

Your

Section Two

funeral



The dead are everything and nothing like us

Kevin Toolis

Many cultures around the world spend intimate time with the bodies of the deceased, which brings comfort to the bereaved. Here, the Irish writer tackles the UK's modern-day alienation from corpses and explores the importance of acknowledging the body that once was

You never forget your first corpse.

For a start, they are awful quiet.

They don't talk, say a word, or react to anything you say to them – how you've always hated their guts. Or love them so much that your heart is breaking. You can shake them, beat your fists upon their chest, call them a bastard, take them in your arms for a heart-comforting embrace, kiss their lips, and still the dead do nothing. They just lie there, immune from the world and its myriad responsibilities.

Do you remember that game you played as a child? Pretending?

Pretending to be dead.

Stilling your breathing, eyes closed, not moving a muscle. Or waiting for the little flicker of the eye, heave of the chest, that gave the game away. Gotcha!

Pretending is a game the dead are truly hopeless at. No "real" person could ever mimic their stolid silence, their immovable virtue.

And here's another existential epiphany: the dead don't look well.

Even as your eye flicks across this page, your heart is pumping blood around your arteries at roughly 2lb per square inch of pressure. Live humans are meaty, inflated balloons of blood, muscle, sinews, nerves and fat.

But cut the pump and the whole thing deflates to the floor like a rubber sack. The blood drains from cheeks, your fingers, your arms, and pools in the lower limbs or your back.

Faces sag, muscles cleave flaccid and sallow skin shrinks on ivory finger bone. You look pale, wizened, dead in fact.

Corpses are cold, too.

Every human being that you have ever touched before, in love or anger, was a warm-blooded mammal. But the dead are so cold – stone-on-an-outside-path-in-winter cold – that it is almost impossible to believe that this thing, this imperfect facsimile of a being you have known, could ever have been human.

Except the dead were, and are, human. Those two impossible things, at the same time too.

Still human. A dead one of Us. The locus of our grief and anguish for all that is lost. The physical body of our beloved dead.

For millennia we have struggled to articulate the difference with talk of "souls" and "spirits", to explain the very difference after breath stops and the great animating current of consciousness, personality, has been sucked out, leaving behind just dry, ice-cold remains.

This visible deadness, this contradictory moment of encounter between the Living Us and the Dead Them, is the very epicentre of all human civilisation. Spawning an eternal search for eternal life and numerous priesthoods, religions, temples, gods, persecutions, wars and countless millions of other deaths of heretics and non-believers who fail to believe in our particular promise of a deathless heaven.

And that's just the corpse.

But the biggest difference about meeting your first corpse has got nothing to do with whoever is inside the coffin-shaped box. Mother, child, man or boy.

The real insight breaks out inside you.

Once you've got over the idea that you've not stumbled onto the set of some trick-camera series, it slowly begins to dawn that today's show is not even a show. Or a special occasion at all.

That the dead person is no one special. And has not even been on TV. That they are just another ordinary mortal. Like you.

A slow, deflating, dawning realisation.

The nub of it all.

Here at last, voluntarily or otherwise, you are now playing your own, full part in a non-game of certain extinction, where, one by one, all the players lose their lives, generally unnoticed and not cared about by a wider world.

Mortal Reality. With its own, certain rules.

We lie all the time in the rest of our daily lives.
Often for good reasons.

“I love you.”

“This weekend, sure. I’ll be there.”

“I’ll stop drinking from now on. Never again.”

“Your arse does not look big in... ”

We cheat the truth. Make up stories. Go back on ourselves. Reverse. Say we are sorry. Kiss and make better. And live to lie another day.

But death is a script that can’t, and will not, be reversed by anger, tears, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, money, status or appeals to some Higher Power. Or further promises.

Nothing on Earth can ever make this dead thing sit up, cough and begin again.

Every Could-Have-Been has hardened into a Never-Was. Every word of their story is now a past tense – the right, the wrong, where they lived, loved, who they were, how they got sick and died. Heroic or Stoic or Afraid. As we might be.

It’s all Final. Forever. Finished.

Dead.

The end point where all our stories stop and our own true mortal powerlessness is inescapable.

There, now within the grasp of your own warm mortal flesh, is the objective defiance of Every-Possibility-to-Be. A dead human. So ordinary, and yet the very mirror of your own Death-to-Come.

Kevin Toolis is a Bafta-winning writer and the author of *My Father’s Wake: How the Irish Teach Us to Live, Love and Die*. His new book, *Nine Rules to Conquer Death*, is published by Oneworld.

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Your funeral checklist

Over the course of your lifetime, you've probably spent hours, if not days and weeks, planning your wedding(s), birthday parties and holidays, yet probably have rarely taken a minute to think about your funeral. While the idea of planning your own might seem unappealing and make you feel uncomfortable, it's an important step in ensuring your final wishes are met and, as we've said before, it will save your loved ones having to make arrangements while they're grieving. This checklist highlights some of the key considerations when it comes to prepping your send-off.

Funding

You can't take it with you, right? As part of the division of your assets, it's important to leave a sum behind to cover the costs of your funeral arrangements, if you can afford to, that is. This will save your family members having to suddenly find a sizeable chunk of money to pay for it. Whether it's through savings, an insurance policy or a pre-pay funeral plan, there are many options for covering the cost of your own funeral in advance. If you have life insurance it's worth checking the details of your policy. To help cover funeral costs, many providers will make an initial payment before a life insurance plan is paid out in full. If you're not in a position to save money and you pass away without any assets to your name or family members able to cover the cost, a public health funeral can be arranged. Local authorities are obliged to pay for a dignified funeral for those without the means to pay for one and will cover the costs of a coffin, funeral director and burial or cremation.

The announcement

How would you like the world to find out about your passing? Some people still choose to make an announcement in the local newspaper, whereas others prefer to post on social media now. Perhaps you would rather keep the news more private and just share the information between family and friends.

Funeral directors

You probably wouldn't buy the first pair of shoes you saw in a shop window, and deciding on a funeral director is no different. Shopping around is essential, both for securing the best deal and to ensure you find someone that you're confident understands your needs. A good funeral director will listen carefully to your wishes and do their utmost to make them happen.

Cremation or burial?

One of the first decisions to make about your death is actually quite simple – burial or cremation? It's best to read up on both options and their economic, environmental and spiritual implications before making a choice. Whether you opt for a burial or cremation, you need to think about your final destination. Would you like your ashes scattered in a favourite spot or carried with family members when they visit other countries so that you can continue your travels after death? If it's a burial you're going for, is there a spot in a family crypt with your name on it or would you prefer to have a natural burial in the woods? The choice can be yours!

Graveyard garments

"I wouldn't be seen dead in that!" – or so we say. If it's important to you that you wear something you're comfortable being seen dead in, it may be worth picking out your outfit in advance and letting your loved ones know your wishes. You might also want to think about what you would like other people to wear to your funeral and plan a dress code. Would you prefer them to attend in traditional black attire or would you rather they're decked out in your favourite colour – or even the full colour spectrum of the rainbow? Alternatively, you could ask people to wear something that's meaningful to you, like the shirt of your beloved football team, or to dress up as characters from your favourite film. Feel free to get creative!

Flowers

Do you love roses and carnations like Paris Hilton, or loathe hydrangeas, as Madonna does? If so, it might be wise to consider which kind of floral arrangements you want to accompany your coffin at the funeral. Perhaps you don't want flowers at all and would rather people make a donation to a charity of your choice. Make sure to put that in writing.

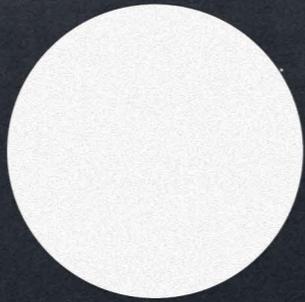
The service

Are you going for a religious or non-religious funeral, elaborate or eco-friendly, something celebratory or sombre and low-key? You might want to prepare a playlist of your favourite songs for the service or decide on particular poems you wish to be read. Perhaps there's a singer, musician or contemporary dancer among your circle of friends or family who you can ask to do a short song or performance. Whatever you do, don't feel pressured by tradition when making your funeral arrangements – it's all in your hands.

The wake

After the party it's time for the after-party, of course. While funerals are always emotional affairs, the wake often helps to lighten the mood and allows your nearest and dearest to celebrate your life, share stories about you and support each other. Create a guest list, decide on the budget, refreshments and location – perhaps your favourite restaurant or a family member's home. Making these decisions in advance will help you create a wake that reflects who you were as a person, as well as lifting the burden of responsibilities from your loved ones.

What are my choices?



“To accept death is to accept that this body belongs to the world. This body is subject to all the forces in the world. This body can be broken. This body will run down”

Sallie Tisdale, *Advice for Future Corpses (And Those Who Love Them): A Practical Perspective on Death and Dying*

In our everyday conversations, it's often considered taboo, too morbid or just a bit awkward to talk about funerals. We therefore avoid making a clear plan or putting our wishes down on paper, and this, sadly, can create a burden for those who live after you're gone. They're already having to deal with pain, emotions and endless phone calls, so why not save them the guesswork (and potential arguments) about what kind of funeral you'd like and choose a plan of action yourself?

Burial or cremation? Lilies or carnations? Debussy or Dua Lipa? Do you want to donate your body to science? There's a wealth of resources out there that can help you decide – not to mention people whose job it is to sort it all out. Making arrangements for your future funeral and, if you can, sharing the details with your nearest and dearest beforehand can save a lot of trouble – both emotionally and financially.

When it comes to making these decisions, it's important to remember that so much of what we expect to happen at funerals isn't mandatory but, rather, has come about due to traditions passed down through generations. For example, did you know that, while it's a legal necessity to have a body cremated or buried, the rest of the ceremony is completely up to you? You don't have to hire a hearse, a limousine or any other specialist vehicle to transport the coffin. Maybe you want a pink Hummer to be your last ride. You're not legally obliged to have a coffin either, and there are plenty of good-looking and sustainable alternatives these days (further details on page 80). Embalming is not obligatory and, some would argue, not necessary – it's worth doing some research to find out what you think. When it comes to the ceremony itself, you have the option of holding it at home or any other venue personal to you, rather than an official or religious one.

Choosing a funeral director is often a task left to grieving family or friends, but there's no reason why you can't research one for yourself, particularly now that there's a wide and growing variety of funeral services to meet all kinds of wishes. There's also the option of skipping the undertaker completely – there's no law that requires you to have one, although there is an advantage to having

a professional on board to take care of some of the trickier bits of funeral organising, such as storage and transportation of the body. Many of the death specialists we interviewed in the making of this book also agreed that everyone should be aware of their rights in their search for a funeral director. It may sound strange to refer to them as “consumer rights” but that's essentially what they are, and there are plenty of resources to help you navigate the process, particularly if you're struggling with the cost, as we outline on page 86.

Basically, don't feel pressured into having to settle for the first funeral director you find or the one that's closest to where you live. Like many things in life, it's important to shop around – Judith Moran, of Quaker Social Action, which aims to relieve funeral poverty through its initiative Down to Earth, compares this to looking for the right washing machine on page 141 – so make sure to choose the service that's most compatible with your vision and budget. Again, if you have the opportunity in advance, it's worth doing. “Pre-booking” a funeral may sound ridiculous, but that's only because we're used to avoiding the subject. Even a list of two or three options will help your next of kin – it's much better for them to be confident they're making the right choice than searching through brochures or websites while grieving.

Another of the main arguments for planning your own funeral ahead of time is the need to manage its cost. During a time of bereavement, people are often forced to make hasty decisions when they're at their most vulnerable, and expenses can rack up quickly. Grieving relatives might also feel under pressure to upgrade your funeral arrangements because they don't want to appear mean. If you're choosing a natural burial site, picking a spot next to a tree will mean you don't have to pay for a headstone or other marker. If you're having flowers, requesting that they're sourced from the gardens of family and friends will do away with the expense of formal floral arrangements, which also produce non-compostable waste. You can ask your friends to pitch in with the catering, too. People often find it a relief to provide practical support at a time when it's hard not to speak in platitudes – and helping in this way also means they won't have to face a buffet of sausage rolls (unless that's one of your last wishes).

Cultural differences

Ready to embark on a journey of deciding what kind of funeral best represents you as a person? Whether you're religious or not, why not familiarise yourself with some of the funerary traditions that have been knocking around for millennia? Of course, each religion and faith carries specific traditions and rituals for death and burial, which have contributed to the options available for funerals. And while representing all religions of our multi-faith society would be impossible, here's a brief overview of the traditions favoured by different religions and cultures that could potentially inspire your final choices.

Baptist

Led by the local pastor or minister, funerals usually take place in a church or crematorium following a mourning process that includes a viewing service. This offers family and friends the opportunity to say one last goodbye.

Buddhism

Following in the footsteps of the Buddha, cremation is the most popular choice for Buddhists. However, the number of those going for natural burials is on the increase, which isn't surprising, given that they're an environmentally friendly alternative that's very in tune with the religion's concept of *samsāra*, or rebirth.

Catholicism

In Catholic tradition, a prayer vigil is organised on the eve of the funeral as a send-off for the departed, usually at the church where the service will be held. When it comes to the funeral itself, the proceedings follow the format of a Requiem Mass and include Catholic funeral hymns or sacred music.

Church of England

In terms of location, a Church of England funeral can take place almost anywhere, from a church or crematorium to a natural burial site. They're also pretty open to non-churchgoers, too – you don't have to be a member of the Church of England to have one. Hymns such as "Amazing Grace" and "The Lord's My Shepherd" are popular in church settings, but having music is a choice.

Eastern Orthodox Church

Wakes, usually one-day long, are held before the funeral in Orthodox tradition. During the funeral itself, an offering of koliva – a dish made from boiled wheat and honey or sugar – is placed near the head of the coffin to represent death and resurrection. Cremation is completely forbidden.

Hinduism

According to Hindu customs, the body of the person remains in a coffin at their home after their death until the cremation. During this period, flowers are placed at the feet of the deceased and a garland of flowers or a necklace of wooden beads arranged around their neck. For men, a paste of sandalwood or ash may be smeared on their forehead, while women have turmeric on theirs. And then there's the dress code – white is a must, black is a no-no.

Humanism

For those who feel like having their life celebrated without the presence of a religion, a humanist funeral service could be the perfect option. Borrowing the structure from traditional funerals but focusing on the individual and their personal stories, humanists use a format that's tailored to each person's wishes.

Judaism

Jewish funeral traditions are rich and vary according to the denomination. However, the presence of a guardian – called a *shomer* if male, *shomeret* if female – who's responsible for tending to the body from the moment of death until the burial, is common. Another ritual sees mourners ripping off pieces of material from their own clothes as a demonstration of their grief, and wearing the torn garments for a week after the person has died.

Islam

Funeral preparations are traditionally separated into two sections – Ghusl and Kafan. As part of the former, the body of the person who's died is washed multiple times by family members of the same sex. Following that, the Kafan includes the body being wrapped in layers of large sheets.

Burial at sea

While not technically a culture or religion, sea life is indeed a lifestyle. And with it comes the choice of departing this world through one last encounter with the big blue. Sea burials are often considered expensive and complicated, but the UK actually has three locations where they can be arranged: off the Needles, at the westernmost tip of the Isle of Wight; at a spot off the south coast between Hastings and Newhaven in East Sussex; and off Tynemouth in North Tyneside. In Ireland, government guidelines recommend scattering ashes at sea, but if a sea burial is wanted, it must take place at least 50 miles from the shoreline and follow official regulations.

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Quakers emphasise simplicity and silence in their funeral services. Anyone can speak if they choose and the ceremony is led by an elder or a minister, known as a Friend. The service typically takes place at a meeting house and ends with all the guests shaking hands.

Sikhism

A cremation is the traditional preference for a Sikh funeral, although burials are permitted if a cremation isn't possible. The ashes are typically scattered over water; headstones and plaques aren't used. As with many other major religions, funerals should be arranged as quickly as possible, usually within three days.

Spiritualism

Because of its openness to different cultures, spiritualism often allows for funerals to be organised for people who were never active members of the religious community but shared their beliefs. Spiritualists are open to both cremation and burials, as well as green funerals.

How do other countries deal with death?

Different societies have their own mourning methods, which are passed from generation to generation. According to academics, culturally defined death rites are a means of countering the transience of life with the longevity of tradition. While we're likely familiar with how our own community mourns, it's interesting to examine how others around the world deal with death, as this ultimately gives us alternative perspectives of both death and life.



1

Mexico celebrates Día de Muertos on the first two days of November, coinciding with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. During this national holiday, which dates back to Aztec festivals, family and friends build private altars in the cemeteries of their loved ones, bringing with them the deceased's favourite foods, as well as items that belonged to them in life. This is believed to encourage the souls of the dead to be more attentive to the prayers of the living.

2

Influenced by the melting pot of West African, French and African-American cultures in the region, jazz funerals have become tradition in New Orleans. Dating back to the late 1800s, funeral processions are led by a brass band that, after initially playing sorrowful dirges, switches to upbeat tunes once the dead have been buried.

3

While Denmark is traditionally Protestant, Danes still observe some non-Christian and pagan superstitions surrounding death. For example, when someone is expected to pass away, it's common to leave a window open to give their soul a chance to escape. This is also a way for loved ones to cope with their grief, as they may find solace from the fresh air.

4

In Ghana, coffins are increasingly seen as a way to reflect individuals' passions in life. This has led to the popularisation of "fantasy coffins" in the shape of objects ranging from cars to Bibles and even fish.

5

In Turkey, funerals are only one aspect of commemoration. *Mevlit* ceremonies are also traditionally held to honour the deceased's memory and to provide a support network for loved ones who have been left behind. These usually happen on the 40th and 52nd day after the death, as well as on its first anniversary, with family and friends gathering in a circle to share food and drink and read passages from the Qur'an, narrating the life and death of the Prophet Muhammad.

6

According to Vajrayana Buddhism, typically followed in Tibet and Mongolia, after death, the body becomes an empty vessel while the soul moves on. In order to return the body to the Earth, it is chopped into pieces and exposed to the elements and carrion birds at the top of a mountain. Known as sky burials, these have been practised for thousands of years and continue to be popular.

7

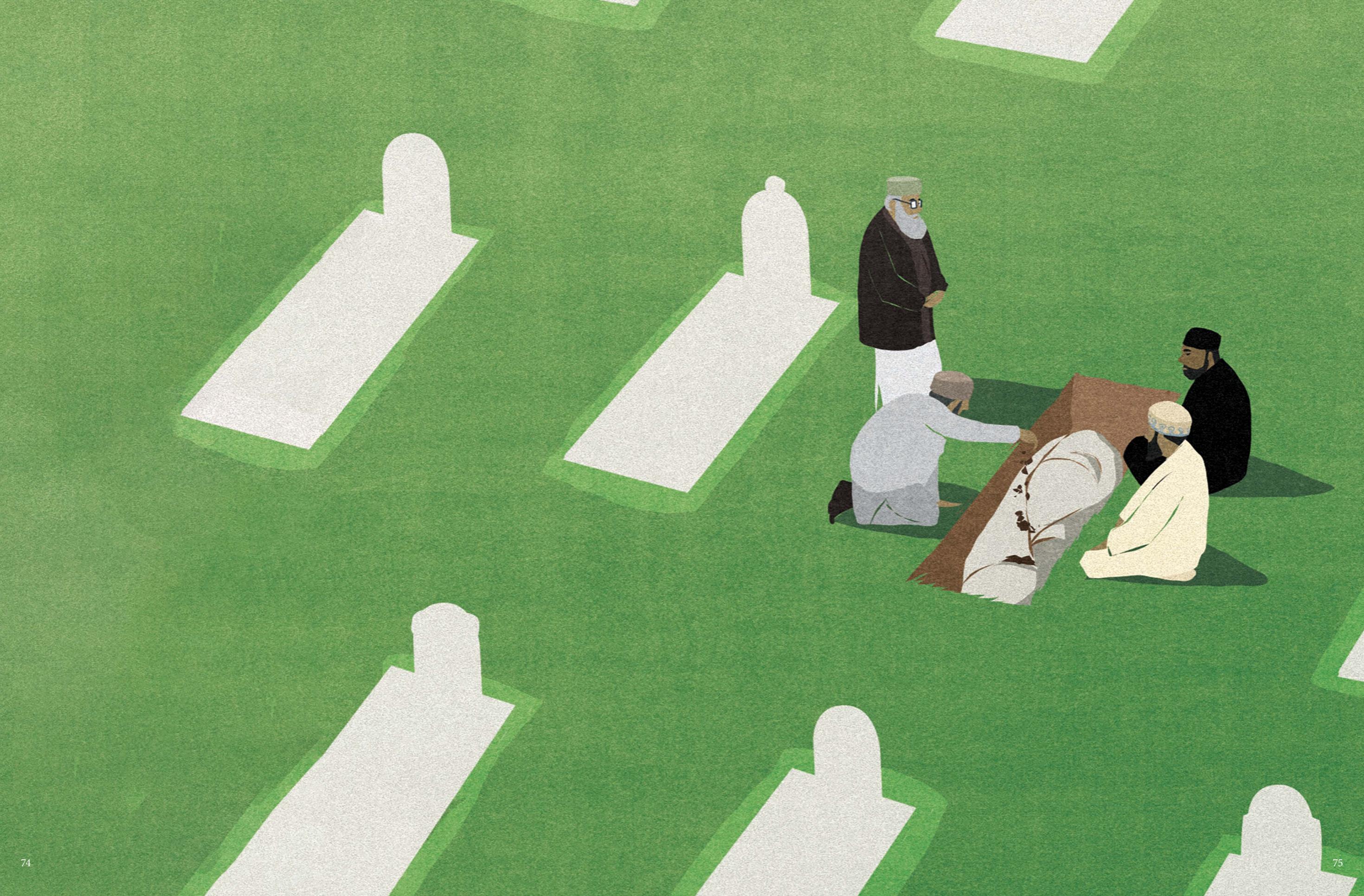
Due to dwindling space for cemetery plots, South Korea passed a law in 2000 that requires graves to be removed after 60 years. While cremation has increased in popularity as a result, some families opt to have their loved ones' remains compressed into gem-like beads that are then displayed in their home.

8

In the Tana Toraja regency of Indonesia, death is not approached as a final, severing event. Instead, the bodies of the deceased are preserved and cared for in the family home in the weeks, months and even years following their passing.

9

Every five to seven years, the Malagasy people of Madagascar participate in *famadibana*, or "the turning of the bones". Families exhume the bodies of their dead in a celebration at the ancestral crypt, complete with a band and dancing, as a way of passing on family news to the dead and commemorating their loved ones.



Considering cremation

“Elaborate burial customs are a sure sign of decadence”
J.G. Ballard, *The Complete Short Stories*

While it's very much a conventional choice today, cremation hasn't always been part of funeral traditions. Looking back through history, there's evidence of Ancient Greeks and Romans practising it. But in the early 5th century, with the growing presence of early Christianity, whose followers disliked cremation, the practice disappeared. It wasn't really considered again until almost 1,500 years later, when Sir Henry Thompson, surgeon to Queen Victoria, brought the conversation into the mainstream by writing a paper and campaigning in support of cremation. Ever since, it's been a subject of much debate.

Over the past century, the popularity of cremation has been steadily growing – from being part of 15% of all funerals in the 1950s, it now occurs in more than 75% of them, according to The Cremation Society. It's often seen as a budget-friendly alternative to traditional burials and a response to the lack of space in cemeteries. However, its negative environmental impacts have increasingly become a point of discussion in recent years. While it does decrease the amount of space a body takes up, a single cremation uses almost as much energy in the form of electricity and gas as a car trip from London to Zurich, and releases 400kg of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Another recent trend is direct cremation. Perhaps you're not into the idea of a ceremony, or simply can't afford one. Direct cremation occurs without a ceremony or the presence of anyone, and is often billed as the cheapest option by funeral services. However, it's important to remember that while it might be presented as such, it certainly doesn't fit the needs of every family and there may be other affordable options for you to explore.

And then there's the big question of what to do with the ashes. Even if you decide to remain in an urn, there are so many styles to choose from – do you go for plain, opulently decorated or something made from upcycled woven textiles? The niche brand Funeria makes urns look so high end you'll practically be housed in a piece of contemporary art. In case you're feeling more adventurous and wish to live it up one last time, you might want your ashes to be turned into a diamond, launched into space or scattered from a hot-air balloon.

David Bowie's unexpected impact on the death industry

When David Bowie passed away in 2016, tributes poured in from the many fans who were touched by his music. But his legacy goes beyond the art he left behind: he also sparked a trend for the no-frills funeral. After the musician opted to be secretly cremated, the low-cost funeral service Simplicity reported a 400% increase in demand for direct cremations.



Eco-friendly funerals

“Not only is natural burial by far the most ecologically sound way to perish, it doubles down on the fear of fragmentation and loss of control. Making the choice to be naturally buried says, ‘Not only am I aware that I’m a helpless, fragmented mass of organic matter, I celebrate it. Vive la decay!’”

American mortician, author and blogger Caitlin Doughty, *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes – and Other Lessons from the Crematorium*

So, you’ve stopped buying single-use plastic and have finally incorporated composting into your daily routine; you’ve swapped your old petrol car for an electric, and decided to shop local instead of at one of the big-name supermarkets. But how do you apply that green mindset to your funeral? Being conscious of the environment is now an important mission of the death industry, and going green isn’t as difficult or costly as you may think.

One of the main tasks in organising a funeral that’s not going to hurt the planet you’re leaving is minimising the carbon footprint of your farewell. It means saying no to embalming, a process that includes swapping the blood with usually highly toxic chemicals in order to preserve your stunning looks. The growing natural death movement also encourages burials in a coffin made from eco-friendly materials, such as bamboo or banana leaf, at a shallower depth. This not only enables the body to decompose faster but also reduces the release of methane, a greenhouse gas produced by deep burials. The movement’s proponents also advocate choosing a natural burial site as your final resting place – naturaldeath.org.uk has a useful list of locations in the UK and Ireland.

However, be warned: funerals aren’t immune to the phenomenon of greenwashing that’s emerged as a commercial response to the climate crisis. It’s important to research the services you’re using to ensure the impact is as positive as it seems.

While an eco-friendly funeral might sound a bit of an extreme choice at first, remember that you don’t have to be vegan, an environmental activist or member of the Green Party in order to throw yourself one. Eliminating some of the traditional notions – such as the need to have a massive mahogany coffin, elaborate floral wreaths and a fleet of black cars – doesn’t have to clash with elements of a traditional funeral. You can still incorporate family customs and religious traditions, as well as your favourite Celine Dion power ballad, into the service without causing any negative consequences for the natural surroundings you’re about to become a part of.

“Being conscious of the environment is now an important mission of the death industry, and going green isn’t as difficult or costly as you may think”

Choosing a coffin

“Choosing the right final resting place is a good thing to tick off your funeral to-do list”

“Dying is a troublesome business: there is pain to be suffered, and it wrings one’s heart; but death is a splendid thing – a warfare accomplished, a beginning all over again, a triumph. You can always see that in their faces”

George Bernard Shaw, playwright

Now’s the time to get creative. Just like picking a bed will set the tone for a new bedroom (Scandinavian pine or velvet upholstery?), choosing the right final resting place is a good thing to tick off your funeral to-do list. Your future mourners might face pressure to guess what you would have wanted, or even feel influenced by the possibility of the shame and stigma unfairly associated with picking the cheapest option. They might end up spending more than they can afford, even though you don’t give two hoots about having an expensive send-off.

Before you decide, you might want to know that there’s no law that obliges a person to be buried or cremated in a coffin. The only requirement is to have the body covered and out of view from a public highway in order to respect public decency. This means, once again, that there are many choices.

But let’s start with the most traditional options. Coffins today don’t just come in wood and metal. In an attempt to create more environmentally friendly choices, there’s been a surge in the availability of coffins made in alternative materials that are more biodegradable – including seagrass, wool and bamboo.

One of the pioneers of the eco-friendly coffin revolution is the Kent-based company Ecoffins, whose options include banana leaf, pine and cardboard. In fact, cardboard is another popular choice that not only has a minimal impact on the environment, but is also a blank canvas of sorts, offering the opportunity for the family or the person themselves to decorate it as they wish. It’s about time we got rid of the connotations of cardboard being part of a “pauper’s funeral”, which is an old-fashioned term anyway.

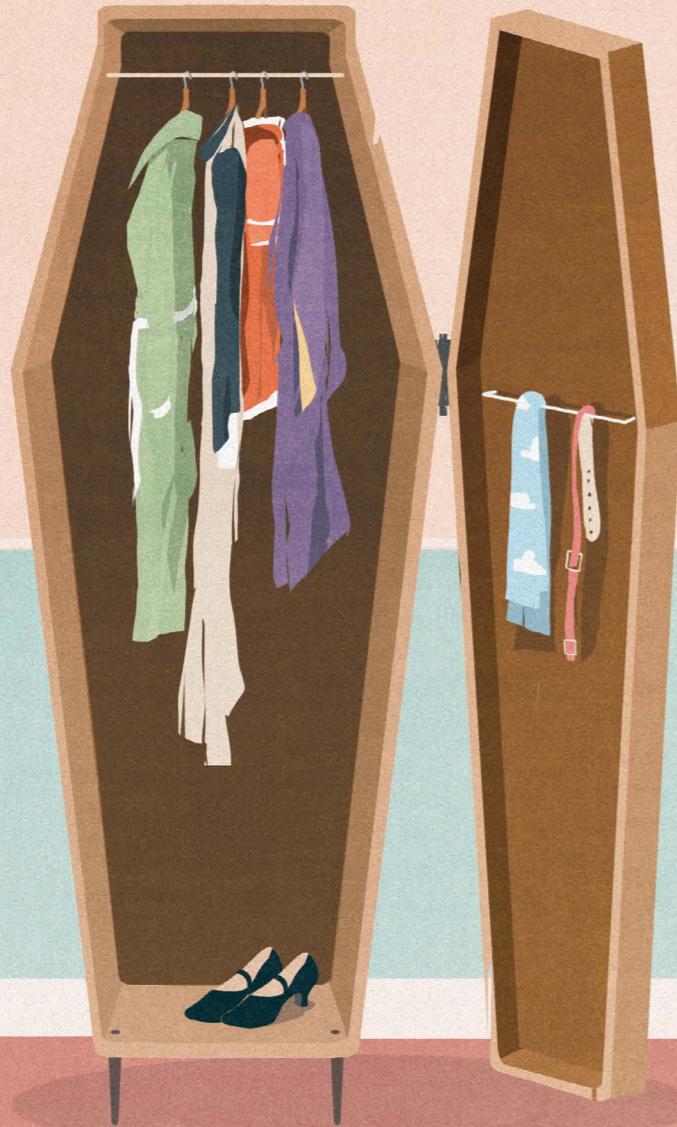
Shrouds are a simple and somewhat elegant option, and an inexpensive one at that: prices start at about £195, or around €220 (though you can choose to spend more on a bespoke embroidered version). A hybrid of eco-friendly coffins and shrouds, soft coffins are a signature of Devon business Bellacouche. They’re made from recycled and natural absorbent materials that are hidden inside a felt-encased wooden base, which comes with a detachable cover that’s placed over the shroud.

And for those with a penchant for interiors, you may want to take inspiration from the Shelves for Life concept debuted by designer William Warren at the 2005 London Design Festival – a beautiful bookcase you can use during your life that can then be transformed into a coffin once you’re gone.

What would you find in an ancient Egyptian tomb?

The ancient Egyptians had many different practices when it came to burials. For example, the deceased would have most of their organs removed and placed in canopic jars, the lids of which would depict ancient gods who they believed would protect the body parts. The brain was extracted through the nose and discarded, as it was thought to be unimportant. The heart was left intact inside the body, as it was believed that its weight signified how much good an individual had done in their lifetime, which would be measured in the afterlife.

The ultimate outfit



If you had to wear one look for the rest of eternity, what would it be? Mourning dress became *de rigueur* (aka commercialised) during the Victorian era, when specialised shops selling fashionable widow's weeds (black clothing worn by widows) and accessories expanded their business into burial gowns. These gowns were designed in pastel shades of shiny satin and crepe, with details including ruches, false shirt fronts, lace, ribbons and bows. Nowadays, they're made as unisex garments, offering the idea of a unified and forgiving outfit that will put the focus on the person rather than what they were wearing.

Remember, good funeral planning means the event will be as meaningful to your guests as you would want it to be. In more recent times, there's been a shift towards expressing the person's individuality through their funeral dress. A hand-knitted jumper? Your favourite silk dressing gown? Your prized Liverpool FC shirt from the year they won the Champions League? However, if you're planning to be cremated, you won't be permitted to include any leather or rubber pieces – including biker's regalia and footwear with leather or rubber soles. Glasses, too, can't be cremated, due to their negative environmental impact. In case you're an avid naturalist, you shouldn't feel the need to choose an outfit at all. It's possible to attend your own funeral nude, although a body must be shielded from public view with some kind of a covering.

Washing and dressing someone who's died can be an important part of the mourning ritual, depending on your faith. Before Muslim funerals, the closest family members of the person who's died are responsible for shrouding them in layers of simple white cloth.

In the Jewish tradition, too, bodies are dressed in a simple linen or muslin shroud, with yarmulkes (skullcaps) and prayer shawls also included for men.

But what's an outfit without the right accessories? There are numerous stories of what certain celebrities have taken into their coffins with them. Allegedly, the writer Roald Dahl was buried with, among other things, a few chocolates in his pocket, while Andy Warhol is said to have been clutching a bottle of his favourite Estée Lauder fragrance as he was lowered into his grave. Or maybe you're about the simple pleasures, like Bob Marley, who was reportedly sent off with his red Gibson guitar, a Bible and some greenery. Notes, letters, precious jewels, toys or photographs – your options are pretty open when it comes to picking what you're going to take with you, but do consider the environment if you can.

Underground fashion

Visual artist, designer and researcher Jae Rhim Lee is bringing sustainable fashion to the death industry with her biodegradable burial suits, which are embedded with mushroom spores that break down the body into clean compost that's full of nutrients. The new strain of fungus she's developed, named the infinity mushroom, destroys harmful chemicals that the body releases as it decomposes.

Famous last words

“The best eulogies are said to be a balance between sincerity, nostalgia and lightness of touch – but, honestly, it’s the meaning that counts, not the performance”

A memorable eulogy

John Steinbeck’s landmark novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, published in 1939, features a particularly memorable eulogy. Against the backdrop of the Great Depression, the Joad family embark on a trek from Oklahoma to California in search of work. When Grampa Joad dies en route, former preacher Jim Casy is asked to make a speech over his grave. He says: “This here ol’ man jus’ lived a life an’ just died out of it. I don’t know whether he was good or bad, but that don’t matter much. He was alive, an’ that’s what matters.”

Just like with any other piece of writing, the key to a good eulogy is solid structure that will support the ideas and stories you want to tell. There are plenty of online resources that retell the experiences of people who went through the effort of writing their own eulogy. An interesting piece of advice that experts like to give is that you should work backwards – starting with the emotion or reaction you want to achieve, and then finding the right words to express it.

The best eulogies are said to be a balance between sincerity, nostalgia and lightness of touch – but, honestly, it’s the meaning that counts, not the performance. Including poems in a eulogy is a common practice, and can help those who aren’t able to find their inner wordsmith. In addition to the rich heritage of traditional remembrance poems that have been passed on for generations, there’s an arsenal of funeral classics written by some of the greatest poets in modern literature. “Funeral Blues” by W.H. Auden, “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” by Emily Dickinson and “When Great Trees Fall” by Maya Angelou are a few popular choices.

And if all else fails to inspire, it might be the perfect moment to revert to music. In a 2019 survey, Frank Sinatra’s track “My Way” was voted the number one funeral song, with Andrea Bocelli and Sarah Brightman’s “Time to Say Goodbye” coming second and Eva Cassidy’s evergreen “Over the Rainbow” in third place. Don’t let these dictate your choice, though – creating the ultimate soundtrack to your farewell can be a very healing process. Some humorous choices could be considered – think Mariah Carey’s “Obsessed” or “When the Party’s Over” by Billie Eilish.



Funeral poverty

“While the cost of funerals has grown in the past 10 years, the average income has not. You don’t need amazing mathematical skills to see there’s a discrepancy in this equation”

Just like with any other life event, funerals can end up being a very costly affair. Rarely discussed, but very much present in our society today, funeral poverty affects more people than you might think.

What is funeral poverty?

According to the Royal London *National Funeral Cost Index 2020*, the average cost of a funeral in the UK is about £3,800 (the price of an average used car). Meanwhile, a basic Irish funeral can cost anywhere between €2,950 and €7,500, and burial plots can range from €1,400 to €9,000, according to Royal London research carried out in 2018. In short – it’s a lot of money to leave behind. With the cost of death being so significant, the inability to cover one’s funeral fees is causing financial difficulties for many who are left behind. To put it simply, funeral poverty is the shortfall faced by those who are unable to pay for a funeral – and research shows that 9% of people face a shortfall of almost £2,000.

How does it happen?

While the cost of funerals has grown in the past 10 years, the average income has not. You don’t need amazing mathematical skills to see there’s a discrepancy in this equation. Research carried out by Royal London in 2020 found that 9% of people took on debt arranging a funeral. Out of those, 21% were forced to borrow from family and friends and 8% chose a cheaper funeral. This can happen for a plethora of reasons. For example, a loved one’s living costs incurred later in life might have exceeded what they managed to save, leaving you to cover some or all of their funeral payments. You might also be a young person with little in the way of savings who suddenly loses their parents and is faced with the awful responsibility of covering funeral costs despite not having a fund dedicated to this sort of event. Or you might want to fulfil your grandmother’s wishes for repatriation – the practice of sending the body or ashes to one’s country of origin – but have no real way to afford such an expense.

There can also be hidden costs in the process of planning a funeral. Lack of price transparency is a significant issue in the funeral industry. While organisations such as Down to Earth – an initiative run by the charity Quaker Social Action that offers support and guidance for those affected by funeral poverty – are lobbying to change that (see details of its Fair Funerals pledge on page 142), there’s still a lot of work to be done. If you’re arranging a funeral and are concerned about costs, you can ask funeral directors to talk you through their low-cost options.

If I’m broke, will I have to have a pauper’s funeral?

When we think of a “pauper’s funeral”, we think of dark, Dickensian times and a lot of social stigma. But things have changed since then – organised by your local council, public health funerals are an option for those with little or no financial backing, as well as those with no traceable family. It’s a basic funeral organised with monetary aid from the local authority, supported by public funds. It’s also fairly common – a Royal London report says the total spend on public health funerals in the UK in 2018/19 was £6.3 million.

Is there help available?

Yes. If you’re on a low income and receive certain benefits you may be able to get a Funeral Payment (or Funeral Support Payment in Scotland) from the government to help you pay for a funeral you’re arranging – see page 102 for more information. Organisations such as Quaker Social Action and the Muslim Burial Fund are also here to provide you and your loved ones with financial support, as well as the information needed to help support you if you’re facing funeral poverty. Their work on good practice in the funeral industry through lobbying the government and publicly discussing these issues means we can feel optimistic about change. But as with any problems in life (or death), it’s essential to reach out to those who are here to help you. This isn’t just your issue – it’s the issue of many.

Funerals in the UK and Ireland: facts and figures

The ceremonies after death have developed substantially over the centuries, with various rituals and traditions coming in and out of fashion. While the traditions differ among religious groups, as well as the non-religious, what happens in the end is about following the family's wishes – there's no one-size-fits-all approach.

33,000
years old – the earliest-known burial site in Britain

£3,290
is the average cost of cremation in the UK

22.7%
of the Irish population opt for cremation

£4,383
is the average cost of burial in the UK

140,000
people choose burial each year in the UK

Cremations are more popular than burials, with only a third of the UK's population opting for the latter. This could be due to the fact that they tend to be more expensive than cremation: in 2020, the average cremation funeral cost £3,290 versus £4,383 for a burial (figures taken from Royal London's *National Funeral Cost Index*).

Despite burials being less popular than cremation, 140,000 people in the UK choose the former each year. In Ireland, however, burials are still the top choice: as of 2019, only 22.7% of the population opted for a cremation, according to The Cremation Society.

While organ donation is seen as a positive deed in Judaism, autopsies are frowned upon as they're seen as sacrilege of the body. The faith will allow them to happen if it's required legally or if carrying out an autopsy will help to save the life of another person, but a rabbi must be in the room when the procedure is happening.

In Hinduism, it's normal for the family of the deceased to wash the body, although ghee, honey, milk and yogurt are typically used to cleanse the departed, rather than water.

Cremations in Ireland can be traced back to the Stone Age, when ashes were placed in stone structures; after the emergence of specific pagan beliefs, they were placed in decorative urns. It wasn't until the introduction of Christianity to the country, around the beginning of the 5th century, that burial became the norm.

Researchers at Cardiff University and the Natural History Museum have found that Iron Age Britons used to dig up the deceased to allow communities to interact with them. There's no concrete evidence of why this happened, but it may have been considered a way for families to help their relatives on their way to the afterlife.

Muslim graves should be perpendicular to the direction of Mecca, the Islamic holy site. The deceased are usually wrapped in a white cloth and placed on their right side, facing Mecca.

The oldest-known evidence of a burial in Britain was found in south Wales in 1823 during an archaeological dig. Located in a cave, the remains were originally thought to have been those of a Roman woman; scientific advancements have since revealed them to be of a young man, possibly a tribal chief, who was likely ceremonially buried more than 33,000 years ago.

The cost for a burial is highest in London. Highgate Cemetery, in north London, where Karl Marx and Malcolm McLaren's final resting places can be found, is the country's most expensive. In 2017, it cost £16,475 to have the right to a grave here, but machine digging added £1,850 to that.

There are some faiths where burial is the only option. In Islam, and most forms of Judaism, cremation is totally prohibited.

Space is a big issue with regard to burials. In the UK, it's estimated that half the cemeteries will be full within the next seven years. Gardens of Peace, the largest dedicated Muslim cemetery in the country, opened its first site in east London in 2002, with 10,000 graves; by 2018, all of them were occupied. According to the UN, today, there are 7.8 billion of us on Earth, but by the end of the century it's thought there will be 10.9 billion, which means that we may soon need to look for alternative solutions to the traditional ground burial.

There's an alternative to burial that's becoming increasingly popular: alkaline hydrolysis, which involves dissolving bodies in an alkaline solution. It's more colloquially known as "green cremation" and already available in some states in the US and provinces of Canada.

In parts of Ireland, it's still common practice for the body of the deceased to be displayed in the family home prior to the funeral so that people can come to pay their respects. In the past, wakes started with the female neighbours of the departed washing the body to prepare it for being laid out on a kitchen table or bed.

Design your funeral



1. Draw your future coffin

What kind of funeral would you like? Your final send-off doesn't have to be dry; it can be an expression of your individuality, the after-party of a life well lived and a comfort to those you leave behind. Take a moment to jot down your wishes, from your favourite songs, to what you might like to wear in the coffin and your final resting place.

2. A vision board for your funeral after-party



Interview with *Ahmed Alsisi* *Chaplain and founder of White Rose Funerals*

Having spent the past decade supporting the Muslim community in south Wales, the funeral director discusses the Islamic outlook on death, funerals and grief

White Rose Funerals is Wales' first Muslim funeral directors. Established in 2010 by Ahmed Alsisi and his brothers, the family-run business has grown over the past decade to serve all faiths as well as the non-religious – something that Alsisi admits was “a very tough barrier to break”.

Q Let's start at the beginning – why did you set up White Rose Funerals?

A It's been quite a journey, to be honest with you. It all started when I was told at a gathering that there was a lack of services within Cardiff and south Wales that cater for faith-based funerals for Muslim, Hindu or Jewish communities. Initially I just wanted to do Muslim funerals – I knew more about them, being a Muslim myself. Since the Cardiff and south Wales Muslim community is small, we all know one another, so it was easy for me to provide this personal service.

Q White Rose Funerals was the first Muslim funeral service in Wales, which must have come with its own set of challenges. What were some of the difficulties you faced?

A Wales needs to catch up with laws and regulations to help families with faith have a dignified send-off for their loved ones. To begin with, there were a lot of problems – issues with same-day burials, weekend services and registration, the coroner and a lack of education around faith-based funerals. There were a lot of things to tackle at one time and, being so young and inexperienced, I had to do a lot of research and reading and make contacts.

Q As you mention, same-day burial is a common aspect of Islamic funerals. What are some other unifying elements?

A The Muslim community, and also the Jewish community, don't like the idea of an invasive post-mortem. Another thing we all agree on as Muslims is, no matter what, no cremation. That's a big no-no. The idea of cremation seems too harsh for members of the Islamic faith because, for our whole lives, we've tried to avoid burning in fire. At Western and Indigenous funerals, it's more a celebration of life, whereas in Muslim communities, it's about the family – them having lost someone special and making sure they're OK. To give them time to mourn, the whole community cooks for them and makes sure they have enough food.

Q More generally, how would you describe the Muslim outlook on death?

A Our faith tells us to live your life to the fullest, to enjoy life, to marry, to eat, to go out, to travel, to receive the best education, but to never forget that, at any moment, you can leave this world. Our approach to death is that it's not the end, it's part of a new life, and we have this understanding from a young age. We accept the idea of death and dying, and I'd like to say we're more positive because we believe we'll be reunited [with loved ones who have died]. I've lost my grandparents and I miss them like crazy, but I'm at peace because I know I will meet them again and I just have to be patient until that time.

Q Alongside providing Muslim funerals, you now serve individuals of all faiths and none. What prompted this shift?

A A few years into doing Muslim funerals I was approached by families of different faiths, asking me to do funerals for them. I thought this might be a good way to show integration in a new form, because funerals are a very sensitive time in our lives, and you need people you can totally trust to perform such a service. We pride ourselves on being the first Muslim funeral directors in Wales, but we're also the first Muslim funeral directors to cater for all faiths and no faiths. I don't think anyone else in the UK does this, just because it's a very tough barrier to break.

Q What's been your secret to breaking down that barrier?

A What makes us different [from other funeral arrangers] is the fact that my family and I see our job as starting at the funeral rather than ending at the funeral. We keep in touch with almost all our families for years just to make sure they're OK and aren't struggling.

Q Finally, what impact has your choice of career had on your personal view of death?

A It's only reaffirmed what my parents taught me as a child – that I should utilise my time wisely before I die. When I pass, I want to look around and say I've done my best for myself and everyone around me. I can have fun, but I've learnt that it's not all about having fun. Now my way of “having fun” is making sure that I'm healthy and happy, that my parents and children have food on the table, that my wife is content, that my brothers and sisters are looked after and that my community is safe.

“I have already in my head decided what I want to be done [when I die]. I just want someone to dig a hole in a forest and throw me in. I don’t need a marker or anything else”

Actress and drag queen Divina De Campo, from an interview as part of Lost for Words, Royal London’s 2020 exhibition in collaboration with RANKIN

Interview with *Charlie Phillips* *Photographer*

The Jamaica-born image-maker speaks about his career capturing the funerals of west London's Afro-Caribbean community

The British photographer Charlie Phillips, born in Jamaica in 1944, has been documenting London's Black community for more than half a century. Known for his photographs of the people and places of Notting Hill and its surrounding areas, he's captured both daily life and important moments in the history of this part of the city, from race riots and protests to the early expressions of the famous carnival.

After Charlie's aunt passed away in 1963, he started documenting the funerals of west London's Afro-Caribbean community, taking photos of services in cemeteries such as Kensal Green. Images from his extensive visual archive of the ever-changing funeral process of his community formed the 2014 photography book *How Great Thou Art: Fifty Years of Afro-Caribbean Funerals*, and his work has featured in exhibitions at Tate Britain and the Museum of London and is included in the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection.

Q What drew you to the idea of documenting Caribbean funerals in London?

A I was taking pictures of everything. I thought I was going to be here for five years and was hoping that, when I went back to Jamaica, I could show them what life was like in England. So, funerals were among the documentary [work] I was doing. I was documenting our lives in the 1960s, and funerals are a part of life. The first funeral I photographed was my Auntie Suzie's, in 1963.

Q How did people react when you were taking pictures?

A At the time they all thought I was crazy, but no one took notice of it. I had grown up in the community, people knew me and, over the years, people got used to me. I was the only one documenting, I'm the only insider who documented our story and our history. We're coming up to the seventh generation [in the UK] and there's been a gap in our history and that's why I've documented it.

Q How would you describe a Caribbean send-off?

A Death in our community is a celebration of someone's life, so this is why they party after. If you had a good funeral, it was an event, you didn't have to be invited, you could just go. This was for our generation but now the youngers today tend to invite select people. Before, it was open to everybody and anyone could come and pay respect to the dead. It was to celebrate the person's life – after all the mourning and all the crying everybody goes and has a party. And you can see in my photographs, it's like a discotheque, a big celebration.

Q What are some of the Caribbean funerary traditions that have been brought over by the community and continued in London?

A The dress code, the celebration, the hymns. "How Great Thou Art" was the main hymn. In the early days we used to have a very strict dress code to wear black and lilac, they were the main colours of funerals. Everyone also has to wear a symbol that represents the person, so if the lady's favourite colour is red, you have to wear some red. I remember there was a lady who was a dressmaker and she loved her machine, so she had a wreath that looked like a Singer sewing machine and it went in her grave. Another tradition is that if a guy likes his drink, when his coffin is going down you pour some whisky – it's like, "Have a drink on me." Or if someone likes cigarettes, you could throw them in. We also have volunteers to fill the

"It's not about just taking you and putting you in a box, it's about celebrating"

grave up, we do the whole thing. And then the women will come in and decorate the grave. The guests participate in the funeral and burial as part of the tradition. After the service, a group of people will stand by the grave and continue singing. It's not about just taking you and putting you in a box, it's about celebrating.

Q What are some of the most important rituals within a funeral?

A The dressing of the body. It's when the family comes round to put on the favourite suit or dress of the dead person. That's a specialty in our community – you don't really see that too much any more.

Q You've spent so many years documenting other people's funerals. Has that made you reflect on what you'd like for your own?

A It's kind of spooky for me now, I'm getting on and I don't know when my time will come. I've made some plans for what I want. We have to meet our makers. [There will be] no crying over me, and I'd love to be buried at sea, but that's not going to happen. I don't think the younger generation really think about [their funerals] these days, but the older generations made plans way in advance – they would leave money to one side. My aunt left money on the side for her burial, and she knew how she wanted to dress and what music she wanted.

Q Will you continue shooting funerals?

A No, but I have this archive that documents how much funerals have changed over the years. We can look back and see how it was. It's good because it makes people look and think about funerals in a different way. It's not just about putting them in the ground and covering them over and having a little cry. It's making people aware that they can be spiritual and [a funeral can be] uplifting.

*Malin Andersson, the Love
Island star and model,
from an interview as part
of Lost for Words, Royal
London's 2020 exhibition in
collaboration with RANKIN*

*“When I was younger at school, no one
spoke about death. No one educated
you on death. I think, as humans, we
feel awkward about the conversation
of death because we don't want it to
happen and we don't know how to act
or respond to it”*

Further resources

Planning your own funeral in advance is becoming more common, but it can still be challenging to know where to begin. Here is a list of charities, organisations and resources that can help you explore what options are out there when it comes to funeral planning and decide what's right for you

Funeral planning

The ins and outs of funeral planning can be tricky to get your head around, and you may not know where to start. The following resources offer some straightforward guidance on what arrangements need to be considered when it comes to thinking about your funeral.

Citizens Advice

Guidance on arranging a funeral in the UK.
citizensadvice.org.uk/family/death-and-wills/funeral-services/arranging-a-funeral

Citizens Information

A guide to arranging a funeral in Ireland.
citizensinformation.ie/en/death/after_a_death/funerals.html

Funeral Choice

A website offering price comparisons for funeral directors across the UK, with more than 3,000 listed.
yourfuneralchoice.com

Funeral directors – professional associations

Select a funeral director who's a member of a professional association, as they have codes of practice and a robust complaints procedure.

The UK

The National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD).
nafd.org.uk

The Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF).
saif.org.uk

The Republic of Ireland

The Irish Association of Funeral Directors.
iafd.ie

Non-religious funerals

Humanist Association of Ireland

Information about humanist funerals and a contact page for celebrants in your area.
humanism.ie/ceremonies-2/funerals

Humanist Society Scotland

Provides information about humanist funeral services and a list of registered celebrants.
humanism.scot/humanist-ceremonies/funerals

Humanists UK

Advice on humanist funerals and memorial ceremonies.
humanism.org.uk/ceremonies/non-religious-funerals

The Institute of Civil Funerals

An institute that offers a database of funeral celebrants available to lead non-religious funeral services.
iocf.org.uk

Religious funerals

Jewish Joint Burial Society

Founded in 1969, this UK society plans Jewish funerals, covering 17,000 community members across 39 synagogues.
jjbs.org.uk

Muslims Funeral Services

A charity offering guidance on planning a funeral in line with Islamic teachings.
mfs.org.uk/Bereavement_Guide_for_Muslims.pdf

The Art of Dying Well: A Guide to Catholic Funerals

A simple guide to Catholic funerals and cremations, including music, funeral proceedings and frequently asked questions.
artofdyingwell.org/what-is-dying-well/catholic-funerals-cremations/guide-catholic-funerals

The Buddhist Society

A guide to planning a Buddhist funeral in the UK, as well as works on death and dying.
thebuddhistsociety.org/page/buddhist-funerals

The Church of England

Funeral information and guidance from the Church of England, including on arranging or attending a funeral and planning ahead for your own.
churchofengland.org/life-events/funerals

The United Synagogue

The largest synagogue movement in Europe, this network offers information and guidance on organising a burial for Jewish people.
theus.org.uk/arrangingaburial

Help and support with funeral costs

With the average cost of funerals rising all the time, many people in the UK and Ireland regularly struggle to pay for them. However, there are a number of ways you can reduce the expense, as well as charities that offer financial support to families so they can meet these costs.

Child Funeral Charity

A charity offering guidance and financial support for parents in England and Wales who are arranging a funeral for their baby or a child aged under 16. childfuneralcharity.org.uk

Down to Earth

An initiative by Quaker Social Action that supports people affected by funeral poverty. quakersocialaction.org.uk/we-can-help/helping-funerals/down-earth

Muslim Burial Fund

The Muslim Burial Fund offers support and guidance to Muslims who need help to fund the costs of a traditional Muslim burial. muslimburialfund.co.uk

The Children's Funeral Fund for England

A government fund for parents who've lost their baby or child under 18. The Children's Funeral Fund is available to all parents, regardless of income. gov.uk/child-funeral-costs

Government support for funeral payments

The UK

These government guidelines give a clear idea of the support you can expect to receive from it in covering funeral costs and advise how to access these funds. gov.uk/funeral-payments

The Republic of Ireland

Ireland also has funding in place to help cover the cost of funerals if you or your family are unable to pay. This link has information on how to access it. citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/death_related_benefits/benefits_and_entitlements_following_a_death.html

Further information

National Funeral Cost Index Report

Over the past seven years, Royal London has produced an annual report on the costs of funerals in the UK and Ireland. royallondon.com/media/research/national-funeral-cost-index-report-2020

Paying for a funeral

Royal London offers tips on how to pay for a funeral and suggestions for how to keep costs down. royallondon.com/articles-guides/learn/bereavement/what-to-do-when-someone-dies/paying-for-a-funeral

The Fair Funerals pledge

This initiative addresses the issues surrounding funeral poverty, encouraging funeral directors to commit to being open about their most affordable prices to avoid people feeling obliged to pay beyond their means. fairfuneralscampaign.org.uk/content/about-us

Burials at sea

The UK

There are quite specific procedures for funerals at sea. The UK government website provides a breakdown of how you can access a licence in order to have sea burial. gov.uk/guidance/how-to-get-a-licence-for-a-burial-at-sea-in-england

The Republic of Ireland

This government website offers a set of voluntary guidelines for those in Ireland considering burial at sea. gov.ie/en/service/de81b8-burial-at-sea

Green funerals

For those who are conscious of their carbon footprint, green funerals are becoming increasingly popular. Below are links to organisations that provide information on how to organise an eco-friendly funeral.

Green funeral directors

The Association of Green Funeral Directors (AGFD) can connect you with funeral homes that focus on more sustainable and eco-friendly options. greenfd.org.uk

The Natural Death Centre

A charity that provides information on all aspects of dying, from handling bereavement to consumer rights. It also has details of a plethora of resources dedicated to natural and eco funerals. naturaldeath.org.uk

Funeral guidance for the LGBTQIA+ community

A list of resources with specific information on funerals for people within the LGBTQIA+ community.

NHS Guide to LGBTQIA+ funerals

The NHS has created a guide with vital information on how to handle the death of someone within the LGBTQIA+ community, which includes considerations of how to plan a funeral when your family doesn't know that you're part of the queer community. www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/bereavement/supporting-lgbtplus-people-around-bereavement

Queer Funeral Guide

Funeral professional and trans activist Ash Hayhurst has created an extensive guide to organising a funeral for a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. goodfuneralguide.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Standard-PDF-queer-funeral-guide.pdf

Funeral planning from prison

Whether you're in prison yourself or have family members who are incarcerated, you may have questions about how to organise or attend a funeral. The below links give guidance on how to make this happen and what to consider.

Day release to attend a funeral

Information on the process to apply for day release to attend a funeral in the UK. insidetime.org/leave-to-visit-dying-relatives-or-attend-a-funeral

What happens when you die in prison?

If you expect that your life may come to an end while you're in prison, the funeral process is quite different. This information sheet guides you through funeral planning if this is the scenario you are facing. death.io/happens-die-prison