lived.

A funeral is no good if it's too good.

A funeral thrives on the participation of people close to the person who has died. For that reason, you can, if you want, invite only selected people to come.

A funeral is one of those rare events which is not necessarily improved by professionals. You can employ a professional celebrant to conduct the funeral but remember: however brilliant your celebrant is with words, both writing them and speaking them, the validity of what he or she says will be diminished by this vitally important fact: *everyone present will know that the celebrant did not know the person who has died*. They would possibly far rather hear something less well-spoken from someone who did.

A funeral is no good if it's too good. It is actually improved by wonkiness and the odd whoopsy moment. These are the things that make it real. You can get the undertaker's bearers to carry the coffin and they'll do it faultlessly; or you can get family members to carry it and it'll all be a bit nailbiting, and all the better for that. You can have an Oscar-winning actor read a Shakespeare sonnet or you can have nine year-old Oscar read out that poem he wrote about granddad. Oscar will trump the Oscar-winner every time.

The reason for this is that every family does things its own way. A funeral needs to be created and conducted according to the **culture, customs and language of your family**. This is no time to tidy away

A Good Funeral Guide factsheet

everything about you that makes you what you are and pretend you're just like everyone else. The eyes of the world are not on you.

A funeral is a time when the people who knew and loved the person who has died close ranks, regroup and support each other. This is a private time, a deeply personal affair. It is no one else's business.

This is why, when it comes to funerals, home cooking trumps the best chefs every time.

A real funeral couldn't care less what anybody thinks of it.