

SOME KIND OF FRONT PAGE

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Celebrant Institute Professional Development activity *Funerals in Australia*. This activity is designed to provide you with an overview of funerals both historically and in Australia, as well as a suggested client journey and an outline of how I (Sarah Aird) approach my funeral celebrancy work.

This booklet contains the same text as the online page you've been given access to. The online page also contains multiple videos in which I deliver the content to you just as I would in a classroom or Zoom environment.

Your professional development activity package also contains the document templates I have designed during my years as a funeral celebrant; you can download them from the online page and edit them to fit with the way you work.

There are no assessment tasks to submit to complete this activity; the information is simply provided for you to review in your own time and return to whenever you want a refresher.

If you have any questions, one-on-one mentoring sessions can be booked via the link available online.

Enjoy!

PURPOSE OF A FUNERAL CEREMONY

We recognise major events in our lives with ceremony and ritual. A funeral marks a death and is a testament to a life lived. Such a significant event needs to be marked for the people who are coping with the recent loss of their loved one. The funeral is a way this transitional phase is demarcated in the lives of those who are grieving.

The funeral ceremony is part of a healing process. It marks the grief and loss of a person or family and then honours the next transition — beginning the next stage in life without that person. These services meet the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs of both family and friends. It can allow people to transform their grief into good memories for the days ahead and can be the most important activity at the time of death. It is also an opportunity to say farewell in a way that has special meaning.

Arranging the practical details of a funeral may be the bereaved family's first step toward facing the reality of the death. This is a necessary part of the grieving process. Without a funeral, the bereaved may find it difficult to accept the death and to heal emotionally. Socially a funeral provides an opportunity for shared loss and the support of family and friends. It brings together family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours to express sympathy and concern. It is a time to understand the relationship of the living with the person who has passed away. It may also serve to strengthen relationships among the living. Spiritually, a funeral service helps family and friends to meaningfully relate to religious/spiritual resources for understanding and accepting suffering and death. It gives a perspective on death and the meaning of life.

As a funeral celebrant it is your privilege to guide people through the ceremonial part of the rite of passage. Understanding the significance of ritual will help you give significance to the celebration of a life when you are asked to be the celebrant. The grieving people whom you serve may not appreciate the significance of ritual at that point in their lives, but if you imbibe the ceremony script with the right balance of words, songs and quotes, the people will be able to feel the healing power of the funeral ceremony.

The following are some of the purposes that the ceremonial process of a funeral can represent. A funeral ceremony can:

- mark a transition in life
- honour and celebrate a life
- recognise that a person is moving from one situation to another
- celebrate humanity
- enable people to cross a threshold in life.
- assist with change
- enable social groups to come together for a common purpose.
- affirm shared values and interpretations of the world
- assist with the healing process
- honour the next stage in the life journey.
- celebrate survival with hope and the overcoming of adversity.
- acknowledge a change of status.
- honour the things and people we love and give meaning to.
- take us (momentarily) to a higher plane of being.
- validate the life of the deceased.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FUNERAL CUSTOMS

In our modern world most of us associate funerals with either a conventional burial or cremation. Throughout history though, various peoples had different ways of sending their dead on their final journey. What has not changed is the fact that the grandeur of the funeral service will be affected by your status or your wealth.

The death of Princess Diana is an example of the pomp and ceremony usually associated with the death of royalty. The funeral of President Kennedy reflected how a great democracy dealt with the death of a modern-day 'Head of State'. It is common for such funerals to have a church service and a funeral procession where a strong military presence is expected. This is in stark contrast to the mass graves of the plague victims of earlier times who were simply thrown on a barrow to be brought to their final destination.

Early funeral rites

The history of a funeral service is a history of humankind. Funeral customs are as old as civilization itself.

Every culture and civilization attended to the proper care of their dead. Every culture and civilization ever studied has three things in common relating to death and the disposition of the dead:

- Some type of funeral rites, rituals, and ceremonies.
- A sacred place for the dead.
- Memorialisation of the dead.

Researchers have found burial grounds of Neanderthals dating to 60,000 BC with animal antlers on the body and flower fragments next to the corpse indicating some type of ritual and gifts of remembrance. Anthropologists assume that with no great psychological knowledge or custom to draw from, Neanderthals instinctively buried their dead with ritual and ceremony.

The role of fear

It is believed that primitive humans lived in a world of fear. They reacted to most natural phenomena such as weather events based on that fear. They eventually attributed many life events to their instinctive knowledge of a higher being or power. In their primitive mind, life and death events were the acts of spirits. Since they were not able to see or sense these spirits, they lived in awe of these spirits. In an effort to enact some type of truce with these 'gods' or 'spirits,' it is believed that humans devised charms, ceremonies and rituals to placate these 'spirits'. Although we may find ancient burial customs to be strange, or in some cases repugnant, they obviously arose for a reason. The first burial customs were crude efforts to protect the living from the spirits that caused the death of the person. Fear of the dead caused the burning of bodies to destroy evil spirits. Many primitive tribes even today simply run away from their dead, leaving them to rot.

Similarly, one of the world's oldest religious peoples, the Zoroastrians allow their dead to simply rot or be devoured by vultures. They consider fire to be too sacred to use in disposing of the dead and burial is thought to be a defilement and injury to Mother Earth. Others place the body deep in the jungle to be devoured by wild beasts. In Tibet and among the Kamchatkan Indians, dogs are

used for this purpose because they believe that those eaten by dogs will be better off in the other world.

Herodotus tells us that the Calatians ate their own dead. It was considered a sacred honour and duty of the family. Queen Artemisia supposedly mixed the ashes of her beloved with wine and drank it. To this day, certain African tribes are known to grind the bones of their dead and combine them with their food.

The Zulus burned all of the belongings of the deceased to prevent evil spirits from even hovering in the vicinity. Some tribes would set up a ring of fire around the bodies of their dead to singe the wings of the spirits to prevent them from attacking other members of the community. Other tribes would throw spears and arrows into the air to kill hovering spirits, or would eat bitter herbs to drive away or kill spirits that may have already invaded their bodies.

The role of religion

This fear of the dead carried over into what was developing into religious thought. The Polynesian word *tabu* expressed the view that a person or thing coming into contact with the dead was set apart and shunned for a religious or quasi-religious reason. In English this thought is rendered 'defilement' or 'pollution.' To most people a dead body is indeed taboo.

In Hebrew belief, the dead were considered unclean and anyone who came in contact with the dead was declared the same. In Old Persian scriptures, a similar taboo is expressed. Anyone who touched a dead body was 'powerless in mind, tongue, and hand.' This paralysis was inflicted by the evil spirits that were associated with the dead body.

Sacrifices of one kind or another were offered in honour of the dead. In some cases their purpose was to appease the spirits. In some cultures, these sacrifices were meant to be used by the deceased in the future world. Self-mutilation, such as cutting off of toes or fingers, was another type of sacrificial sign of respect for the deceased.

Suicide was considered the ultimate show of respect and sacrifice in some cultures. The sacrifice of dogs, horses and slaves was common in Africa after the death of a king. In Japan, it was the custom to insist that 20 or 30 slaves commit *Seppuku* (also known as *Hara-Kiri*) at the death of a nobleman. In Fiji it was considered correct for the friends of the deceased as well as his wives and slaves to be strangled.

Probably the strangest rite was practised among the Hindu in India prior to being outlawed by the British. The practice was known as *suttee*, or 'wife burning'. The wife of the deceased was expected to dress herself in her finest clothing and lie down by the side of her deceased husband on the funeral pyre to be cremated alive. The eldest son then lit the pyre.

In many cultures, men and women were treated differently at death. Among them:

- the Cochians buried their women, but suspended their men from trees
- the Ghonds buried their women but cremated their men
- the Bongas buried their men with their faces to the north and their women with their faces to the south.

Modern funeral customs

We would like to think that in these modern times, our state of enlightenment would have totally dispensed with such thinking, but this is not the case. Even today, death is often approached from a standpoint of fear. Many of our funeral customs have their historical basis in pagan rituals.

Modern mourning clothing came from the custom of wearing special clothing to disguise identity from returning spirits. Pagans believed that returning spirits would fail to recognise them in their new attire and would be confused and overlook them.

Covering the face of the deceased with a sheet stems from pagan tribes who believed that the spirit of the deceased escaped through the mouth. They would often hold the mouth and nose of a sick person shut, hoping to retain the spirits and delay death.

Feasting and gatherings associated with the funeral began as an essential part of the primitive funeral where food offerings were made. Wakes held today come from ancient customs of keeping watch over the deceased hoping that life would return.

The lighting of candles evolved from the use of fire mentioned earlier in attempts to protect the living from the spirits. The practice of ringing bells comes from the common medieval belief that the spirits would be kept at bay by the ringing of a consecrated bell. The firing of a rifle volley over the deceased mirrors the tribal practice of throwing spears into the air to ward off spirits hovering over the deceased.

Originally, holy water was sprinkled on the body to protect it from demons. Floral offerings were originally intended to gain favour with the spirit of the deceased. Funeral music had its origins in the ancient chants designed to placate the spirits.

Every country and every race has its own way of burying their dead. There are sepulchres and shrouds, graves and mausoleums. The American Indians sent their deceased to the great hunting ground in the sky; sailors go to 'Davy Jones' Locker'. The Norsemen sent their dead to Valhalla, while in Greek legend their spirits found their heaven in the Elysian Fields.

Yet whether we believe in the Buddhist nirvana or the Christian paradise, we all share the same feelings of loss and grief when we lose someone we love. A funeral ceremony is a fitting way to express that grief and to say our goodbyes. Such a tribute should not be restricted to statesmen and public figures. All those we have loved and lost have contributed to our lives. It is fitting that we should publicly proclaim that fact as well as remember them in our hearts. Loving words bring comfort. So whether the funeral is a traditional burial or the scattering of ashes over the sea, to immortalise a loved one for evermore with a eulogy expressing love, those left behind can be eased through the grief process when paying tribute to their loved ones.

DYING AND DEATH CARE IN AUSTRALIA

Prior to World War II, it was common practice in Australia (as in much of the Western world) for dying people to be cared for in the home by family members. Death was much less of a taboo because so many people had experience of caring for a family member through illness and death, or keeping them home after death for people to pay their respects.

Following World War II, there began a movement for people to put their elderly relatives in aged care facilities/nursing homes, and they would often die in such a facility without the care and presence of their family or friends. Death became a topic that is not really discussed because so few people have firsthand experience of dealing with it, and there has been the attitude of 'If I talk about it, it will happen'.

In the last 10-15 years, there has been a move back to dying at home or bringing family members home to die; people have started to express their wish to die in their familiar surroundings, with their family and friends at their side.

While discussions of death are still on the more taboo side, there has been a strong movement in the last five years to remove the stigma around planning for death and dying, with organisations and individuals encouraging people to discuss and document their wishes for their end-of-life care and post-death ritual with their families, so that families are not needing to make tough decisions in the emotional period following a death. Counselling and other support services are available for people dealing with death (either before or after a death) and those caring for them.

FUNERAL DIRECTORS

When a death occurs, someone in a family will begin the process of informing loved ones of the loss and start making plans for the funeral. In most instances a funeral service company is appointed to take care of the funeral process.

The funeral director will respond to the needs and requirements of the family. They will give suggestions, listen to their ideas, and make recommendations with a quiet strength that will provide comfort as they make decisions. The funeral director will handle all necessary details and provide complete personal supervision before, during and after the funeral. They will care for the deceased, oversee paperwork and documents, as well as handle discussions with the family regarding the funeral service details.

After death

Funeral directors will care for the deceased as follows:

- Transfer the deceased from the place of death to the funeral home/mortuary, where they will be stored in a refrigerated facility.
- Embalm (if requested), wash, dress, and present the deceased. If the deceased is to be viewed before burial or cremation, makeup may be applied and hair may be styled.
- Place the deceased in the family's selected coffin or casket, which is then closed ready for transport to the funeral.

Generally a funeral celebrant is not involved with a body from the point of death until burial or cremation, however with more families choosing to keep their loved one at home after death and even to have the funeral at home, celebrants may be involved in rituals or in other ways. Celebrants must be comfortable with being in the presence of a dead body.

Consultation

During the consultation with the family, the funeral director will ask the family to select:

- coffin/casket
- date, time and location for the ceremony
- burial/cremation
- celebrant/clergy
- flowers
- refreshments
- orders of service
- photo slideshows
- music
- newspaper notices of the death and/or funeral.

After the consultation, according to the family's instructions, the funeral director will:

- arrange the cemetery or crematorium (disposal requirements)
- book and manage all suppliers

- organise newspaper notices.

Documentation

Funeral directors will organise the following documentation:

- obtain medical certificate from the relevant doctor
- complete government forms as required
- obtain any necessary permits
- prepare and place death notices in the news media (after consultation with the authorised representative of the deceased)
- supply the Funeral Director's Statement of Death to the Registry of Births Marriages and Deaths to register the death
- apply for a BDM-issued death certificate on behalf of the family
- pay the celebrant and other suppliers their fees
- render an account for services provided to the person who provided information for the death certificate.

On the day of the ceremony

The funeral director's responsibilities on the day of the funeral include:

- Transporting the deceased to the service.
- Managing the logistics of the funeral ceremony in consultation with the celebrant.
- Transporting the deceased onto the cemetery/crematorium.

How much choice does the family have in funeral arrangements?

The family has absolute choice in funeral arrangements, with certain exceptions such as a coronial investigation in some murder or accidental death cases where permission may be given for a funeral by burial only. Apart from in instances where there are specific religious or cultural requirements for the place or timing of a funeral ceremony, families in Australia should have complete choice when it comes to these matters. While they may be encouraged by a funeral director to schedule a funeral within a few days of a death, there is no particular reason why funeral ceremonies must take place quickly.

There is a trend towards taking more time between the death and the funeral to allow (a) for mourners to gather from interstate or overseas and (b) for close family members and friends to have time to make decisions about how to honour their loved one and to sit with their grief while still ensuring the funeral is appropriately conducted.

Funeral or memorial ceremonies can take place almost anywhere; the only restriction will generally be whether a venue is prepared to have a coffin present. There may be some variation between states and territories within Australia, however in most instances relevant health departments require the deceased to be placed in a coffin for burial or cremation. In the case of cremation, the coffin must be combustible.

In some states, funeral costs may be government-assisted in the event of insufficient funds. Such funerals have limitations on choices. When necessary, advice could be given in the first instance by a funeral director, social worker or relevant government office.

How much will a funeral cost?

It's an obvious and understandable question, but just like building a house, the answer could be almost limitless. There are certain necessary inclusions and certifications required, some of which have fixed costs, some of which are negotiable. A specific answer cannot be given to this question because of the scope of options available. The costs of a funeral include professional service fees, disbursements, (i.e. funeral expenses such as flowers, newspaper notices, burial or cremation, BDM death certificate, transportation, celebrant, refreshments, etc.), and choice of coffin. Coffins cost anywhere from around \$800 to many thousands.

Options for final disposition or disposal of the body

Final disposition is the term for the way in which the deceased will be cared for after death, as decided by the family. Burials, entombments, or cremations are methods of final disposition. Regardless of which final disposition method is chosen it is important to have a service of remembrance, either a funeral (with the body present) or a memorial (with no body present). This is an important gathering of family and friends that provides an opportunity to pay tribute to a unique life. A service of remembrance helps survivors face the reality of death which is a first step toward dealing with grief. It also brings people together to give support and consolation when most needed.

Burial

Burial or interment is a widely used form of final disposition. Bodies must be buried in approved cemeteries. Most communities have at least one cemetery. These include municipal, church, or privately-owned cemeteries.

There are two methods of burial. The first is a burial where the body is placed into a coffin, lowered into the ground and covered with earth. The second way is to place the coffin in an outer container made of concrete, metal, fibreglass or wood. An outer container protects the coffin and its contents and may also prevent the grave from excessive settling. Some cemeteries require the use of an outer container for perpetual care. The funeral director will advise clients of the cemetery requirements in their area and can show them a selection of outer containers.

It is possible to arrange for double or even triple graves, where one person is buried deeply, and when a spouse or another loved one dies, their coffin is lowered on top.

Entombment

Another type of burial involves permanently placing the body and the coffin in a mausoleum, or tomb (thus entombment), above or just below the ground.

Most mausoleums are built within a cemetery. When a coffin is entombed it is placed in a space in the mausoleum wall. The front is then sealed and faced with either marble or granite. A permanent memorial can be attached to this.

Cremation

Cremation is the process of reducing the deceased's body to bone fragments and ashes through intense heat in a high technology cremation chamber. It takes approximately two hours to complete the process at temperatures of approximately 900oC. Cooling takes considerably more time, after which the remaining bone fragments are further crushed to a finer substance. For an average-sized adult there will be two to three kilograms of cremated remains.

Myths abound with regard to costs of funerals. One of them is that cremation is an inexpensive substitute for the traditional funeral and burial. This is not always so. The services provided and the merchandise selected determines the costs. The choice of final disposition does not necessarily have a bearing on the costs (although when comparing disposal methods only, cremation is cheaper than burial).

Inurnment

Inurnment is when cremated remains are placed in an urn. Normally the cremated remains may be returned to the family within one or two days following cremation. Usually they are placed in an urn that the family has selected previously. The urn may be made of hardwood, metal, marble or a synthetic material.

Following cremation, it is suggested that the family place the urn and its contents in a permanent, respectful place.

Burial of cremated remains

A family may choose to inter the urn in a new grave selected by them. Many cemeteries offer small graves for cremated remains or a family may buy a full-size grave. Another option would be to bury the urn in an existing grave. This will vary from culture to culture and with family preferences. A graveside service with family and friends present when the urn is interred brings finality to the death and helps the grieving process.

Columbarium

Families that choose cremation because they do not like burial may not wish to inter the urn. The above-ground permanent placement of the urn in a columbarium offers an alternative. A columbarium is a structure that houses many urns. Within a columbarium a family may select either a single niche or perhaps a double niche to hold a pair of urns. Many cemeteries, funeral homes and crematoriums have a columbarium. A columbarium may be a simple, freestanding wall located outside that is enhanced with trees, shrubs, flowers and benches. Or it can be located within a building such as a funeral home or crematorium. A columbarium also allows for a permanent memorial plaque to be placed with the name of the deceased on it.

Scattering

Some people may consider scattering the cremated remains, but there are several important issues to consider before this is done. Families have scattered cremated remains and regretted it afterwards. Scattering is permanent and once done cannot be reversed.

Families may decide to scatter ashes on their own private property but in time that decision may make it much more difficult for the family to part with that property. Some families have chosen a favourite place of the deceased's such as a park, lake, or mountainous area in which to scatter ashes. Some restrictions may apply. There are also no guarantees that the setting chosen will be

as beautiful in years to come. Some ashes are scattered in a place in accordance with the wishes of the deceased.

The physical act of scattering may be difficult in that the cremated remains are a coarse material – they are not entirely ashes that can be taken by the wind. Many cemeteries have scattering gardens where permanent records are kept, and a memorial may be erected.

Taking an urn home

Some families decide to keep the urn at home because they feel that as long as they have the urn, the deceased is still with them. Taking an urn home may be a temporary measure until a decision can be made as to its final resting place. It may be more appropriate for the next of kin to make the decision at the time of death instead of leaving that choice for the next generation. There may also be a security concern about the urn if the home was ever broken into or vandalised.

Immediate disposition

Any funeral home will arrange an immediate disposition if requested. Membership in an organisation or society is not required.

Immediate disposition includes transferring the deceased from the place of death, preparing and placing the deceased in a coffin or appropriate container, obtaining the registration of death and burial permit, securing all necessary documentation, providing the Funeral Director's Statement of Death, and arranging for a coffin and the use of facilities and vehicles. Charges for the transportation to the cemetery and/or crematorium are the responsibility of the family or executor of the estate and will be included in the funeral director's invoice.

A funeral director's advice to celebrants

A funeral director who addressed a group of funeral celebrants provided the following practical advice.

- Act in a professional and respectful manner.
- Fashion the service to truly reflect the deceased person.
- Nothing is unusual.
- Give the family whatever they want.
- Always honour family's wishes, especially in regard to religious content. Check carefully with the family.
- Do not put five verses/readings in a row and not much else. Spread readings throughout the service.
- Have quiet periods.
- Be practical with the venue (e.g. if venue is outdoors in a park or at the top of a hill, then content should not include something only appropriate for a service held in a chapel).
- Think; be practical.
- Don't upsell things like memorial books, coffins, or flowers. Don't cross boundaries.
- Don't automatically use candles; not always appropriate with families. Talk to families first.
- Listen; hear what is coming through.
- Provide a transcript of service to the family for the future.

- Fees are a disbursement on the funeral director's account. It is a competitive market place. Communicate costs with all concerned.
- Always remember that the families are the most important people.
- Pre-arrangements are a very good idea. More and more people are doing this. Encourage people to think about their funerals in advance.
- Film segments can be shown in a chapel.
- If the deceased was an unpleasant person or died by suicide, honesty about the deceased is absolutely the best policy. However, check with the family first.
- Display craft work, or whatever the deceased was good at or known for. Do something that reflects their life. It's not unusual to have animals present during the service, for example an officer of the RSPCA died, and animals formed a guard of honour at his funeral.
- It is a very good idea to have a photographic display of the deceased, especially while food is being served.
- Remember, the memory time around a cuppa can be just as important as the service.

ASPECTS OF A TRADITIONAL FUNERAL SERVICE

The traditional funeral service is held in a church or funeral home chapel.

Each funeral is unique – the celebrant works with the family to develop such a service. This might include a eulogy and tributes by family members or friends; special music, songs, poems, or passages from scripture; or special requests previously made by the deceased. When planning the funeral, the family decides whether the service will be public or private. A public service is open to all who wish to attend, allowing friends and acquaintances the opportunity to mourn and express their sympathy.

The traditional funeral can include viewing the deceased. Although viewing should not be forced on families, it can be a healthy step toward the resolution of grief. When death is sudden and unexpected, viewing helps to reinforce the finality. If the person has had a lingering illness, it is often helpful to see that the suffering has ended. The funeral home can provide a quiet, private setting for the viewing. In some cultures it is important for the body to be kept at home for viewings and a family member will stay 'on guard' over the body of the deceased. In some cultures the body is never left alone and it is important to touch the body.

The committal is the conclusion of the traditional funeral. It may be conducted at the graveside, crematorium, or in the church/chapel.

A traditional funeral service involves the staff, facilities, and equipment of a funeral home for an average of four to seven days. The staff will transport the deceased from the place of death, file and secure necessary government documents and permits, arrange for desired services, embalm and prepare the deceased if required, provide the coffin and necessary funeral vehicles, and arrange for the flowers, notices in newspapers, and a mourner's book to be signed as people arrive for the service. They can provide an order of ceremony which can be printed and prepared for the people who attend the funeral, and they will also provide advice on music and can offer refreshments after the funeral service.

NB: a funeral service is one where the deceased's body is present, housed in a coffin or a casket. A memorial service is one where the deceased's body is not present; they may have died overseas or interstate and it has not been possible to get the remains home yet; the family may have decided to wait until an important person could be available for the ceremony, and the deceased may have been cremated or buried already; or the family may simply find it too confronting to have the coffin present. A similar order of service would be used for both funerals and memorials, except that the committal is not included in a memorial service, because this is the moment of farewell to the deceased, and if the deceased is not present, it's not relevant. The celebrant's role in both ceremonies is the same except for the removal of the committal for a memorial; some celebrants may make themselves available to assist families with making arrangements for memorial ceremonies in circumstances where no funeral director is involved. For the purposes of this content, I'm going to use the word 'funeral' to refer to any kind of ceremony of farewell.

NB: a coffin is a container for a body that has six sides; it widens from the head to where the body's shoulders go, then tapers back in towards the feet. It has a lid that lifts off altogether. A casket is a rectangular container with a hinged lid that is connected on one side. Often the lid is in two parts so just the head and shoulders can be displayed for a viewing. For the purposes of this content, 'coffin' will be used across the board to refer to the container the deceased is put in after death.



Coffin



Casket

FUNERAL CELEBRANCY

Historical context of funeral celebrancy in Australia

After the commencement of the civil marriage celebrancy program in 1973, Dally Messenger, the second civil marriage celebrant to be appointed, began to be asked to perform civil funeral ceremonies. He reluctantly agreed in 1976 after a request to perform the funeral for a woman he had married. That was the beginning of civil funeral celebrancy in Australia (and likely the world).

Over the last 45 years, civil funeral celebrancy has grown to be more popular in Australia, with about 70% of funerals now being delivered by civil funeral celebrants (as opposed to religious ministers), up from approximately 30% in 2000 (according to statistics compiled by the Australian Funeral Directors Association). The Census 2016 showed that approximately 30% of Australians identified as non-religious, whereas in 1966 the Census showed that approximately 3% of Australians identified as non-religious; this reflects the growth in civil funeral celebrancy.

Many of the funerals delivered by civil celebrants are still booked through funeral directors, but there is a growing understanding in the community that there is more choice available and families are beginning to search out their own celebrants through online research.

The role of the funeral celebrant

Funeral celebrants perform a vital role in society. As a funeral celebrant you will need to be aware of the status this role has in your community. Assisting people with the remembrance service for a loved life that has been lost is an especially important honour. The service you deliver to people should not only create the appropriate final moment for the lost one, but will aid the family and friends with their process of grieving. The knowledge you have about funerals, speeches, rituals, ceremony and the grieving process will be of invaluable use to you.

It can be a serious business creating a tribute to a departed loved one and the ceremonies people have to 'say goodbye' to their loved ones are significant. There is no registration or authorisation process in place for funeral celebrants, but this in no way should make people assume that the service being provided is not a professional one.

Funeral celebrants are required to present themselves in an exceptionally professional manner. From the moment they have their first contact with a grieving family, right through to while performing the ceremony (even when not actively presenting), the celebrant needs to be 'in role' – someone is always watching. If being a celebrant is an unnatural role for a person to perform, the work of funeral celebrancy can become very onerous.

Celebrants must ensure they maintain privacy and confidentiality for all their clients, including for funerals. Although the funeral celebrant will not collect must in the way of personal identifiable information about their clients, it is still imperative that they do not share information with others who do not require access to it for the purposes of conducting the funeral. Any personal information collected in the course of a funeral celebrant's work should be kept securely (i.e. in a lockable filing cabinet and/or on a password-protected computer) or securely destroyed after it is no longer required.

Sometimes a family will request a private funeral, whereby the details of the date, time, and location are not shared with anyone other than those specifically invited by the family; this can be to avoid certain people attending, and it is crucial that celebrants do not share information about private services with anyone.

A funeral service is the most common way our society has of celebrating the life and mourning the death of a loved one. The service is performed in a setting that suits the memory of the deceased and the needs of those left behind and are grieving. This can at times be sombre and formal, and

other times it can be a joyful celebration of a person well loved. The key for the celebrant to remember is to observe and value the wishes of the family and/or friends organising the funeral ahead of their own. Like all ceremonies, a funeral service is a very personal affair.

The funeral celebrant needs to create a well-structured tribute to the deceased. This will be constructed with the help of family and/or friends. The tribute will be just that – a heralding of the life, the experiences, special qualities and achievements of a person who is no longer amongst us. It will provide a lasting memory for people to honour their loved one and can be exceptionally important in the grieving process. It is an enormous responsibility to officiate at a funeral service and the celebrant should take the utmost care in composing the tribute at such a landmark event in the lives of those left behind.

Very often the funeral service will have a non-religious context. People can be very specific about the inclusion and/or exclusion of religious references and the celebrant must be respectful of their needs. The deceased may have given clear instructions about what was wanted at their funeral service. In this way each service will be individual and provide a unique expression of the life energy that once was. The funeral celebrant will create and deliver the service, coordinating the process of people giving tributes and eulogies or participating in other ways, and ensuring the service meets the needs of the family and the coordinating funeral service company.

As a funeral celebrant you will need to develop the skills that will assist in the composition of appropriate services. Another key component of the role is the ability to communicate respectfully with the grieving family/friends and others involved. Developing an empathetic style that supports people and still gets the job done will be the cornerstone to your success as a funeral celebrant. Your knowledge of the funeral industry, the grieving process, the services available to help people cope with grief, and the ability to assist people through the transitional period of mourning, all form part of the work of a funeral celebrant.

The significance of the funeral celebrant in society should never be underestimated. The role requires a person with a range of skills and qualities who can appreciate the significance of assisting a family and friends through an important rite of passage for their loved one. Consider the following list of functions that a celebrant could perform:

- listen to the needs of the clients
- console grieving family members
- liaise with the funeral director
- gather information about the deceased from family and friends
- advise family and friends on their role, if any, during the funeral ceremony.
- plan a suitable funeral ceremony
- show sympathy and empathy towards grieving family and friends
- provide advice on the typical process a funeral follows
- offer recommendations of poems, music and reading to be used in the funeral
- follow the instructions and wishes of the family/friends or the deceased
- suggest rituals to enhance the ceremonial nature of the funeral
- maintain a professional standard of dress
- compose the script for the funeral ceremony
- be dignified and solemn
- manage their own sadness and feelings of grief that may emerge
- respect the cultural, religious, social and ethnic values of people
- deliver an eloquent and professional funeral ceremony

- be punctual with all arrangements.

Due to the vulnerability of the funeral celebrant's clients, it is crucial that the celebrant operates from a strong ethical and moral standpoint and supports the grieving family and friends through the creation of an appropriate tribute. The funeral celebrant works alongside the funeral company and needs to have a clear understanding of the funeral company's offering, so that they are clear about their own role and the various roles performed by others.

Working with funeral directors

As a funeral celebrant you will be referred to most of your clients through a funeral director who works for a specific funeral service company. Funeral service companies have very clearly defined codes of conduct and professional ethics, and the celebrants they use will need to appreciate and respect these. The funeral director will establish a working relationship with several celebrants and get to know the style and manner of each. It is the task of the funeral director to match the right celebrant to the grieving family.

Because the funeral celebrant works as a contracted professional of the funeral company, the primary client of the funeral company (the grieving family) becomes the primary client of the funeral celebrant as well. The celebrant needs to establish a good working relationship with funeral director if they want to keep providing funeral ceremonies and this means respecting the role of the funeral director, communicating with them professionally and respectfully, and acknowledging the way in which they want their clients to be treated.

The family who contacts the funeral service company may have very specific requirements for the celebrant. For example, some people might want a male celebrant rather than a female celebrant. Others may want a more mature person or a religious celebrant. These requests will direct the funeral director to contact a specific celebrant who they feel best suits the family's needs.

Because you may be working with several funeral homes and different funeral directors, it is a good idea to build up a catalogue of the different funeral director and to also take note of the specific requirements the funeral service companies may have. For example, some funeral homes prefer the funeral director to call up the pall bearers, whereas others are quite comfortable for the celebrant to do this.

Establishing working relationships with funeral directors can be difficult; there are a lot of funeral celebrants out there all clamouring for the same work. Being requested to act as celebrant at the funeral of a family member or friend is a good opportunity to establish a relationship with a new funeral director through appropriate and comprehensive communication, and respecting the different roles of the funeral director and the celebrant.

THE CLIENT JOURNEY: FUNERALS

Now that we've looked at purpose of a funeral and the role of funeral celebrants, we're going to put it all into the context of the client journey for working with funeral clients.

NB: In the following pages I'm going to teach you how I (Sarah Aird) manage my client journey with funeral clients that come to me through funeral directors. I've provided all the document templates I have designed over the years as part of your package, so you can edit them to fit the way you work. The journey is very similar for clients who come to me directly.

The timeline for a funeral client journey is much, much shorter than any other ceremony; it can be as little as 48 hours or as long as a few weeks, depending on the type of ceremony (memorials can be further away because there will not be a body present) and the requirements of the family. Funeral celebrants really need to be available to drop everything at a moment's notice to meet with a family if required.

The funeral client journey is fairly standard and won't change much between celebrants. The major difference I've found between the way celebrants work is those who send a script to their client to read, and those who read it to them over the phone, and their timeline for doing so.

Here's a summary of the steps in my client journey:

1. Receive enquiry from funeral director; confirm availability. Receive basic information from funeral director. Confirm booking in my booking system and prepare client folder.
2. Call client to organise funeral planning meeting.
3. Attend funeral planning meeting with family and/or friends.
4. Draft and send ceremony script. Collaborate with client to confirm all details and finalise ceremony script.
5. Create a funeral run sheet for the audio/visual operator.
6. Attend and present the ceremony.
7. Invoice the funeral director and check if they have any feedback.

Now let's look at these steps in more detail.

Receive enquiry from funeral director and confirm availability

As mentioned, funeral directors have a selection of funeral celebrants they can call on. Funeral directors first meet with the family to plan arrangements for the funeral service and gather information for the death certificate. The funeral director will try to match the experience, personality, and ability of a funeral celebrant to suit the requirements of the grieving family. The funeral director will call the celebrant to confirm availability to conduct a funeral ceremony. If available, the funeral director will provide them with the following basic details:

- name of the deceased
- date of birth, date of death, and age of deceased
- cause of death (if known)
- next of kin / contact person and their contact details
- venue, date, time for funeral
- whether the deceased is being buried (in which case the celebrant will likely be expected at the graveside as well) or cremated

- arrangements the family have made for music, slideshow, orders of service and refreshments
- special considerations (if relevant).

Once I have all these details, I enter them onto my booking form (when I was completely paper-based) or into Tavé (my customer relationship management software), and create a folder for the ceremony with the checklist stapled on front (when paper-based) and the booking form inside.

You may find it useful to have a stack of booking forms printed so that when the funeral director calls, you can enter the details directly onto the form. This will also ensure you don't miss asking for any information you will need.

Call client to organise planning meeting

The first call to the client is the first opportunity to make a good impression. Remember you're representing the funeral director, so it's important the client feels good about the celebrant who has been booked for their loved one's service. You may find it useful to develop a short script for this first phone call. Mine goes a bit like this:

'Hi, is this X? My name is Sarah Aird, and I'm a celebrant. Funeral Director Name has asked me to give you a call about Deceased's funeral service. I'm hoping to make a time for me to come and meet with you, and whoever else you would like to be involved, to plan the funeral.'

I never say 'I'm sorry for your loss' or use other platitudes; they can be seen as empty and tokenistic by the deceased's loved ones, particularly as they've probably heard the same words a thousand times already.

I always go to the client's preferred venue for the meeting; it's usually their home, sometimes the deceased's home, or occasionally the funeral home, depending on everyone's location. I always set aside two hours for this meeting; it can take as little as 20 minutes or as long as 2.5 hours, but two hours is a good average.

Before ending the call I tell them I'd like them to think about what music they'd like played during the service, and who would like to speak, and we can think about everything else during the meeting.

Some celebrants send a list of questions they're going to ask the family beforehand, but I like to build some rapport with the family before jumping into the nitty gritty.

Attend funeral planning meeting

I'm happy for as many or as few people to be in attendance as the family wishes. My biggest meeting to date was with about 12 people, a combination of family and friends of the deceased, which sounds like a lot but simply requires good meeting facilitation.

I prefer to hold meetings sitting at a table if possible; it's easier for me to take notes, and I find it easier to see everyone if we're sitting around a table. My preference is to sit at the head of the table so I can see everyone easily. The first thing I do when we sit down is write down everyone's names in my client folder in the order in which we're sitting; if we're sitting around a table, I literally draw a circle or a rectangle and write the names around it. I can picture in my head someone's face and where they were sitting, and if I can't remember their name, I can look at my diagram.

Understanding different stages of grief can assist you in anticipating the needs of clients. Celebrants must be comfortable with grief and seeing people grieve and break down emotionally. The celebrant needs to be aware of their own issues around death and ensure that they are able to be supportive to the grieving family and their friends. Communicating with people who are in an emotional state requires highly developed communication skills and the ability to empathise. It is

not the role of the celebrant to be a grief counsellor; there are specialist agencies for this function, but nonetheless the celebrant will need to understand and cope with the issues of grief.

Gathering information

Just as with weddings, it's crucial to have a checklist or questionnaire of some kind to help you in collecting the information you will need to write the funeral ceremony.

My funeral booking form has been through many, many iterations, but it now collects all the information I need to write the ceremony, including details on whether or not they're having a slideshow, what music they've chosen, whether they're having a memorial book for mourners to sign, and where they're having refreshments after the ceremony. All of those details, although arranged and managed by the funeral director, find their way into my script, so it's important I get them at this meeting, so I don't have to go back and ask the family later.

As I stated earlier, I like to build some rapport with my families by asking them relatively simple questions before I dive into the nitty gritty of the deceased's life. I've filled in some of this information already from the info I got from the funeral director, but I always like to confirm those details to ensure everything is correct; sometimes a funeral director has told me a name over the phone and I've spelt it incorrectly when writing it down, or they've given me a date of birth that's off by one or two days. It's crucial to confirm all those details with the family and not just rely on what the funeral director tells you. I start by asking about:

- details of the deceased (full name, date of birth, date of death, age). I don't tend to ask about cause of death at this stage; it often comes up later in the conversation, but it can be too raw to ask about it so early on
- contact details of the main contact within the family, including any email address/es they would like me to send the draft ceremony script to
- date, time and venue details of all events: ceremony, burial if included, refreshments
- information about ancillary items the family will be including, such as order of service booklets, slideshows and music, so I can include them in the ceremony
- who would like to speak and what kind of speaking they'd like to do, such as a eulogy (the life story), tributes (memories, anecdotes, impact), readings and poems
- special requests about the ceremony design, such as including candle lighting, The Lord's Prayer, Psalm 23 (sometimes even non-religious families want one or both of those), RSL, Masonic, or other special sub-ceremonies, discussion of items owned by the deceased that will be placed on the coffin or anything else
- family details (a limited family tree, from the deceased's parents down to any grandchildren or great-grandchildren).

Eulogy

There is much value in the celebratory, life-appreciation part of a funeral. It is comforting to those who grieve to know that the person they loved was generally valued. Sometimes it is also helpful for them to impart to the wider circle something of the special nature of a rather private person they knew much better than most and appreciated at a level perhaps not generally recognised. If celebrants are to help people through their grief by setting their clock ticking properly again, an important early step is one which enables them to look back at the life that has ended, and feel good about it.

It is not recommended that eulogies include negative aspects of the deceased's life unless it is at the express wish of the family. Great care needs to be taken to remain sensitive to the feelings of family and friends.

If the family wants to write and deliver the eulogy themselves, sometimes they ask me for a list of what information they should cover. I have a simplified dot point list of prompts they may like to consider when putting together the eulogy (it's the same as the items listed below that I would ask them if they wanted me to write the eulogy), and I'm always happy to email that to them.

If they have told me they want me to write and deliver the eulogy, after I've covered the above details, I start to ask questions about the life of the deceased:

- early family life
- place of birth, parents and their occupations, siblings, where they grew up, interests
- school life (primary, secondary, tertiary)
- friends, incidents, achievements, qualifications, trade or academic
- career
- workmates, career moves
- military service / historical significance
- family life: marriage, children, events, grandchildren, great-grandchildren
- community service, achievements, beliefs, causes they fought for, political ideals
- memorable events in their life
- holidays, anniversaries, achievements
- pets
- hobbies, interests, sports, community involvement
- club memberships, positions held
- sporting achievements
- favourite songs, tunes, prose, poems, prayers
- personality.

When I've heard about the person's life, if I think I've built enough rapport with the family I will say 'would you like to tell me about the end?' Some families want to tell you every single detail of the deceased's illness and their final days/months/weeks. Some families just want to say it was peaceful in the end. I do encourage families to tell me a small amount so that I can put something in the script, because it's often easier for me to explain how someone died during the funeral rather than the family have to deal with every second person asking 'what happened?'

The final questions I ask are the more difficult ones for the family to answer:

- Give me some words you would use to describe Deceased.
- What did Deceased teach you?
- If you could say one more thing to Deceased, what would it be?

These are really the questions that give me the most information about what KIND of a person the deceased was. Even if I'm not going to write the eulogy, I ask these questions, because they give me some ideas about the types of wording I might use for the introduction and committal.

It is important to speak with more than one person if possible, to try and understand more about the deceased from different people's perspectives. This will help your tribute to be more rounded and a more realistic depiction of the deceased. A eulogy should consider the whole person so that it honours the entirety of a person's life and experience.

A tip is to try not to leave the meeting until you feel you 'know' the deceased. Observe if there is anyone present who is not contributing to what you are being told and the information you are

writing down. Try and draw them out. They are most likely grieving deeply but are too emotional to speak without encouragement.

It is important to have plenty of spare paper; the spaces in my booking form are never big enough, so I have plenty of pieces of blank paper in my file.

Tributes

It's so important that there is plenty of time available for family members and/or friends to talk about their loved one during the service; if need be, I will cut down my remarks to allow more time for personal tributes.

Sometimes a family member or friend may feel they want to say something, but don't think they will be able to speak on the day. I always offer for them to write something for me to read on their behalf; on the day they can even give it a go if they're feeling strong, and I (or someone else) can be there to jump in if they need rescuing.

Alternatively, someone may feel they have something they want to say to the deceased, but they don't want to include it in the public ceremony; I always offer that they can write a letter to their loved one if they like, which we will put in the coffin before it is taken away for cremation or burial. I've even had grandchildren draw a picture to go with their beloved grandparent.

Readings and poems

Often people will want to speak but not feel they are able to write something themselves. Poems and readings are perfect for such people, and it's an essential part of a celebrant's toolkit to have a collection of readings they can suggest. I always check the relationship of the person to the deceased (because a lot of funeral readings are written for a parent, child, grandparent, etc.) and what they are trying to convey (that they will be missed, that they are glad they're no longer in pain, etc.). Feel free to adapt a reading, for example if it's written for a mother and the deceased is the grandmother, or for a father and the deceased is the mother, etc.

Knowing a bit about the deceased is also useful in recommending readings; for example, for the son or daughter of a deceased who was a keen gardener, I often recommend My Mother's [Father's] Garden, which provides a lovely description of the way a person parents their child through the analogy of nurturing a garden.

Music

It's also a good idea to have a collection of songs you can recommend to families who are not sure what music to choose. There are obviously thousands of songs that could be chosen for a funeral, but my go-to suggestions for families who are struggling to choose are:

- My Way, Frank Sinatra
- Time to Say Goodbye, Andrea Bocelli and Sarah Brightman
- Air on the G String, Bach
- Flower on the Water, John Williamson (for those who like country music)

NB: Music played during a photo slide show will enhance a funeral service, but music should not be played while someone is speaking during the service. Music is distracting. Not all individuals have the same capacity to hear more than one conversation at once, and not everyone can listen to a speaker while music is playing, even when it is only playing quietly in the background.

Venue

It's really useful to have some familiarity with the venue the funeral will be held in. The family may ask you questions about how ceremonies usually work in the venue, or how long the ceremony can go for in that venue, or they may want to discuss different options with you. It's useful to know, for example, whether there is a curtain that may be closed around the coffin at the end of the ceremony, or whether there is a catafalque that may be lowered. If you are unfamiliar with a venue when you are booked for a service, feel free to ask the funeral director for some more information or ring the venue directly.

Draft ceremony script and send to family

I try to write my funeral scripts as soon as possible after the planning meeting, when everything is as fresh in my mind as possible. I ALWAYS send a script to my families for their review. Inappropriate or incorrect words or phrases can cause tremendous stress to the loved ones, so it is crucial they have the opportunity to review the wording before the ceremony.

Length of the ceremony script

The duration of a funeral service varies, usually depending on the number of speakers. The length of service is important, but I'm not prepared to tell you this long is too long, or this short is too short. I've had a ceremony that went for 10 minutes including opening and closing music and a reading, but that was perfect for that family; the deceased lived a very solitary life, nobody knew much about him, and what we put together was all they wanted and all they needed. I've had a ceremony that went for two hours and involved 20 speakers and four separate slideshows (with about 10 songs in all), but again it was perfect for that family; the deceased was involved in multiple different communities and representatives from each needed the opportunity to say goodbye.

Sometimes there are time constraints due to the venue (at a crematorium chapel in Melbourne the service may be restricted to just 45 minutes; in Brisbane or Sydney it may be just 30 minutes) and these do need to be adhered to, but if the celebrant feels the family needs more time to honour their loved one, they can talk to the funeral director about suggesting booking a double slot, or moving to a venue without such time restrictions. If the length of a funeral service exceeds the allocated time, the family may be charged additional fees. Celebrants do need to advise families of how long a service is likely to take, and if there are time constraints, they need to let all speakers know that keeping to time is paramount.

The average person speaks at about 140 words per minute. You can use this number and the length of the songs to be included to gauge approximately how long your ceremony script will take to read.

I never, ever, open the floor to speakers who have not been pre-arranged. This is how I was taught and it is an excellent practice. There are two reasons: you might get an awkward silence if nobody wants to say anything, or you might get every man and his dog feeling they need to speak, and you'll almost definitely run over time. Funeral directors hate it when celebrants open the floor, and it's widely discouraged within the industry. I always tell families there will be plenty of opportunity over refreshments for people to say what they want.

Sometimes the length of a funeral is out of the celebrant's control. The celebrant may have no opportunity to meet participants or find out how long their delivery will be, nor the content. Sometimes the celebrant is told a person will 'just say a line or two' and they turn up with three pages of written material. Sometimes conflicts amongst family members or extended family and friends of the deceased present a range of difficulties for the celebrant. It is good practice to ask to speak to everyone who will be speaking on the day, and ask them to send their tributes to you so

you can time them, but often people haven't finished preparing until the day, or they decide to speak off the cuff (they're usually the ones who talk the longest and end up waffling). Again, this is beyond your control; all you can do is ensure you have let the family know that if a service goes for longer than the allocated time, they may be charged extra.

Structuring the ceremony

There is no prescribed format for funeral services, but they do need to be structured in a logical way that will flow well, from the initial welcoming of mourners to the final committal. The wishes of family are paramount. A standard funeral service for a cremation may be as follows.

1. Mourners gather in the ceremony space; the coffin may already be in place, or it may be carried or wheeled in while the opening music is playing.
2. Opening music plays. Mourners may be asked to stand as the coffin and/or significant family members enter the ceremony space. Traditionally the deceased is brought in feet first and coffin is turned sideways so that the floral sheaf on top of the coffin can be on display.
3. Celebrant asks everyone to be seated, and the service begins. I always open with an appropriate quote.
4. Housekeeping (thank mourners for coming, turn off your phones).
5. Permission to cry, smile, laugh, and clap during the service. This is a service of celebration and also a chance to start the grieving process.
6. Candle lighting; sometimes families like to light a single candle in remembrance of the deceased, or several for different features of remembering.
7. Words of comfort about death and dying. Every celebrant will have a range of explanations of ways death may be viewed. Based on the celebrant's knowledge of the family and friends they have interviewed, the type of information shared here should suit the audience.
8. Reading/prayer.
9. Eulogy (the life story of the deceased) interspersed with tributes (stories of the deceased by those who loved them). If I am delivering the eulogy, I like to scatter the tributes throughout, at the time in the life chronology where the speaker best fits. If it is a work colleague, I have them speak just after I've talked about that particular job. If it is a child, I have them speak just after I've talked about their birth and childhood. I find this works better than having all the tributes in a clump after the eulogy, as the person's recollections are then set in the context of how they knew the deceased.
10. Reflection. I generally encourage some music to be played for people to have some quiet reflection time. Sometimes candles are lit. Sometimes flowers are available to be placed on the coffin. Sometimes a slideshow of photos is played. Sometimes it's just the music. Whatever happens, it's important to give the mourners time and space to reflect on their memories of the deceased.
11. Final thank you to mourners and a reminder of the invitation to join the family for refreshments.
12. Committal. These are the words we use to say goodbye to the deceased, and they commemorate the act of giving a body (whole or cremated) back to the earth. I am generally speaking directly to the deceased at this point. Mourners are asked to stand for the committal.
13. Some celebrants end with the committal, but I like to invite the mourners to sit down again, and say some concluding words, which are generally well wishes for those who knew and loved the deceased. The words help the gathering to focus on what they need to look towards. It takes their minds away from what has happened and moves them to an awareness that life must continue.

14. Closing music is played, and the coffin is committed. This may include the coffin staying where it is while everyone leaves the ceremony space, drawing a curtain around the coffin, lowering the coffin on the catafalque (at a crematorium chapel) or carrying or wheeling the coffin out to the hearse.

For a burial the service is much the same until we reach point 11. It would then be as follows.

11. Final thank you to mourners and a reminder of the invitation to join the family for the burial, and for refreshments after that.

12. I would include the concluding words here, the well wishes for those who knew and loved the deceased, as not all mourners will attend the burial.

13. Closing music is played, and the coffin is carried or wheeled out to the hearse.

14. The funeral cortege (hearse, followed by family and others in cars) makes its way to the cemetery or graveside.

15. Once everyone is gathered the coffin will be carried from the hearse and placed on the lowering device over the grave.

16. I welcome everyone to the new site. Sometimes families like to include a reading at this point.

17. Committal. These are the words we use to say goodbye to the deceased, and they commemorate the act of giving a body (whole or cremated) back to the earth. I am generally speaking directly to the deceased at this point.

18. Closing music is played as the coffin is lowered into the grave.

The above structure is by no means fixed. There are no rules. Not all sections will be included, and some may be arranged in a different order, or something else may be included. The family will be given options for the flow of the service and decide what they prefer.

All of the information discussed with the family needs to be carefully scripted, and the script needs to be sent to the family for review. Sometimes the family comes back with a LOT of edits, and that can sting, but in the end, it is their ceremony, and it is important they are satisfied with it.

Create a funeral run sheet for the audio/visual operator

While I always manage my own music at wedding ceremonies, this is not usually possible at funerals, as the AV may be controlled from a computer or sound system at the back of the room or in an attendant's booth. I am still the person who is most familiar with the ceremony structure though, so it is important to provide a run sheet to the AV operator, so they know when to play the music and the slideshow.

Some people suggest you provide the entire script to the AV operator, with their cues highlighted, but I've spoken to many attendants at crematoriums, all of whom have told me they don't need that much detail, they just need a simple one-page document that provides them with a structure, and the final few words that will be said before they need to press play on anything.

Attend and present the ceremony

Before leaving home

Just as with weddings, funeral celebrants should use a checklist to ensure they've packed everything they need and haven't forgotten anything.

Arriving at the ceremony venue

Upon arrival at the ceremony venue (I like to arrive half an hour before the planned ceremony start time) there are a number of things for the celebrant to do:

- Place ceremony script on lectern.
- Check in with the funeral director, especially if you haven't met the person conducting the service that day (sometimes the person who arranges the funeral and books the celebrant is different from the person who conducts the service on the day). If they are operating the AV equipment, discuss your run sheet with them so they know what's happening during the ceremony. I have always produced a keepsake copy of the ceremony on nice paper, and I give that to the funeral director to be put with the other items for the family.
- If the ceremony is being held at a crematorium chapel, check in with the crematorium attendant who is looking after the service; depending on the venue they may also be acting as the AV operator, so you can discuss your run sheet with them.
- When the family arrives, greet them warmly and professionally. It may be appropriate to give them a hug depending on the relationship you've built with them; you need to play that a bit by ear. Ensure they have everything they need and that they have met the funeral director.
- If you have time, assist the funeral director with things like handing out orders of service or asking mourners to sign the memorial book. There is often a lot for the funeral director staff to do, and they will appreciate an extra set of hands.
- Liaise with the funeral director about when to start the ceremony.

The ceremony

Once all guests are seated, the AV operator can be cued to start the opening music. If the coffin needs to be carried or wheeled in, the procession can start whenever the funeral director is ready. If the coffin is already in place, generally the funeral director and the celebrant will process down the aisle, acknowledge the coffin by bowing to it, then the funeral director moves to the back of the room and the celebrant to the lectern to start the ceremony.

Deliver the ceremony script professionally with warmth, using effective body language and sincerity.

Ensure that participants are introduced in the order arranged, and that they are named and thanked for their contribution.

I like to sit near the front row when others are speaking or during the slideshow. Some ceremony spaces have the seat for the celebrant behind the lectern, but I don't find that very suitable; I like to be a supportive face for the person speaking, and I like to watch the slideshow so I can comment if anything jumps out at me. Just move the chair ☺

At the end of the ceremony, I stand to the side while the funeral director approaches the family with instructions. If the coffin is being wheeled or carried out, it will be turned so that the deceased leaves the space feet first. If the coffin is being lowered or a curtain drawn, this happens while the music is playing. After it has been completed, the funeral director will approach the family to invite them to leave the space when they are ready. The rest of the mourners will take their cue from the family and leave after them.

Once the ceremony has finished and the mourners have moved on to refreshments, I pack up my belongings, say goodbye to the family and the funeral director, and leave. I don't stay around for a cup of tea or food; I don't see that it's my place to eat the food that has been purchased for the mourners, and the family has so many people to speak to that I would just get in the way. So I just make sure they're okay and leave.

Things to remember when presenting the ceremony

Celebrants need to remember that when they are conducting the service it is important to rein in their own feelings. There will be a lot of people around in pain and grief. It's not the celebrant's job to match them. It is their job to distance themselves somewhat and be compassionate, yet strong, so that the bereaved can lean on the celebrant and feel free to express their own grief.

The celebrant needs to keep control of the funeral ceremony. In many ways it is like a production, and although it does not need the drama of theatrics, it does need a level of professional performance. Careful planning and management on the part of the celebrant will ensure that the family and friends know what will happen and when it will happen. If this sense of planning is achieved, the celebrant will feel confident about their performance and will be able to handle any unforeseen problems, because they will know what should have happened and can always try to direct things back on track.

Public speaking and presentation techniques can be used to enhance the delivery of a funeral ceremony. Funeral celebrants should use appropriate (not distracting) body language, facial expressions, and presentation techniques. They will generally have access to a microphone so should ensure they use good microphone technique. They should not feel that they need to remain solemn and serious throughout their ceremony presentation; smiling and having a warm countenance is welcome at appropriate moments.

Invoice the funeral director and check if they have any feedback

It's much easier for funeral families if they only have to pay one bill, so when you are booked by a funeral director it is usual for the celebrant to invoice them, and they will pay you. I always send my invoice the day after the service, and if I didn't have a chance to speak to them after the service, I like to ask if they had any feedback for me.

I don't tend to follow up with the families after the service unless they contact me. I definitely don't think it's appropriate to ask them for feedback; they'll tell you or the funeral director if they're not happy, so if you don't hear from them or the funeral director you can be pretty sure things went okay.

That's it! All done and on to the next one!

FUNERAL CEREMONY SAMPLES

I have provided these samples (along with videos for two of them, available in the online version), so you can see how I set out funeral and memorial ceremonies. Please respect the privacy of those involved if you know any of them, and please respect my intellectual property.

Funeral ceremony 1: Warren, a 71-year-old who died of cancer

My aunt Ann, Warren's wife, gladly granted me permission to provide this funeral for your learning. I have edited out the content of the personal tributes.

All guests and family seated

Music: Blackbird, The Beatles

Love alone is capable of uniting people in life and in death, for it is only love that joins us with a tie that lasts for eternity.

Welcome everyone. My name is Sarah Aird. I'm Warren's niece and a celebrant, and I am honoured to have been invited by my family to conduct this celebration of Warren's life today, in conjunction with Le Pine Funerals.

After the service you are all invited to join the family for refreshments next door. If you didn't have a chance to sign the memorial book when you arrived, it will be available to you afterwards. The family have asked for donations to Eastern Palliative Care in lieu of flowers, and there are donation envelopes available in the foyer for your convenience. If you haven't yet turned off your mobile phone, would you do so now please?

Today is a celebration of Warren's life, but it is also an opportunity to grieve. It is a time to let go of the emotions you've been holding in since he died. It is a time to set aside the jobs, the responsibilities and the tasks that have taken up every waking hour since he left you. It is a chance for you to think, to reflect, to remember, and to start to heal. Feel free to cry, but also to laugh and smile at your memories of Warren. If it feels right in the moment, feel free to acknowledge our speakers through applause. Any and all of your feelings and reactions to what you will hear today are valid and real, so give yourselves permission to feel your feelings, to have your reactions, to celebrate, and to grieve.

Warren Douglas Scott (Dad to James and David, Uncle Warren to me and my cousins, Wozza to his grandchildren) was born on the 26th of December 1946, Boxing Day, the eldest son of Adye and Doris Scott. Doris was in labour the whole of Christmas Day, and if he had been born that day, he would have been Noel or Noelle if he'd been a girl. Lucky for him (or unlucky, depending on your point of view) he held on another few hours and was Warren instead.

He grew up firstly in Toorak, in half a rented house due to the post-war housing shortage, then in Laburnum in a house built by his carpenter father, and was soon joined by his brother Trevor. He had a wonderful free childhood, roaming the remains of the farms and orchards of Blackburn. There weren't many houses in Blackburn in those days, and together the neighbourhood boys would roam the streets, only coming home when it got dark. They would often raid the local apple orchards and carry their spoils home in their jumpers for their Mums.

Warren attended Blackburn Primary School and Box Hill High School, or Bokkie High as it was called. While at high school he had several jobs, including a morning paper round, selling the Footy Record at the Box Hill footy ground, and making deliveries for the local chemist on his bicycle after school. He also dabbled in entrepreneurship. There was an old flower farm near his house, and at the right time of year he would pick the daffodils and sell them to visitors at Box Hill Cemetery. On other occasions he would find scrap metal on the street or in the rubbish, and sell it to the scrap metal merchant down the road. So many ideas!

He was a good enough student that at the end of Year 12 he was awarded a Department of Education studentship, which paid for his tuition and a small weekly stipend while he undertook a Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Melbourne, to be followed by a Diploma of Education at Monash University. The idea behind the studentship was to create teachers, so Warren studied typing, economics, geography and geology. He also spent much of his time at Naughtons Pub, as students did in those days. Nevertheless, he completed his Bachelor of Commerce and started his Diploma of Education, but he didn't manage to finish the latter. Theoretically he should therefore have had to pay back the money provided by the studentship, but through various devious means he managed to get out of that.

He managed to get a cadetship at the Department of Transport, where he spent a year or so before attempting a Masters degree at Melbourne Uni. While studying he drove taxis, and worked in a factory cutting index cards. It was while living in a share house in Carlton during his Masters studies that he met Ann, and there's quite a story there.

It was March 1969, and Ann was also living in a share house in Carlton, along with a few of her nursing friends. Allegedly nurses were renowned for having the rowdiest parties, and one Saturday night they threw one. Warren was living across the street, and together with his mates paid the entry fee of six longnecks and joined the party. The next day he remembered that he'd asked one of the girls who lived in the house to join him at the movies at the local Carlton cinema known as the Bughouse that night, but he couldn't entirely remember which one. Nevertheless, at the appointed time he walked across the road and knocked on the door, and Ann answered, ready for her movie date. It was the beginning of an incredible relationship.

The couple dated for several months, but Ann had been planning and saving for two years for a trip to England with her girlfriends. She wasn't about to put that off just for some bloke who hadn't even asked her to marry him, so in January 1970 she boarded the ship to England. Approximately three weeks later the ship docked in Cape Town, and waiting for Ann was a telegram from Warren, simply saying, "Will you marry me, seriously?" Naturally she said yes, and he joined her in England in June. Obviously they couldn't tell their parents they were living together out of wedlock (it definitely wasn't the done thing in 1970) so on the 12th of December 1970 they were married at the Chelsea Registry Office, with just 12 guests. Let's hear from Ann about some of her memories of Warren.

Ann speaks

While in England Warren took a casual job at Heller Factors in Surrey, along with a group of young expats who were on working holidays from various Commonwealth countries. Those people became their friendship group, and some of them remain friends to this day. They came home for my parents' wedding in 1974, and re-established friendships with both of Ann's brothers and their wives. For a little more on that time in their lives, let's hear from John, Ann's brother.

John speaks

My parents are travelling and were sorry to be unable to get home in time to be here today, so they wrote something for me to read on their behalf. This is from Peter, Ann's brother, and his wife Cathy.

We were very touched when Ann and Warren came home from London for our wedding in 1974. That was when Cathy and Warren discovered they were excellent sparring partners, and over the years that followed they enjoyed many a good robust discussion. Warren was particularly good at winding Cathy up, never more so than in partnership with James. Who could forget the taunting about the failure to flame the Christmas pudding – which has always been Cathy's pride and joy – one Christmas at Coolibah.

We all have fond memories of holidays at the Aird family beach house at Somers with Ann, Warren and the boys – Warren and the boys out sailing, Warren's homemade bread he would bring down with him, and the long summer nights enjoying those robust discussions.

His joy in his grandchildren has been a delight to see, and it was wonderful that he saw both boys married last year, and both so happy and settled.

It was lovely that we were able to enjoy lunch with Ann, Warren, Pam and John, just before we left for our holiday, when Warren's spirits had been the best they had been for a while.

We wish the family all the best at this difficult time, and look forward to catching up when we get back.

In 1975 Warren was invited to join the management-training program at the head office of Heller Factors in Chicago, and they lived there for a year before returning to Australia. In November 1975 they made their way home, landing in Sydney with a plan to come back to Melbourne, but first they stopped in, wearing their backpacks, to see Gary, the boss at the Heller Factors office in Sydney. He immediately offered Warren a job in Sydney, so they lived there until June 1976. They bought a house in Leichhardt, and a week after moving in and stripping all the wallpaper off the walls, Warren was offered a management role in the Melbourne office. Ann was six months pregnant with James at this point, so moving home to Melbourne was a pretty attractive prospect. Six weeks after moving into their new home, they moved right back out again, and headed home to Melbourne. They rented a home in Balwyn, which is where they were living when James was born at the end of August 1976, and then they bought their home in Ringwood, moving there in 1978. David was born in December 1978 and their family was complete. We'll now hear from David about his memories of his dad.

David speaks

Warren managed the Melbourne office of Heller Factors for about 10 years, after which he had several attempts at working for himself, none of which were particularly successful. In 1989 he went to work for MSS Alarms as the Victorian State Manager for a year before moving to the Records Management division as a sales rep. During this time the family moved to the cottage on Ann's parents' property at Wonga Park while they built their perfect home, which they moved into in 1992.

After a few years with MSS Warren moved to Pickfords Records Management, where he saw out the rest of his career as a sales manager. This role suited him quite well indeed; he wasn't much of a salesy type of guy, but he was able to build a great rapport with his corporate records management clients. He retired in 2007, and never had another haircut; his excuse was that now he was retired he couldn't possibly afford it. Isla, David's wife, has a very clear recollection of the first time she saw Warren with his ponytail; it could never be unseen.

During his time at Pickfords another huge milestone occurred in the Scott family; James' first two children were born, the first grandchildren in our family. Jack came along in 2003 and Ana in 2006, and Warren became Wozza, a role he absolutely delighted in. His third grandchild, Angus, was born in 2016, and there are two more on the way. I would like to invite Jack and Ana to share some of their memories of Wozza with us.

Jack and Ana speak

Retirement was good to Warren. Work had always been stressful, and he loved the freedom of doing his own thing. His many hobbies over the years have included picture framing, bookbinding, lead lighting, French polishing, bread making, beer making, fruit and vegie growing, papermaking, metal turning, and mud brick making. He built a shed. When I asked Aunty Ann what he would do in the shed, she shrugged and said, "shedding of course". It was secret men's business.

The shed contained two insulated rooms; in one room was a metal lathe that had to be kept at a certain temperature so as not to rust, and in the other room was his collection of half-finished model boats. He enjoyed the process of building the boats from kits or from scratch much more than he enjoyed a finished product, so half-finished they remained. He never said no to a trip to Bunnings, purchasing every kind of tool under the sun, because you never knew when you might need something; he was an exceptionally useful handyman to have around, and he always knew exactly what needed to be done to fix something.

He downloaded pretty much the entire internet, certainly more music, videos, documents and podcasts than he could possibly ever consume, but he wanted to know that if he ever needed something, he'd be able to find it there on his hard drive (because, you know, it might disappear from the internet). Above all else, he was a collector; he never threw anything away, because you never know when you might need something, even if it did take 20 years.

Warren was certainly eccentric in ways other than his collecting habits. He was determined to never go with the flow, and not only didn't want to do what everyone else did, but actively rallied against things that everyone else did. He would never go out for coffee, because that's what other people did. He never owned a mobile phone until it was necessary for emergencies, because that's what other people did. He refused to have an iPad, because it was an Apple product and that's what other people bought, opting instead for a Sony Xperia, which promptly broke down after a couple of years. He would never go to the movies, because that's what other people did. He quite deliberately went against the tide, and delighted in being different, but always had good reasons for his decisions.

In March 2014 Warren was diagnosed with bowel cancer. He had multiple surgeries and rounds of chemotherapy and radiation, but nothing could stop the onslaught. He never complained; 'What's the point?' he'd say. He was well enough to see both his sons married, David to Isla in August 2017, and James to Meg in October the same year, and he was thrilled that both couples are expecting babies: James and Meg a baby girl in a few weeks, and David and Isla a boy in March; he had hoped to be around to see both of these two grandchildren. He stopped all treatment at the end of May this year, deciding knowing the end was coming was better than dealing with the side effects of the chemo. In the middle of September his health deteriorated rapidly, and on Thursday the 27th of September he died peacefully in his bed, surrounded by his family. Many people die in the middle of the night, but in typical Warren fashion, he did the exact opposite of what other people do, and died in the middle of the day.

Warren was a stubborn, beardy dreamer. He was an excellent strategist. He loved planning things; executing them, not so much. He was exceptionally intelligent; my abiding memories of Uncle Warren are from holidays at the family holiday house in Somers, of him and my mum arguing about what was happening in the day's news. He loved a good banter with anyone with whom he could disagree. He was very ambitious. Above all, he was Ann's husband and friend, James and David's dad, and Jack, Ana and Angus' Wozza. He loved his family, and they will sorely miss him.

This is the time that we call reflection and it is just that, a time to reflect and remember. Warren had an extensive and eclectic music collection, and we're going to play one of his many favourite songs. As the music fills the room allow your love and memories of Warren to fill your hearts and minds. Remember him and think of him, as you always will, with love.

Photo slideshow

Music: Streets of London, Ralph McTell

On behalf of Warren's family, I would like to thank you all most sincerely, not only for coming today, but also for your words of comfort, your acts of support and your expressions of love. Please remember the family's very genuine invitation to join them for refreshments (which by the way includes his favourite chocolate Teddy Bear Biscuits) and allow them the opportunity to thank you personally.

Please stand for the words of committal.

Warren, rest now at the end of your days; your work is done and you now live in the hearts and the minds of all who love you.

Your family and your friends have shared with you the happy times and the sad times. And they will miss you. They will miss the sound of your voice and your laughter. They will miss your hugs and the delight in your eyes whenever you looked upon them.

For as long as they have memory, they will think of you. For as long as they have a voice, they will speak of you. As long as they have a heart to feel, they will love you and remember you. No

one can speak with your voice, say your piece, smile your smile, or shine your light. No one can take your place, for it is yours alone to fill.

Warren, we now commit your body to the never ending, ever-changing cycle of life and death. Take with you the love of everyone who knows you.

May you rest in harmony, in tranquillity and in peace.

Please be seated.

It is worth remembering that sadness comes out of caring, out of loving someone. Sadness then is a measure of love and therefore, in its way, a kind of privilege. Even as you are sad at the loss of Warren, surround each other with love and comfort as you go into the world, glad that you have loved, free to weep for the one you have lost, free to hold each other in human frailty, and willing to live life to the full.

Music: Always Look on the Bright Side of Life, Eric Idle

Funeral ceremony 2 (simulated): Peter, a 60-year-old who died of a heart attack

This simulated funeral ceremony was created and performed as part of the Silver Celebrants Funeral Training course I undertook in June 2019; I'm a firm believer that we never know it all and can always learn something!

This ceremony is structured a bit differently from how I usually do things, with all the tributes clumped together following the eulogy. That's how we were required to do it for the course, and I was happy to comply.

Coffin in situ

All family and guests seated

Music: In My Life, The Beatles

When the hands of time stand still and the last breath has been taken, there is an emptiness that cannot be described. No one can ever fill that space, but memories of time spent together will bring comfort. Today is about coming together, sharing memories, and supporting Peter's family.

On behalf of those who loved him, welcome to the farewell service for Peter James Power. My name is Sarah Aird and I am honoured to conduct this celebration of life today, in conjunction with Roger and the team at Chestnut Funerals.

If you haven't yet done so, please check your mobile phone is off or on silent; it can be hard to remember to do so when there is so much going on, and when you're seeing people you haven't seen for a while.

~ ~ ~

Peter, known as Petey, Powers, or simply Pete, was a patient, hardworking, honest man. He was quiet and reserved when you first met him, but once he warmed up to you, he was all laughter and smiles. And oh, did he love to laugh; his laughter came all the way from his belly. He always tried to do the right thing by everyone, and he was an incredibly supportive husband and loving grandfather. He didn't like being the centre of attention and never wanted a fuss to be made, however he will have to make an exception just this once, as today we're here to both celebrate and mourn this much-loved man.

~ ~ ~

During this ceremony, and in the time to come, you may find your sadness sitting alongside immense feelings of appreciation and gratitude for having known Pete. When death comes suddenly and in such a tragic way the loss can feel overwhelming. It will take time for the numbness and pain to pass and to feel peace settling in your hearts once more.

There will be times of questioning. Why Pete? Why now? Everyone's grief is unique and each of you will find your own way to find peace again in your lives. It is important to be gentle and compassionate with yourselves, to know that whatever emotions or feelings arise, they stem from your love of Pete. Feel free to cry, but also to laugh and smile at your memories of Pete. Any and all of your feelings and reactions to what you will hear today are real and valid, so give yourselves permission to feel your feelings, to have your reactions, to celebrate Pete, as well as to grieve.

~ ~ ~

As we can see from the gathering in this room today, there were many people who loved Pete. Jenny, you had 10 amazing years with him; you may feel disappointed that you couldn't have longer together, but hold close your memories of the life you had with him. Rory and Steve, you reconnected with your dad after many years apart; remember the joy it brought to him to have you back in his life. Brandon, your Granddad was so glad to have you in his life and to be able to give you some of the experiences he couldn't give his own sons; you will be able to remember all

the times you spent at the beach with Granddad. Jordan, when you came into his life with Jenny, Pete didn't see you as a step-son but as a mate, and he was delighted to be able to talk about technology with you.

Alex and Ross, Pete was the piggy in the middle of you three brothers, and you will always be able to bring to mind the special bond you had with your brother. Joy, Pete was more like a brother than a cousin to you, and although you're finding his death exceptionally hard to come to terms with now, you will always remember the unique place he held in your life. John, the line between family and friends is often blurred, and you probably knew your friend of 50 years better than almost anyone in this room; you can always take comfort in knowing how much he valued your ongoing friendship.

Pete had an impact on so many people, and there is no doubt that each and every one of you in this room has individual memories of him that you will treasure in the days, weeks and even years to come.

~ ~ ~

How did those memories of Pete come to be? Let's take a look back at his life so we can see where you all fit within his journey, and where your memories came from.

Pete was born in Melbourne on the 25th of April 1959, the second of three children to Patricia and Anzac, known as Ted. Along with his two brothers, Alex and Ross, Pete grew up in Brighton and attended Christian Brothers' College. We'll hear more about that time in his life from his lifelong friend, John, whom he met at school.

While he was a clever student, Pete didn't enjoy the religious aspect to the education provided by CBC, and he left at year 11, although he was to complete his VCE later in life. He had a number of jobs over the next few years, including operating theatre technician at The Alfred, hospital and commercial cleaner, and machinist.

He married Julie in 1982, and they lived in Dandenong, where Rory was born in 1984 and Steve in 1986. Unfortunately, the marriage was not successful, and Julie left with the kids in the early 90s, taking them back to her hometown of Adelaide. Pete fought hard to maintain contact with his sons, but Julie made it extremely difficult for him, and he sank into depression. Living in a share house in Dandenong with only his computer for company, Pete built an online community that helped to keep him sane, and when he was ready to go back to work, he moved into the world of information technology.

He became an expert in open source software and mobile technology, working for such companies as TechData before branching out on his own with his dear friend Ian, creating the company ODC (Odyssey). IT was Pete's passion, and although ODC folded when Ian died, Pete continued to freelance for various companies; he had five screens on his desk and was rarely away from his computer.

In 2006, at Pete's mum Pat's 90th birthday party, he reconnected with his sons Rory and Steve. They had been out of touch for 12 years, so it took some time for them all to warm up to each other again, but Pete was just glad to have any opportunity to speak to his boys again. The past few years have seen Pete become especially close to Rory, who now lives in Melbourne, while Steve remained in Adelaide, where Pete was able to visit him on a regular basis. Pete was delighted to become Granddad to Rory's son Brandon; he was able to spend the time with him he couldn't with his own sons, and he loved taking him to the beach and going fishing.

Being such an incredible geek, it wasn't strange that he would turn to the internet when he decided to look for a new partner. He met Jenny online in 2009, and for him it was love at first sight. He asked her to marry him five days after their first date, but Jenny was determined she was never getting married again, so turned him down. He persisted though, eventually wearing her down, and they were married later the same year.

Their relationship was full of love and laughter, as well as tech geekery; their Gold Class style lounge chairs are top of the range, with USB charging ports included in the arms. Jenny's son Jordan also clicked with Pete, and they became mates, swapping tech tips and music suggestions.

Pete was an extremely loving and supportive husband to Jenny, working closely with her on her charitable foundation, the Ida Elizabeth Foundation. He was a board member and helped her with the technology aspects of running a charity, and the family has asked that anyone who would like to show their support for Pete make a donation to the Foundation in his name.

Apart from his love of technology, Pete also had a number of other interests in his life, including music and travel. He and Jenny loved to go on cruises together; it was the perfect opportunity to disconnect from their regular lives and just enjoy their time with each other. Everywhere they went, Pete would buy a t-shirt as a souvenir, and he had almost as many band and album t-shirts; the house is full of them!

Pete was exceptionally health-conscious, riding his bike at every opportunity, and it was on one of his daily after-work rides that he collapsed, suffering a massive heart attack. A bystander rushed to his aid, performing CPR until the ambulance arrived, but it was too late; Pete couldn't be saved. He died six weeks after his family had gathered to celebrate his 60th birthday; they will always wonder what could have been.

~ ~ ~

Pete's life may have come to a sudden and untimely end, but as you can hear from the following words by Victor Frankel, that may not be the end of the story.

Do not judge a biography by its length,
Nor by the number of pages in it.
Judge it by the richness of its contents
Sometimes those unfinished are among the most poignant.

Do not judge a song by its duration
Nor by the number of its notes
Judge it by the way it touches and lifts the soul
Sometimes those unfinished are among the most beautiful.

And when something has enriched your life
And when its melody lingers on in your heart
Is it unfinished?
Or is it endless?

~ ~ ~

You have heard about the details of Pete's life, but there are people in this room who are going to tell us about the inner workings of his heart and mind; let's hear first from Pete's best friend, John, who will tell us more about Pete's early life, and share some of his memories with us.

John speaks

Thank you, John. We're now going to hear from Pete's eldest son, Rory, who will share his memories of his dad with us.

Rory speaks

Thank you, Rory. Finally, we're going to hear from Jenny's son Jordan, who is going to speak on behalf of his mother.

Jordan speaks

Thank you, Jordan. It is clear from everything we've heard today just how special Pete was; he will be sorely missed by all who loved him.

~ ~ ~

We've heard lots of words today, and now we are now going to take some time to remember Pete's life through pictures. Photos can take us right back to a moment in time, and they may evoke treasured memories in your mind. The Eagles were one of Pete's favourite bands, and you may find comfort in imagining the words of this song coming directly from him.

Visual memories

Music: It's Your World Now, Eagles

What an incredible set of memories. Thank you to Pete's cousin Joy for taking the time to put together those wonderful images; hopefully you found it a healing experience.

~ ~ ~

As Naomi Hunter said in one of Pete's favourite videogames, Metal Gear Solid, "You mustn't allow yourself to be chained to fate, to be ruled by your genes. Human beings can choose the kind of life they want to live. What's important is that you choose life, and then live." Although Pete experienced some periods of hardship throughout his life, he always managed to pull himself out of them by choosing life and working hard to live it. Pete taught his sons that if you work hard enough, you can succeed at anything; that sounds like an excellent legacy to leave behind.

~ ~ ~

It is now time to make our final farewell to Pete. This moment will be one of the hardest you will face, so hold in your mind his lovely smile and the warmth in his heart, as these will bring you comfort. Please stand for the words of final farewell.

Committal music at half volume: Cavatina

Peter James Power, tenderly and reverently we give your body to the never ending, ever changing cycle of life and death. We give thanks for your presence in this world, and for the love you shared with those closest to you. With the greatest love and respect, we bid you a sad farewell.

Committal music lifts to full volume, wait 10 seconds, curtain is closed

~ ~ ~

Please take your seats.

On behalf of Pete's family, I would like to thank you once again, not only for your presence here today, but also for your acts of support, your expressions of love, and your words of kindness. Please remember their very genuine invitation to join them for refreshments where you will be able to share your memories of Pete with his family and each other. As you all know, Pete was a huge coffee snob, splashing out on the most expensive coffee machine available. Today you'll have to settle for coffee that Pete probably wouldn't have been impressed with, but next time you're ordering an espresso from your favourite café, please think of him, and perhaps imagine him sitting in one of the empty chairs; having loved live theatre, we'll be leaving to one of Pete's favourite songs from Les Misérables.

It is worth remembering that sadness comes out of caring, out of loving someone. Sadness then is a measure of love, and therefore, in its way, a kind of privilege. Be grateful for the time you spent with Pete, for the lessons he taught you. Recall the impact he had on you and all the people in this room. Hold on tight to your memories, keep talking about him and saying his name, and most importantly, remember him with love as long as you live.

Music: Empty Chairs at Empty Tables, Les Misérables

Family and guests leave chapel

Funeral ceremony 3: Andrew, a 21-year-old who took his own life

I have provided this script for you (de-identified, without personal tribute speeches) because suicide funerals are exceptionally difficult, and it's worth having some ideas you can work with.

This ceremony is again structured differently from my usual ceremonies; my usual plan of dotting the personal tributes throughout the eulogy at the time they're most appropriate in the chronology of the person's life simply wasn't going to work for this one, so I clumped them all together after the eulogy was finished.

This was a memorial service with no coffin present, so there is no committal wording. All names have been changed.

There are some notes throughout the ceremony to explain to you why I made certain choices or ceremony inclusions.

Pre-ceremony music: Etude in E major, Op. 10, Chopin; The Lass of Patie's Mill; Enigma Variations, Op. 36, Nimrod, Elgar; Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini in A Minor, Op. 43, Rachmaninov; Impromptu, Yirum

All guests and family seated

Music: Piano Sonata No. 14 in C# minor, Op. 27, No. 2, 'Moonlight Sonata', Beethoven

If you love something, love it completely, cherish it, say it, but most importantly, show it. Life is finite and fragile and just because something is there one day, it might not be the next. Never take that for granted. Say what you need to say, then say a little more. Say too much. Show too much. Love too much. Everything is temporary but love. Love outlives us all.

Welcome everyone. My name is Sarah Aird and I am honoured to be the celebrant invited by Andrew's family to conduct this commemoration of his life today.

After the service you are all invited to join the family for refreshments. If you didn't have a chance to sign the memorial book when you arrived, it will be available to you afterwards. If you haven't yet turned off your mobile phone, would you do so now please?

Today is a celebration of Andrew's life, but it is also an opportunity to grieve. It is a time to let go of the emotions you've been holding in since he died. It is a time to set aside the jobs, the responsibilities and the tasks that have taken up every waking hour since he left you. It is a chance for you to think, to reflect, to remember, and to start to heal. Feel free to cry, but also to laugh and smile at your memories of Andrew. Any and all of your feelings and reactions to what you will hear today are valid and real, so give yourselves permission to feel your feelings, to have your reactions, to celebrate, and to grieve.

As you all know, Andrew took his own life. Although his family and closest friends were aware of how much pain he was in, many of you were not. Try as you might to understand his decision, it is almost beyond understanding, and yet you must come to accept that he is gone. Some of you may be asking yourselves, 'how did I fail him?' 'what more could I have done to help him?' But you didn't fail him, and you could not have done any more. Andrew made a conscious decision to end his life. He made the decision, and it was one he had been contemplating for a long time. No one else is to blame. It was his choice, and just as you respected his choices in life, so you will respect his choices in death. Let us reflect on Andrew's life, and remember the sensitive soul he was.

Honestly, now I likely wouldn't include the sentence about respecting his choice in death, but it seemed to fit for this particular situation

Andrew Full Name, known as Andrew, was born on the 12th of September 1994 in Mitcham, the younger son of Liam and Carly, and little brother of Rowan. The family lived in East Doncaster, and Andrew attended [Primary School]. He was an excellent student, and many of his sporting pursuits

started during this time. We'll talk about those more a little later. It was while at primary school that he met three boys who were to become his best friends: Jason, Billy and Lewis.

Andrew went to [Secondary School] for secondary school, and the family moved to their Warrandyte home while he was in Year 7. He again excelled academically at [Secondary School], taking mostly science and maths subjects for his VCE; English didn't come naturally to him, but he was determined to succeed at it and worked hard until he did. He attained an exceptionally impressive ATAR score. He also continued with his sporting pursuits during high school, and I think it's now time we heard about those. There were many...

He was speed skating with his family from about the age of two, and eventually got so good that he represented Victoria. He started playing basketball in about Grade 2 and continued right through until he was about 19. He was a great team player, less concerned about scoring the points himself than about ensuring his teammates were well supported. Although if you played him one on one, that concern for others went out the window; it was ALL about scoring ALL the points himself.

He played cricket and volleyball, ran cross country, took up boxing to build his self-confidence, and participated in swimming and gymnastics. Liam started taking him to the gym after school when he was about 13, and he took to that just as quickly as he took to everything else he had a go at. Jason remembers one time when they were about 14, and Andrew suggested he try and lift the weight he'd just been using. Jason couldn't lift it even one inch, but to Andrew it was almost easy.

The family were lucky enough to go on many varied family holidays over the years, to everywhere from Anglesea and Port Fairy to Vanuatu and Thailand to the US several times. Their US trips included New York (where a then 16-year-old Andrew was determined to go for a run around Central Park at midnight and couldn't possibly understand why his parents wouldn't let him), Washington, camping through the Southwest region, both Disneyland and Disneyworld, and dude ranching in Colorado, where they finally found something that Andrew was NOT good at: horse riding (he was far too concerned about being kind to the horse to really get the hang of it). Andrew also enjoyed skiing trips to New Zealand and Japan, Scuba diving trips to Osprey Reef off Cairns, and ship wreck diving in Vanuatu. They loved travelling together and had many epic adventures on their travels.

Like many young children, Andrew had started learning the piano when he started school, but by the time he got to Grade 2 he really wasn't enjoying it anymore and gave it up. When he was in Year 11, he announced one night that he'd signed up for a music elective; Marissa is going to tell us a bit more about this later.

For his 18th birthday, Andrew asked for a camera, and photography became a new passion after high school finished. He loved spending time setting up a scene so that it was just perfect before taking the shot, and he was a talented and creative photographer. His preference was to photograph nudes, but probably unsurprisingly he had some trouble finding too many people to model for him. So instead he photographed whatever caught his eye.

In the second half of 2017, Andrew and Lewis suddenly decided to drop everything and take off to Europe, and with two weeks' notice they did just that. They had an incredible adventure for almost five months, ticking things off the bucket list, eating incredible food, and discovering music. Lewis had played the guitar for many years, and Andrew had fiddled with it once or twice, but while in Europe they listened to a lot of Led Zeppelin, and Andrew decided he needed to learn how to play properly. So he did. He went from barely having touched a guitar to coming home a few months later owning two of them. Again, he excelled at it; he would go into music shops and play a guitar, and random people would tell him how good he was. He would start playing a riff and Liam would ask him who it was by, and he would say it had just popped into his head.

Andrew was talented, handsome, polite, caring, and energetic. He was empathetic, always the mediator, always trying to help others, always looking out for the person sitting on their own. He had a quirky sense of humour, enjoying TV shows such as The Office (the original UK version, of

course), Monty Python and Fawlty Towers. He simply wasn't like anyone else, and everyone loved him.

The Andrew I have just talked about is the Andrew most of you knew, the way you saw him: talented, creative, handsome, happy. Unfortunately, Andrew didn't know or see himself the same way.

Bullied at school from a young age, but unwilling to talk about it for fear of burdening those around him, Andrew was sad. Deeply, deeply sad. When he went to Melbourne Uni in 2015 to study science, with a plan of becoming a biologist, he lived on campus at St Hilda's College. He found it difficult to fit in, and figured the easiest way to make friends would be to drink as much as everyone else did, and take part in all the social activities on offer. None of that was particularly conducive to study, and he dropped out at the end of his first year.

He started working at TGI Friday's in Doncaster in 2016, where he quickly moved up the ranks to become a bartender. As with everything, he excelled at his work there. The bosses were so impressed with his work ethic, knowledge and efficiency that he was awarded a coveted Hammer Pin in his first month. Everyone was amazed; no one they'd known had ever gotten one of those. But he simply wasn't happy, and he was drinking heavily to deal with the pain. It was about August 2016 when his family worked out that something wasn't right, and they started searching for some help for him. In February 2017 he was hospitalised for the first time, and after three weeks he came out sober and happier than he'd been for a long time. Later that year there was the epic Europe trip with Lewis, and although he started drinking again while away, it was only for pleasure and perfectly responsible.

At the start of 2021 Andrew decided he wanted to be a photographer, and found a university course that was due to start in semester 2. He whiled away the months before then playing music, going to the gym for hours every day, and hanging out with his friends and playing with his new puppy Zep, but in May the school announced they would not be running the course. That's when everything went downhill again. He couldn't see a future for himself, and he started self-medicating again with marijuana and alcohol.

In August Carly and Liam left for a long-planned trip to Europe. They ummed and ahed about whether or not to go, but Andrew was determined that they should enjoy their holiday and not worry about him. It was while they were at Singapore Airport waiting to board their flight for the second leg of their trip that the extremely dark text messages from Andrew started coming. Andrew was hospitalised but broke out and attempted to take his life for the first time. Andrew's Aunt Marissa was an enormous help to Andrew during this time. Carly and Liam will always be grateful for the care and love that she gave Andrew before they could get home from Europe.

After Liam and Carly arrived back from Europe, they found that Andrew was positive and talking openly about the future and the past. Carly and Andrew went and bought him clothes for the look he wanted to convey. Liam and Andrew checked out electric pianos to purchase so they could set up a studio at home.

Liam took Andrew to Anglesea for five days, along with his much-loved dog, Zep, and then to New Zealand to take photos. He was trying to show Andrew that life was worth living, that there were reasons to go on, that things could get better. But it wasn't enough. Hospitalised again in New Zealand, Andrew tried hard to make plans, to recognise the good things about himself, and to see that there was indeed a bright future in store. But it still wasn't enough, and he made the decision to take his own life, a decision he had been considering for a long time. He died on the 28th of October, leaving a huge hole in the lives of his family and friends. Shortly we will hear tributes from those closest to him, but first, a song.

Reflection: Somewhere, Barbra Streisand with Josh Groban

I would like to introduce Marissa, Andrew's aunt, to tell you about her memories of Andrew.

Marissa speaks

Thank you.

The rest of the friends and family members who wrote tributes for Andrew didn't feel strong enough to read them themselves, so I read them on their behalf. There were tributes from his three best friends and his parents

While suicide is almost never the answer, while there are almost always other options, in Andrew's case it seemed almost inevitable. He was in such deep pain, suffering so much, and nothing anyone did seemed to make a difference. He was surrounded by a loving family who sought help from the best doctors and hospitals they could find, but even Andrew's psychologist and psychiatrist were somewhat stumped as to how to help him. He was surrounded by an incredible group of mates, and although he knew they were there for him if he ever wanted or needed to talk, just as importantly they provided him with a chance to escape his demons; the time he spent with the boys was time he could just be Andrew and not have to think about his problems. His family, although grieving his loss terribly, are relieved that he is no longer in such tremendous pain.

During the past few months, Andrew had started to write poetry, and his family have asked his uncle, Alistair, to share one of them with you. I think it provides a good indication of his state of mind in recent times. It's called 'Ace up my Sleeve'.

Ace up my Sleeve

Living day by day
Barely scraping by
Stuck in my routine
Stuck in all my lies
How long can I last for
I need some space to breathe
Death becomes my saviour
A hidden ace up my sleeve
Maybe not today
Maybe not tomorrow
But one day coming soon
I'll put an end to all this sorrow
I know it doesn't solve anything
And you probably can't relate
But it's still a comforting thought
One last great escape
I hope I'll never need it
I hope the right cards come out
But it's out of my control
The cards that I get dealt
So I keep pushing on for now
Bags packed to leave
One day at a time
With my ace up my sleeve
When your life seems too far gone
The night is darkest just before the dawn
All of your love has been wasted
And all of your strength has been taken
Look back and see only regrets
Look forward and see nothing but death
No point wasting time to grieve
When I can make death the ace up my sleeve

It felt like the air had been sucked out of the room after this poem was read. It gave a real, tangible understanding of Andrew's frame of mind, and it was very distressing for many in attendance. But that's almost why I encouraged the family to include it; I wanted people to know he hadn't made a split-second decision, he'd been feeling this way for a while, and it was unlikely there was anything anybody could have done to prevent what happened

We are currently experiencing an epidemic of male suicide in this country, with three times as many men as women dying by their own hand. Although there wasn't the right support to save Andrew, please, all of you, know that there is support available for you. Beyond Blue is an excellent place to start if you don't know where to turn. Please ask for help if you need it; you won't be a burden, you won't be too much trouble, you will simply be loved.

I thought it was important to speak about the help that is available for anyone in attendance who was struggling with their own mental health, which is why I included the preceding paragraph

This is the time that we call reflection and it is just that, a time to reflect and remember. As you've heard, Andrew loved Beethoven, and he asked several weeks ago that this next piece be played at his funeral. As the music fills the room allow your love and memories of Andrew to fill your hearts and minds. Remember him and think of him, as you always will, with love.

Photo slideshow

Music: Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92: II. Allegretto, Beethoven

On behalf of Andrew's family, I would like to thank you all most sincerely, not only for coming today, but also for your words of comfort, your acts of support and your expressions of love. Please remember the family's very genuine invitation to join them for refreshments and allow them the opportunity to thank you personally.

It is worth remembering that sadness comes out of caring, out of loving someone. Sadness then is a measure of love and therefore, in its way, a kind of privilege. Be glad you felt the pressure of his hand, the warmth of his hugs; remember his beautiful smile, his laughter, and his kindness. Be glad for all the joys and happiness that Andrew experienced. Be glad for what he gave you and taught you. Tenderly and reverently, bid him farewell.

Music: Run, Liana Lewis