

CELEBRANTS EDITION 7

It's Your Funeral!

“It was a beautiful ceremony, just what they would have wanted” is a phrase often said after a person's funeral. But is true? Has the person in charge of making the arrangements for your service really captured the right tone, remembered the right stories or even chosen the right music?

You may think leaving a list of instructions is enough for your loved one but there is no guarantee that they will even find it before the day of your funeral, let alone follow the instructions correctly. Don't forget they are grieving and dealing with a huge loss, especially if your death has come as a surprise. So how do you ensure you get the send of you deserve?

Death is unavoidable. It is the only certainty in the world and yet talking about dying still seems such a big taboo. No one wants to think about their own mortality but perhaps we should to be more prepared for the inevitable. Many people save for their funerals to avoid passing the burden of cost onto their families so planning the details shouldn't be too different, especially as there are a number of avenues you can take to organise it.

As a celebrant I write and conduct funeral ceremonies and this has often led me to think about what will happen when it is my turn. I was deliberating music choices and made a comment to my husband about a particular piece I would like included. His response was, “I'd have never have thought of that song.” I was surprised he wouldn't have and clearly, I wasn't going to get the funeral I wanted. There are potentially only two times in your life that all your loved ones might all come together: your

wedding and your funeral so it is important it is a true reflection of you and the life you have lived.

I brought the conversation I had with my husband up with my friends and the general consensus afterwards was “what if our loved ones got it wrong?” Obviously, we realised that this wouldn’t be done intentionally but many felt that the person planning their funeral would probably feel like it had to be a sombre affair rather than a celebration, with several of my friends saying they wanted their family and friends to leave the ceremony dancing in the aisles. But did their family know that?

So how do we ensure we get the ceremony we want and how can we start to feel more comfortable talking about passing away? There has already been a slight shift with this with the birth of Death Cafés. These ‘not for profit’ events first began in the UK in 2011 and were created for people to talk about death rather than grief. Since then, there have been 12829 Death Café sessions held in 79 different countries around the world* so people are certainly beginning to open up about death and there is a want to talk about it.

One way to ensure you get the ceremony you wish for is to choose your own celebrant. It is becoming increasingly more popular for individuals to write their eulogies with a celebrant before they die to guarantee the right stories are told. Each celebrant will differ slightly in how they do this with you but any celebrant will tell you that their main aim is to accurately reflect the life of the deceased, so doing this with person in question will certainly achieve that. You can also create your own funeral plan at a funeral home and this information will be held until it is required with payment not being necessary until the time of death.

I'm not suggesting that you should do this all alone and not allow your family to have any input in your ceremony. They should be able to share and include their favourite memories of you too as this is their opportunity to say goodbye. It can also help some with the grieving process so their involvement should not be dismissed. It is important however that your wishes are listened to and that you provide your loved ones with the required information so they can fulfil your requests.

The onus doesn't have to be just on you. Family members should take the initiative to visit their loved ones if they know these arrangements will soon need to be made. There is no point putting the discussion off – instead turn it into a shared activity that helps you both relive some of your favourite memories and in turn make new ones. Creating the funeral together, especially writing the eulogy, could become a memory those you leave behind cherish forever. They may also find out new things about you such as where you grew up or went to school, important information which could be missed out by others when discussing your eulogy with the celebrant.

Funerals by nature aren't easy but they shouldn't be feared either. As a relative, putting planning off may make it harder to do when the time comes so having key things in place before hand could be helpful. As the intended, it can be comforting to know what will be shared with those you cherish most and for that reason you can confidently say that the lyrics in the ever popular funeral song ring true, "I did it my way!"

*Deathcafe.com. 2021. What is Death Cafe. [online] Available at:
<<https://deathcafe.com/what/>> [Accessed 29 July 2021].

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