

A new style of mourning?

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establish, and only when the relationship between work and death is established as causal will a company grant compensation. Defence council Kawahito states that if a victim has worked 16 hours a day for seven consecutive days prior to his death he has a chance of being classed as a *karooshi* victim. Owing to the Labour Ministry's strict approval standards for compensation, companies refuse to admit the existence of *karooshi*.

The grief reaction of widows who believe that their husband's death was caused by *karooshi* is complicated in various ways. Strong emotions are often apparent: anger at the deceased husband's company's refusal to acknowledge that the cause of death was due to overwork, and guilt feelings for not having persuaded their husbands to take more rest and thus avoid death from overwork.

CONCLUSION

We have to be aware that different cultures have, indeed, different attitudes toward death and bereavement. Japanese views on death and bereavement are not a static phenomenon but are rather in a dynamic evolving process. In order to understand a country's perspective on death and bereavement, we have to look at the cultural background and the underlying value structures of the culture.

Comparing Japanese culture with that of numerous other countries, from the perspective of my 40 years in Japan, I have come to the conclusion that, despite various differences, what is common in the bereavement experience of people around the world is much greater than what is different. In the 21st century, there will probably be even greater interaction between peoples and cultures than in the past. Being aware of the differences will help us to understand the sufferings and needs of people from different racial backgrounds and enable us to share their sorrow and support them in their grief. At the same time we need not overemphasise cultural differences: as members of the family of human beings we all have similar experiences when confronted with death and bereavement. BC

References

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Looking through an album of my Victorian family photographs, I found myself reflecting on how little I knew about these people. I wondered too how much less my own children and future generations will know about them unless some form of enduring written record is established.

Ways of life are changing and in many countries the close proximity of the extended family is a thing of the past, as members disperse and relocate around the globe. It seems, however, that for a growing number of people the internet is becoming a resource, enabling them not only to create a 'permanent' record of the lives of loved ones following bereavement, but also to share these memories and reflections with friends and family worldwide.

There are now a staggering number of web sites, many created within the last five years, dedicated to the creation of on-line memorials. Some are linked directly to specific funeral homes. Some charge a small fortune to clients perhaps already vulnerable following a bereavement, but a large number appear to offer a reasonable service for which there is a growing demand.

One such site, www.memoriallink.com, founded in 1999, has offices in Colorado and Florida. It provides clients with the opportunity to create a 'biographical representation of an individual's life', a virtual tribute accessible worldwide for generations to come. The copy is written by the client and can include scanned photographs, artwork, poems, lyrics, and newspaper articles. Clients can link this memorial page to that of other family members and send emails inviting selected people to view the page.

Those accessing these memorials are also able to email messages of condolence to the family and even send flowers via an online ordering service. The whole site can be translated into eight languages in addition to English, including French, Portuguese and Chinese.

A site with a slightly different angle is the Canadian-based www.Partingwishes.com, founded in 2000. Again, clients create online memorials to include audio and video clips as well as text and graphics. Unlike the previous site, these memorials are free of charge providing they do not exceed 100 KB. If more space is required, it can be purchased with a one-time-only fee and there are no annual maintenance charges as there are with many sites.

An unusual feature of this site is the facility for clients to create an online document detailing their wishes for their own funeral arrangements, especially useful if there is a fear of family disputes following the death. A 'funeral wizard' helps clients complete a series of very specific questions on their requirements which can be updated at any time, and these can be kept private until needed. The site makes clear that the document is not legally binding but, after a client's death, the organisers take responsibility for informing friends and family around the world, inviting them to view the client's wishes via the site. The document can be created and stored on the site for up to a year free of charge. After that, prices range from \$14.95 for a 10-year site membership to \$199.95 for a lifetime.

Other services provided enable clients to establish a power of attorney and create wills and living wills. The site also links to online Amazon bookstores in the UK, USA and Canada for the purchase of books relating to grief and bereavement.

Although these sites are based in the USA and Canada, there are a few UK-based ones offering similar but more limited services. At www.light-a-candle.com, a unique feature is the possibility of creating different memorials for Jews, Christians and those of no particular religion. In addition, the site provides an email service to remind clients of anniversaries and informs them when others have added to the memorial. Clients can also light a virtual candle for their loved one.

Despite the fact that this site, like many of the others, includes memorials dedicated to movie and music icons mixed somewhat oddly with memorials from the general public, it appears to offer a reasonable and inexpensive service, and 5% of payments are donated to a charity of the client's choice.

Whatever our views on the concept of online memorials services, they certainly seem to be here to stay. Perhaps one of their greatest appeals is that they are dynamic in that they can be constantly updated and new material added by any selected friend or family member wherever they may be. They are also 'permanent', at least as long as the website remains active and the client can afford to pay for them. Certainly for a growing number, online memorials appear to offer a relatively new and effective way of expressing grief as part of their healing process. BC