

## The National Funerals College (Lincolnshire, UK)

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a grieving person that he/she cannot connect and integrate that beauty within themselves – it remains outside.

It is only now, after many years, that I am endeavouring to understand a little of what it means to internalise a lost loved one, to identify again with the outer world and the need to do so. With the passage of time I can also begin to appreciate what has contributed to my inner world becoming gradually integrated both internally and with the world outside.

I can marvel again at the beauty of the first snowdrops, the spring flowers, the flight of the gulls over ploughed fields, the inquisitive robin on the bird table, a gentle dawn and a glorious sunset. I have regained this joy because I have regained compatibility within, and with everything around me. Wyn is no longer outside. She has returned in a different way, and as a result, she and I have externally separated and I am no longer dependent on her.

I can now laugh – it is much easier to laugh when there are two of you, and cry when there is only one – but I can laugh outwardly because I am laughing inwardly at the same time.

Regarding the bluebells: a friend of mine took me to her woods, different woods, where I found a similar beauty, but the experience was not Wyn's – it was mine. I think perhaps it was there that I said 'Goodbye' to the Wyn I used to know.

'There will be no need to cling, no need to rail. Instead there is a quiet contentment, a feeling of good fortune, a deep sense of having been added to; and we can say with conviction, 'I'm glad we knew each other'.<sup>5</sup>

### References

1. Abraham K. A Short Study of the Development of the Libido in Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis. London, UK: Hogarth, 1924.
2. Klein M. Mourning and its relation to manic-depressive states. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 1940; 20: 1939.
3. Parkes CM. Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life. London, UK: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972 (2nd Edn 1986).
4. Krupp GR. Notes on identification as a defence against anxiety in coping with loss. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 1963; 46: 303.
5. Jacobs M. The Presenting Past. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1986.

### FUNERALS AND HOW TO IMPROVE THEM

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The National Funerals College is an educational body serving the United Kingdom and aiming to improve the quality of funerals as indicated in the *Dead Citizens Charter*. This was launched in January 1996 to draw attention to the rights all citizens have in preparing for funerals, either of themselves or of others. The *Charter* is consonant with the College's first stated principle:

to stimulate better funeral practices for the sake of the dead and of the bereaved.

The *Charter* was launched as a discussion document and is being reissued in the light of comment from a wide variety of specialised and professional groups, eg funeral directors, cemeteries and crematoria, clergy, hospices, and bereavement charities and support groups, including Cruse Bereavement Care.

The College was founded by Lord Young of Dartington, widely known for his pioneering of the Consumers' Association. Researching for *A Good Death: conversations with East Londoners\** he became conscious of how perfunctory many funerals had become and of how little help they provide for grieving families.

### The function of the funeral

Death and life are inseparably linked. We are born mortal and so, one day, we will all have a funeral. Our lives are full of opportunities whose exploration death prohibits, so that the fact of death forces us to make choices. Funerals play a key and positive role in human societies because, in focusing on the individual who has died, they emphasise the achievements and values which survive. Paradoxically, death promotes life.

Funerals have three traditional functions: to dispose of a dead body, to transfer the 'soul' safely to the next life and to help the survivors come to terms with their loss. Contemporary funerals rarely fulfil their potential. Certainly, in funerals following a tragic or premature death – say of children or of leaders, or resulting from an accident or AIDS – survivors may receive great support, the deceased great attention and the funeral service great preparation. Such funerals may provide healing and satisfaction. Meanwhile, many funerals impoverish the participants, in particular those where:

- the deceased was elderly, in an institution or unknown;
- the family has made no plans;
- the family's preferences are limited by clergy, funeral directors or cemetery/crematorium procedures.

Over a long perspective, control over the funeral has steadily shifted from dying people and their families towards professional groups. Today, funerals are organised by bereaved families, funeral directors, clergy, and cemetery/crematorium management. However well these different groups contribute, the funeral as a whole does not always play a constructive role in the grieving process, nor does it always do justice to the life of the deceased. Thus a special feature of the College's seminar programme is the participation of all the principal groups involved to consider in what ways greater co-operation can help bereaved people.

### The work of the College

Nearly 800 people have attended seminars. Course assessments have been analysed by John Pearce (British Humanist Association). They have revealed how professional groups tend to blame funeral inadequacies on each other, and how the current fragmented system can frustrate both families and professionals. Paradoxically, John Pearce estimated that 'clergy are the only realistic prospect for pro-active change'.

Changes in British funeral practice are accelerating. The National Funerals College believes that it is critical that change benefits those most subjectively involved, people who are facing death or preparing for funerals, either their own or of someone close to them. The *Charter* argues that funerals should be more personal, more prepared, and more positive.

The media has paid enormous attention to funerals these last few years – a combination of the *Dead Citizens Charter*, the work of the Natural Death Centre, the high-profile marketing of pre-paid plans, the challenge to current practices of the large funeral-directing companies, and the multiplying number of alternative funeral groups. Building on the public awareness of the long-term work of bereavement support groups, of hospices and palliative medicine, most people will benefit from the lifting of the 'taboo' on death.

The National Funerals College is funded by the Nuffield Foundation's Phoenix Fund. The Chairman is professor Malcolm Johnson, Director, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. The Director is the Revd Dr Peter C. Jupp. Copies of the *Dead Citizens Charter* and information about forthcoming courses can be obtained from the National Funerals College, Braddan House, High Street, Duddington, Stamford, Lincs PE9 3QE. Tel: 01780-444269.

\*Young M, Cullen L. *A Good Death: Conversations with East Londoners*. London, UK and New York, USA: Routledge, 1996.