

Services in the Greek Orthodox Church include a vigil, and a traditional church funeral service without music. On the ninth and the 40th days, additional services are held. Louis's mother was troubled by all these preparations and would have preferred something in a more personal style. The service on the 40th day is an important one. It can be held on a day earlier but not a day later, since it is believed that if it is late the spirit of the deceased would not be able to reach for the food. Louis's mother thought that if this is true, then by adhering to the tradition Louis could gain nourishment from the food left out for him.

Mother described how she "dressed her son like a groom". He had on his best blue suit, white shirt and a bow tie. He wore his comfortable sneakers and next to him were his best shoes, his jeans and favourite jumper. Packed into the white-lined coffin was his doona (duvet), his pillow, three of his most loved toys, a packet of cards, packets of chewing gum, and several photographs of his favourite pets. In his suit pockets there was a comb, handkerchief, and his wallet containing 30 Australian dollars. A few more dollars were thrown into the coffin. He was truly well dressed and well prepared for his journey.

### Celebrant's Funeral

Di is an attractive lady celebrant in Melbourne who conducts funeral services in a style that could well be emulated. The service may be conducted in the funeral parlour at the cremetorial chapel, at the family home or in a garden. Di is able to assist in a church service if requested. She aims at making the service a spiritual experience that is "totally personally orientated". After a death she will spend well over an hour with the family encouraging all members to become involved: parents, grandparents and especially children. She encourages them to talk, to write and to draw, and then uses the material in her service. All services are tape recorded and as she gives the tape she says "Here is a copy. You may choose not to listen to it ever again, or you may choose to, sometimes".

Di has collected many children's drawings which are brought up and stuck onto the coffin along with posies of hand-picked flowers. There is a familiar pattern to the drawings, the dead child drawn horizontally on the ground and under black earth, the yellow sun in the sky and there are always birds. For older siblings, Di asks

them to choose and tape any music that their brother or sister would have liked.

For little babies that have died, she gets the couple to go back to the point of conception and the love they had for each other and their baby at the beginning of its life. She asks them to describe preparations that were made, buying baby clothes, painting the nursery and gathering things for their child. In this way a baby of two days old can be remembered as living for nine months and two days.

Di tells the bereaved families that she is not there to proselytise but to listen, and in some way help them move forward to the future. She may say "I am here to help you have a dignified service for your child, I wish I wasn't here at all, I do not understand your pain, but you can tell me what has happened, and then I will shepherd you through and not add to your distress." She may read poems written by other parents, or children, and finds that these are often creative and beautiful. The mother who lost her five-year-old daughter wrote a poem entitled "The Eternal Child", the last verse being:

And through my tears I see you, ever  
green  
My memories by time are undefiled  
Here in my heart, forever is for you  
Eternal memories, Eternal Child.

### Discussion

Funeral ceremonies provide ritualised permission to grieve, and when these are unavailable—as following the death of stillborn babies, where mass graves hold up to 20 or more tiny infants—parents express anger and anguish. The death of their expected baby is not even given a personal space. This is a 20th century phenomenon, since with the high infant mortality rates of the past, deaths were accepted more easily, or even ignored.

Funeral rites provide a public and private acknowledgement, and a personal recognition, that the child is now dead and can never be seen or touched again. Occurring within a few days, when shock and disbelief are still present, the funeral emphasises the reality of the death. It also provides a time for mourners to reflect on the value of life, however short, and to acknowledge to the grieving family the importance of their child.

Mourning is seen as the emotional work that is necessary in order to internalise the lost person, the dead child, into one's mind. Bereaved parents speak of the value of photographs, books, and videos made before the child died,

or a tape of the funeral. These tangible objects can aid in mourning, as parents sometimes regret the dimming of their memories. After the funeral, by discussion, active thought, the good memories of the child, are retained; the suffering and the bad times are integrated, so that the dead child does not become too idealised at the expense of the living children.

Mourning is a natural process which will vary with each individual and family. This study of children's funerals has attempted to emphasise how these can be rewarding and hopeful occasions, especially when the family has the confidence to choose the service and to participate. Caring professionals, funeral directors and friends have important roles, but first it is necessary to hear, observe, and take heed of the family's wishes. While partly understanding their grief, they should allow the family to experience their own pain; only by so doing can the work of mourning proceed, a healthy resolution occur, and death take its place as part of the circle of life.

### Reference

1. Griffin GM, Tobin D. In the Midst of Life. Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1982.

## CAMEO ON GRIEF

### A Voice from the Past

I was twenty-four when I first heard Ruth Draper in a season of monologues given on the London stage. She had a full theatre as she brought to life people and communities around her until they were as real as herself. I watched spellbound—the tourists in an Italian church; the hostess at a garden party; the lover and the men in her life and, finally, the mother's encounter with her soldier son killed in the War. This was an experience Ruth and her sister had on a bicycle tour of Southern Ireland. A sudden shower took them for shelter to the cottage of a widow who spoke of the War. "My son was killed at Passchendaele and I grieved constantly for him. One day I woke from sleep and he appeared at the foot of my bed looking at me with such sorrow on his face. Then he spoke, 'Give over weeping, mother, or my wounds will never heal.' Then he disappeared and I have never wept for him since then."

— Margaret Torrie  
Grayshott  
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