

**Submission  
No 11**

## **INQUIRY INTO FUNERAL INDUSTRY**

**Organisation:**

**Name:** Ms Leah Munro

**Telephone:**

**Date Received:** 12/05/2005

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**Theme:**

**Summary**

Hon. Dr. Arthur Chesterfield-Evans  
Australian Democrats (NSW)  
PO Box 16  
ROZELLE 2039

29.3.2005

Dear Dr Chesterfield-Evans,

RE: DO IT YOURSELF FUNERALS.

After reading the article in the newspaper 'how to fight rising burial costs' 24.3.05 followed by a request from the ABC wishing to interview me on the DIY Funeral book our service provides, I thought I would send you a copy.

In 1997 as then coordinator of the Bellingen Shire Bereavement Service I wrote, with the help of other members of the service, the DIY Funeral book, being well aware of the need for such choices being made available to the community.

Since then we have sold and given away 100's of books all over Australia and even some overseas, received a great deal of positive feedback and recognition in the 2001 Commonwealth Government publication "Women taking action"

The bereavement service provides a backup to those purchasing the book, encouraging people to email questions if they are having problems with any of the procedures, also in the Bellingen Shire we provide personal assistance for families to get the funeral they want within their budget, whether that be with or without a funeral director involved.

Hoping this will be of some assistance to you

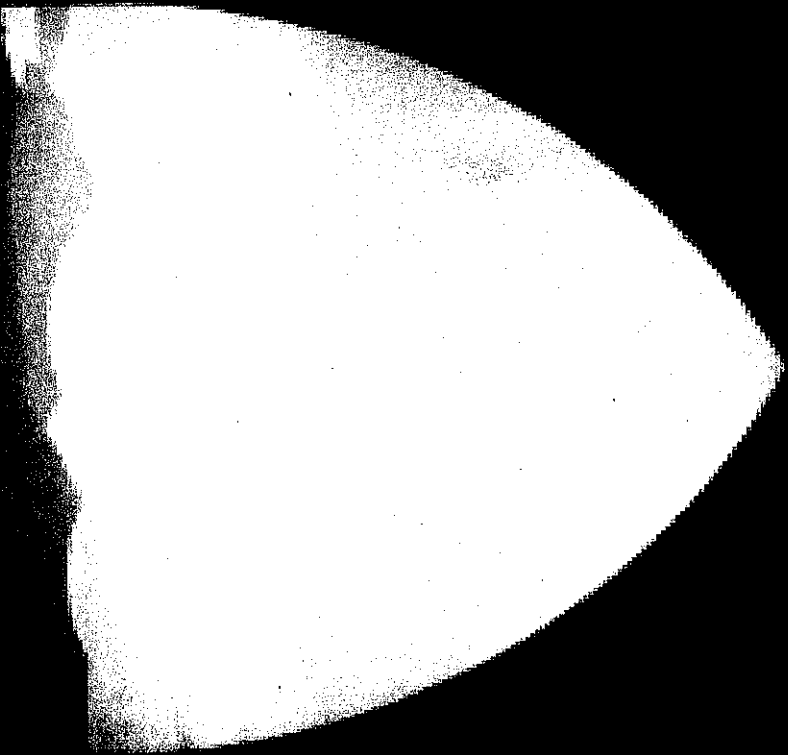
Regards

*Leah Munro*

Leah Munro

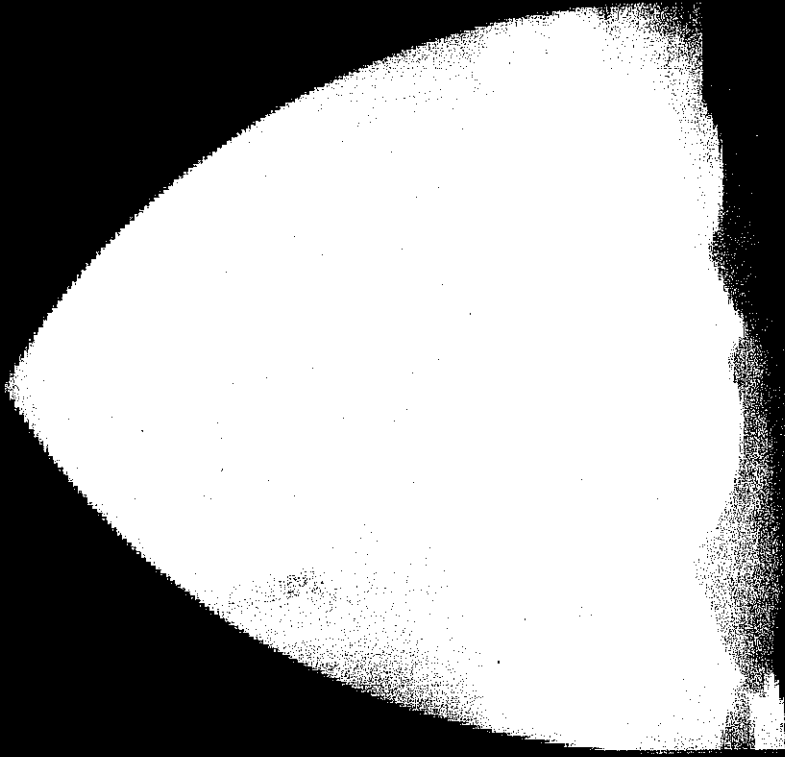
Member of Bellingen Shire Bereavement Service/sub-branch of Coff's Harbour NALAG.

# DO-IT-YOURSELF FUNERAL BOOK.



Cover photo by Fran Clayton  
Cover design by Ros Coy.

# DO-IT-YOURSELF FUNERAL BOOK.



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Cover design by Ros Coy.

## **Fearless Funerals**

This booklet has been written to encourage people to talk openly about death and to become familiar with the procedures around death. We only fear what we don't know. The more knowledge we have, the more empowered we will be to make wise decisions in a crisis time, thus enabling us to begin our grieving process and our healing.

The idea of this booklet came up in one of our bereavement support group meetings, arising from the question 'How was the funeral for you?'

Many said they had been unable to make clear decisions because of the emotional state they were in at the time, but then later felt hurt and angry that they did not have the funeral they wanted for their loved one.

The time leading up to the funeral and the funeral service is a very important and precious time, and needs to be handled wisely. It needs to reflect the way the person lived, and also recognise the needs of the grieving family.

Leah Munro, Coordinator  
The Bellingham Shire Bereavement Service

THIS BOOKLET HAS BEEN WRITTEN ESPECIALLY FOR THE RESIDENTS OF THE BELLINGEN SHIRE IN NSW. IF YOU ARE USING IT IN ANOTHER SHIRE OR STATE YOU MUST CHECK WITH YOUR LOCAL COUNCIL, HOSPITAL AND OTHER RELEVANT ESTABLISHMENTS AS THERE MAY BE DIFFERENCES IN REGULATIONS

## TO KIM

The information in this booklet has been compiled by Leah Munro with many thanks to Lyn, Zenith, Rejane, Barbara, Catherine, Lorus, Dorin, Colleen, Irene, Aishwara and all the other people who helped make this book a reality.

© Leah Munro 1997  
2nd Edition 1999  
Revised Edition 2005

- IF YOU ORDER FIVE OR MORE COPIES OF THIS BOOKLET, WE ARE WILLING TO CHANGE THE RESOURCE INFORMATION TO ALLOW IT TO BE MORE RELEVANT TO YOUR OWN AREA.

I was told that he had severe head injuries and that he had several bruises on his face, a wound at the back of the head that was repaired. I believe this information did assist in preparing us and that even though he was injured I loved him so deeply that his injuries would not put me off the strong desire to hold him and kiss him and comfort him in his darkest hour of need. I thought that the rites of passage for him were essential components of helping him in his transition from life to death and also essential for the family and communities needs in dealing with his sudden and untimely loss.

Having Sunny home was extremely beneficial, it was a precious time in which to say our final goodbyes and resolve past conflict. The rituals we performed with him were uplifting, enriching and satisfying experiences. They assisted us at a physical, psychological and spiritual level. As a family we created these rituals from our eclectic religious views that we derived from travelling overseas as well as living in Australia's rich, diverse and multi cultural society. All family members and friends had time to add their own unique needs to the rituals as a way of finding acceptance and meaning in Sunny's loss.

At the end of these three days we had a wake that went long into the night. Sunny was physically present and his coffin was open. A hundred or more people took the courage to say their goodbyes personally. Three days after the wake we had a cremation ceremony also with the coffin lid open. Flowers and notes expressing love and goodbyes covered his body and he looked glorious, all of these ceremonies were important steps for our family in meeting our own needs and also those of the community and at the same time they are memories that are satisfying and positive. At six weeks we divided the ashes and Sunny's friends had a memorial service with their share, they designed their own rituals and ceremony and found this beneficial and healing in assisting them to gain closure.

On the first anniversary I visited the accident site and met the truck driver, we placed a cross and flowers at the roadside. The truck driver found this an essential and healing ritual to perform for healing his personal shock and grief. After this ceremony I was able to put to rest the horrible images I had regarding Sunny's last moments of life. I now knew that he had fallen by tripping on a traffic island and that the truck had not run over his body, his neck was broken by falling hard against the wheels rather than under them.

Four years after Sunny's death I look back and find that I am satisfied that I sat back, took a deep breath and slowed the funeral process down as well as the subsequent ceremonies. The ongoing rituals over time assisted in the healing process after Sunny's sudden, traumatic and violent death.

*Aishwarya*

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## BEFORE A DEATH OCCURS

There are many decisions that can be made before hand, whether this be the planning of your own funeral or the funeral of a loved one

Some ideas:

-A burial in the Cemetery.

-A cremation.  
In both cases a Funeral Director is required, but it's up to you how actively involved you are.

-A burial on your own land. You must have at least 5 hectares to be able to do this.

This can be carried out without the services of a funeral director. If this is your intention, it is very important to do the legal work now.

-A wake. Traditionally an all night vigil with the dead person.

-A Memorial Service.

Allocate a special draw or box in which copies of Birth and Marriages Certificates and your wishes regarding a funeral are kept. Let other family members know of this.

## DEATH OF A SON.

When I received the phone call to tell me that my twentyone year old son had died suddenly and traumatically as a pedestrian in a roadside accident my first reaction was a spontaneous and primal scream.

I was working as a grief counsellor and educator at the time that he died and was especially interested in how meaningful rituals assist the bereaved and also the deceased. My first thoughts after the ear piercing scream settled into wails and sobs was, that I wanted to bring my son home so I could say goodbye in my own time and my own way.

I thought that the general social trend in Australian society was conservative in approaching traumatic death and body viewing. I also considered that other cultures or societies such as Japan, Bali, and Israel appeared to take time to mourn fully. The solid rituals and rites of passage associated with Hindu, Jewish and Buddhist religious traditions appealed to me and appeared to have a healthier approach than the three day mourning period of Australian work orientated culture. I knew also that I had a conflict between the society in which I lived and my ideals, worldview and philosophies that I would need to negotiate in my healing journey.

I had knowledge from my training in grief education and experiences with clients that to see Sunny, touch him and talk to him would assist me to accept the loss as physically real and also to begin my healing journey, which I believed would be a difficult process over time. I had a personal awareness that I was not comfortable in institutional settings such as funeral homes and that to express my emotions fully I would need privacy. I also had the realisation that I had an eclectic religious approach to life and that the rituals that would be most meaningful would draw upon this rich mix of attitudes and philosophies about life, death and life after death.

I had the knowledge that I could not have Sunny home for more than eight hours without him being embalmed. For this procedure to take place he had to have a certificate to state that he had no infectious diseases. I was fortunate that I was able to have my needs met and on the fifth day after Sunny died he arrived home for a three day stay before the wake was to take place.

Prior to Sunny arriving home I knew it would be wise to ask what Sunny's injuries were and what he would look like. I knew this information would assist my family and myself in preparing for the shock of seeing him.



After Jenny died we switched on an air conditioner and packed 2 litre milk containers of frozen water around her for 20 hours. Then with the children, we washed Jenny, rubbed Rosemary oil into her body, dressed her in the clothes she had chosen to wear, and placed her onto a sheet.

A friend made a bamboo coffin for Jenny.

We packed frozen milk containers this time into the . coffin and then we used the sheet she was lying on to lift her into the coffin. Every four to six hours we replaced the frozen bottles. We did this for three days and experienced no problems in keeping her body cold enough.

On the third day after her death, we had a service for Jenny in the house in town and then late in the afternoon we transported Jenny's body in a van back to her bush home and place of rest in the nearby forest.

Over the next 49 days we followed the Tibetan Buddhist custom of helping Jenny on her journey by meditating and saying prayers each week at the time Jenny died.

This ritual also helped us in our grief, it brought us together with close friends which we really needed.

On the 49th day family and friends gathered together to celebrate Jenny's transition.

Throughout Jenny's cancer and dying, we both felt to be open and honest as possible to ourselves and our children. Always making sure our children were a part of this process I believe this has helped us as a family to move through our sad loss.

Please feel free to call me if you would like some support, or just to talk to someone who has been through a home death  
Lorus (02) 66558763

## WHEN SOMEONE DIES AT HOME.

Slow down. There is no need to rush.

Spending time with the person who has died can help with the grieving process.

The only legal requirement is that the body needs to be disposed of within five days. If a longer period is required permission from the Health Department must be sought.  
Phone a relative or friend with the understanding that there is no need to panic.

Now decide what you will do.

Discuss this with the family.

Has the dead person left any instructions?

### KEEPING THE PERSON AT HOME

If you need any assistance with this you can contact the Bellingren Shire Bereavement Service. Contact numbers under resources.

It is possible to keep the dead person at home until the funeral if you can maintain the temperature between 1-5 degree Celsius.

### SUGGESTIONS.

Choose the coolest room in the house.

Pack plastic frozen water bottle's around the body.

Use an air conditioner or have a fan blowing over blocks of ice.

Buy a coffin or have one made.

If necessary wash the person.  
Rub warm oil on the body, this can make it easier to position person. Rosemary in the warm oil will act as an antiseptic, deodorant and preservative.

Use large pads in case of leakage of the perineal area.

Dress the person.

Tie a scarf under their chin to close their mouth. Close their eyes.

Place their hands over the heart or on their lap.

This encourages people to touch them.

When you have the coffin, line with plastic, then place the frozen bottles in the bottom. Pick up the person on a sheet and place on top of bottles.

Renew the frozen bottles when necessary.

Things to be aware of when keeping a body at home.

-Rigour mortis starts to set in slowly within four hours of the death. The body will start to soften again within three days.

-Illness and humidity can cause the body to deteriorate quickly

if not kept at the correct cooling temperature.

-Others trying to dissuade you, but know you do have the right to keep the dead person at home if the body can be kept at the correct temperature.

-Any discharge/clean up material from the body must be considered contaminated waste and be placed in a heavy-duty plastic bag for disposal.

## **JENNY'S HOME DEATH WITH HER FAMILY.**

Written by Jenny's partner Lorus

Jenny was a caring and nurturing mother to her four children, Yemaya aged six, Yarnam aged nine, Rhian aged eighteen, Shanti aged thirteen.

Jenny helped run the Bellingham Homebirth Group through which she was able to help many mothers at their own home births. Our children were born at home too.

When Jenny was told she had breast cancer and only had a few months to live, she began opening herself more fully to the experience.

Knowing she would soon die and leave her beloved family, she began planning carefully how she would like to die. She asked me to keep her body at home after she died so she would be with us until she was buried. She decided she wanted a home death and funeral, with no funeral directors involved, and be buried on the land close to her dear family.

Jenny felt to be positive about dying and drew strength through her faith and love with the Holy Mother  
She wanted to always be present and loving to her children, so she gave much thought to how she would continue mothering after her death. She decided to express her love to each of her children by writing them birthday cards and wrapping them in individual gifts to be opened on successive birthdays. This helped Jenny to feel empowered, knowing that she would be continuing her mothering after her death.

On the 1st of August 2000, Jenny died both beautifully and peacefully at home with all the care and support of her family, friend's, nurses and the well set-up Palliative Care team.

They were waiting for us, on this soft almost-rainy winter afternoon with the quiet beat of a native American drum and the drone of a didge. The brightly coloured crowd spread along the hillside above the grave, looking out through the trees and across the valley. The Kalang valley that Ralf came to 20 years ago to start a hippy commune.

As we took our places below the grave looking back at everyone, I felt as if we were on a stage, part of some solemn performance in that bush setting. A friend led the ceremony, - moving tributes and poems. We lowered the coffin into the deep shaley grave and all filed past, throwing in a handful or spadeful of dirt. Then the real shoveling began, first the men of the community, then others joined in - men women and children - all working briskly until we had the earth heaped back in place. After the sadness and emotion of the days before it was a great release to be able to do something physical, to use our bodies and shovel that dirt.

Dusk fell and we walked back down to the nearest house to a roaring bonfire, a bring-a-plate feast, music, and to the delight of the kids, fireworks.

The whole event just flowed without a hitch. We even took our own videos and photos.

The successful planning and conducting our own funeral, so many friends coming together, all this gave me an energy that helped through the difficult days to come.

As a community too we gained, for facing death together creates strong bonds. And we were so proud of what we had achieved. Even more so when we tallied up the costs. We spent about \$800 establishing the cemetery - a capital investment that will serve Chrysalis community for generations. The funeral itself - a mere \$200.....And that would have been exactly in keeping with Ralf's own wishes.

In death, as in life, he was still on the leading edge

## LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The dead person needs to be seen by their own doctor within 24 hours of the death.

If there is to be a cremation, you can ask the doctor to bring the "Attending Practitioners Cremation Certificate" If the doctor is satisfied they will fill out the certificate stating the cause of death (PR315) and the cremation certificate if required.

It will not be possible to keep the body home if:

- The correct temperature cannot be maintained.
- The person has an infectious disease.
- This was an unexpected death, and an autopsy is required.

The doctor will advise you on these matters, let the Doctor know if you want spend more time with the person before any officials are contacted.

If a burial in a cemetery or a cremation is to take place a funeral director will need to be contacted.

Before you make any decisions phone around and negotiate the arrangements and costs with different funeral directors. If this is too difficult, have someone else do this for you.

## HOME BURIAL

Things that can be done before a death.  
Go to Council for the regulations and "Application for Private

Burial" form.

Decide whether to have an individual grave site or a private cemetery.

If the land is communally owned, all owners must give consent.

You will need the area locating the grave site surveyed. To apply to Council for approval you must present them with the following:

- Surveyor's plan.
- Signed approval from other owners, if this is applicable
- "Application for private burial" form filled out.

### THE GRAVE

The grave needs to be 90cm wide x 2.3metres long.

The upper surface of the coffin is to be a minimum of 900mm below natural surface level of the soil where it is buried.

You can hire a back hoe as this is a big job.

Place three or four planks across the hole.

When ready for burial, lie two or three metre ropes beside the planks, these will be used to lower the coffin. Have plenty of strong people on hand to do this. It may be a good idea to wear gloves for this task

### A CELEBRATION OF RALF'S LIFE

Ralf Martin, Chrysalis community elder, died on 22 July, 1998, after some months of illness. His partner Dorin had been nursing him at home in Bellingen, helped by friends and with local medical support. Believing in self sufficiency, armed with their sole reference "The Do-it-Yourself Funeral Book" and their own creativity Dorin, Chrysalis members and others took the next bold step.

What follows is Dorin's account:

As I took my turn shovelling the loose shale into Ralf's grave I felt an immense sense of achievement. We'd done it! Our own home funeral. The first in the Shire.

And we had done it all. There were no priests no undertakers, no fancy coffin and hearse, no fake grass and hydraulic lifts at the graveside.

We were self sufficiency in action. Two friends laid out Ralf's body at my home, where he died. Another two made a simple elegant, plywood coffin. The miraculous 2 litre milk bottles of frozen water provided cooling for a day, allowing us to keep his body with us and hold a vigil. The hospital allowed us to use the morgue for the rest of the time. We had my VW kombi van for transport, then a 4 wheel drive ute for the last section up to our own bush cemetery in the trees.

Chrysalis community members had done all the paper work with council, cleared the lantana away and dug the grave by hand. My 'event coordinator' sewed up dozens of stark white pennants and hung them from graceful black bamboo poles to decorate the site. Clumps of the same pennants fluttered from the entrance to the property, the track to the cemetery and my studio, where we laid Ralf with flowers and candle light for the final viewing.

It was a community occasion. 2BBB FM our community radio spread the word and played a specially selected tribute to Ralf, it's former council reporter and technical whiz.

Ralf had always been a political and social activist as well as a loyal friend and many people trudged up the steep dirt road to say their

## BOOKLETS

"Coping with Grief"  
Mal McKissock.  
Bereavement Care Centre,  
PO Box 327, Epping 2121.

"What to do when someone dies"  
From Centrelink.

"If, How and When"  
Funeral Industry Council of NSW  
PO Box 523  
Cherrybrook 2126

The Outstretched Hand Foundation  
For leaflets and booklets on all aspects of death, dying  
and bereavement.  
36 Berambing Crescent  
Berambing 2758.

Six people will be needed as coffin bearers. Be aware of their different heights.

Before placing the lid on the coffin, allow private time for others to be with the dead person.

Supply enough shovels for people who wish to help fill in the grave.

It is necessary to have a marker to identify the place of the burial.

## TRANSPORTATION

A van, station wagon, truck or utility can be used for transporting the confined body.

Measure the coffin beforehand to make sure it will fit in the vehicle.

The health acts require:

-That a dead person arrives at a crematorium or cemetery in a coffin.

-The back of the vehicle used, be lined with heavy duty plastic.

-The duration of travel is eight hours or less.  
If travelling a distance use an air conditioned vehicle and place frozen water bottles around the body.

## MAKING A COFFIN

### Objective

To provide a minimum standard for the construction of coffins. Only those coffins meeting or exceeding the standard will be accepted for cremation.

1. No larger than 620mm wide, 550mm high and 2100mm long. The size of the coffin is generally commensurate with the size of the body.
2. Total weight of coffin, including the dead person, should not exceed 130kg.
3. Coffins must be constructed of a readily combustible material of timber origin with sufficient strength to allow unsupported movement.
4. Coffins must be lined with a heavy duty plastic.
5. Coffin lids must be able to be securely fixed in place, preferably with nails, screws or clips.
6. A coffin must have a smooth base with no projections.
7. A coffin must have multiple handholds, example, wooden or rope. Handles that are constructed of non-combustible material must be readily removable.
8. A coffin must include a fixed but readily removable name plate, placed at the head end of the coffin. This will be retained by the crematorium for identification of the remains.

### SUGGESTIONS

The shape of the coffin need not be flute shaped, it can be rectangular.

## RESOURCES.

Bellingen Hospital (02) 66551266.

Dorrigo MPS. (02) 66572066

Una Maloney, Welfare Worker.

Mental Health Service

Coffs Harbour Base Hospital.

Palliative Care Unit provides:

-The Silent Visitors service.

-Support and counselling.

(02) 66567685/3

Coroner Mark Holdom.

Bellingen Court House (02) 66551033.

Mark is available to the immediate family for legal advice and access to medical and autopsy reports in the case of the death being reported to him by the Police. Also will assist with commencement of legal proceedings.

Bellingen Shire Council (02) 66557346.

### Surveyor

S. Hutchings (02) 66551897

North Bank Rd. Bellingen.

### Celebrants.

Wendy Haynes (02) 66521427.

Catherine Campbell (02) 66552334

Jenny Beswick is available to assist with a Tibetan Buddhist Funeral. Ph: 66552417

## RESOURCES.

### SIDS

Toll-free line 1800 651 186

### Private Grief Counselling

Julie Fuad (02) 66552030

Aishwara Saraswati (02) 66556610

Catherine Campbell (02) 66552334

### Coffins:

Hand built coffins.

Phone Mark 0427578029

A coffin can be purchased from some funeral directors, priced from \$440(2005).

### Crematoriums

Coffs Harbour Crematorium

Karang. (02) 66514009

Hogbin Drive Crematorium

Coffs Harbour. (02) 66522822

### Embalming

Jim Summers (02) 66426444

Grafton and District Funerals

Complaints to the Dept. of Fair Trading  
13 32 20

The coffin can be painted and decorated in a way that reflects the dead person.

The coffin can have plastic in the bottom then be covered by: Woodchips. Shredded paper. Fresh herbs.

A cloth can be placed in the coffin allowing it to hang over the sides.

A doona and pillow can be used in a coffin.

### **IF A PERSON DIES IN HOSPITAL.**

Stay with the dead person as long as you need to.

In some circumstances, if the person is badly damaged, you may be advised against seeing the person, but you can insist if this is what you need to do. Contact a friend or ask for a counsellor in the hospital to support you with this.

If you are doing a home burial without a funeral director involved.

If you are using the services of a funeral director but collecting the dead person yourself in a private car.

You will need to inform the hospital of your intentions.

The dead person will stay in the hospital mortuary until the funeral arrangements are made, then collected by the family who will provide the coffin and transport in a private car for the funeral service, burial or cremation.

The legal time for a dead person to be out of the cool room is eight hours.

## **CORONERS INVOLVEMENT FOLLOWING A DEATH**

There are many circumstances under which a person may die, that will subsequently require the involvement of the Coroner. In the majority of situations this is simply a requirement because specific conditions exist, and certainly does not suggest fault on any person's part. Such circumstances include

1. When the person has died suddenly and the cause is unknown.
2. Where a doctor has not given a Medical Certificate as to the cause of death.
3. Where the deceased has not attended a doctor within the last three months prior to the death.
4. Where the death has occurred while under anaesthetic or within 24 hours after, administration of an anaesthetic.
5. Where the deceased has met a violent death or unusual death or has died under suspicious or unusual circumstances.

A Government Medical Officer carries out the post mortem, usually in the Coffin Harbour Hospital. If you are planning to have the coffin open let the Medical Officer know of this.

The Coroner and the hospital will need to be informed in the case of a home burial that does not involve a funeral director.

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## **BELLINGEN SHIRE BEREAVEMENT SERVICE**

Provides:

- Telephone support.
- Funeral Support.
- Basic counselling, information and referrals.
- Weekly meditation group

Inquiries Catherine, coordinator 66552334  
email: [ellanthis@aapt.net.au](mailto:ellanthis@aapt.net.au)

Leah, book distributor 66572648  
email: [lmunro@dodo.com.au](mailto:lmunro@dodo.com.au)

This is a free Service run by trained voluntary workers.

Books produced and supplied by the Service:  
"One Breath Away" \$12  
"The Do It Yourself Funeral Book" \$7  
"GriefWork" \$10  
Available from  
The Myrtle Clinic, Dorrigo.  
Yellow Shed, Bellingen.

For mail orders add \$2 for each book.  
To: L. Munro  
65 Myrtle Street.  
DORRIGO 2453

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## WILLS

This information is for NSW jurisdiction only.

The executor of the will has the right to the body. This person can override the family.

Have two executors to share the load and in the case where one is not available.

If there is no will, one needs to apply to the Court for Letters of Administration.

It is possible to write a will without a solicitor but if a situation involves a complicated family situation, a business or estate worth more than a certain amount, see a solicitor.

After a death, a certified copy of the will or probate needs to be taken to the bank, etc., to change names on the account.

For a vehicle, take a certified copy of the will to the RTA to change the name on the registration.

Same sex relationships are not recognised under law. It is important for people in gay and lesbian relationships to make a Will, otherwise the partner will have no right to the body or to the assets, regardless of how long they may have lived together.

Friends, lover's carer's and significant others have no right to inherit anything unless stated in a will.

If you want to leave instructions regarding your funeral it's best not to write it in your Will, as usually this is read after the funeral.

For more information on Wills, Estates and Funerals. The book "Rest Assured" is available at the library.

## DEATH OF A BABY

A still born baby is one of twenty weeks or more gestation or at least 400 grams in weight that has not breathed after delivery.

This birth must be registered in the normal way.  
A funeral is a legal requirement.

A baby delivered before twenty weeks or less than 400 grams is regarded as a miscarriage.  
There are no legal requirements.  
The parents can do a burial if they choose to.

### A death requiring a coronial inquest

If the child dies within 24 hours of a surgical operation.  
If the doctor cannot certify the cause of death.  
If the baby dies suddenly.

The post mortem is carried out in Sydney and then the baby is brought back to the local hospital. (You can insist on spending as much time as you need to with the baby before this happens)

There is no fee involved with this.  
When the paperwork is completed the family can take the baby for the burial or cremation.

## ORGANISING A FUNERAL

Anyone can organise a funeral, but what you need is a team of people with one person co-ordinating.

This person needs to have a logical approach, not too grief stricken, be firm, as many officials may err in favour of caution. Everything needs to be completed swiftly and precisely.

Others need to be very aware of not taking over, listening carefully to what the grieving family want and encouraging them to make the decisions.

All instructions should be in writing.

Have a letter from next of kin authorising people to do official tasks.

### TASKS

- Assist family to negotiate with a funeral director.
- The coffin.
- Make contact with whoever is doing the Service.
- Legal paper work.
- Newspaper articles. Who died and when. Where and when Service is to be held.
- Incoming and outgoing telephone calls. Who needs to be contacted?
- Write out an obituary. A story of the person's life, highlighting important events. This can be read out at the Service and later placed in the newspaper.
- Are there any practical things to consider?  
Child care, cleaning, cooking, etc.

## MATTERS RELATING TO DEATHS AND FUNERALS.

Once you enter a contract with a funeral director, the Dept. of Health, require that the funeral director must know where the deceased is at all times.

If you are using the services of a funeral director and would like the dead person to be brought home for a time. The funeral directors' regulations require a minimum of three people to transfer the body in a coffin. e.g. If the body is transported to the home and left for two to three hours and then returned to the funeral home, this would result in a minimum of four hours for each employee. Total of twelve hours at award rates.

If a person has written instructions not to be cremated, a cremation permit will not be issued.

Whoever orders the funeral is responsible for the bill. This person can be reimbursed from the dead person's estate at a later date.

Leaving your body for scientific research involves a written agreement between you and the research institute. Only bodies from metropolitan areas are considered.

A destitute burial can be arranged by the social worker at the hospital but only if the person had no assets and there is no family to take responsibility.

## AFTER THE FUNERAL

Ongoing rituals for the first six weeks following the death, can assist the grieving family and some believe, the dead person. Some suggestions:

- A coming together each week of close friends and family at the time the person died.
- The lighting of a candle, a prayer, a meditation.

Thank you letters, including programs to people who were unable to attend the service to be sent out.

Obituary to the newspaper.

Legal requirements. If the person has been buried on own land the following forms need to be sent off within one month of the death:

“Registering a death in NSW”

“Application for private burial”

“Cause of death”

If needed, “NSW Death Certificate application”

(There is a cost involved for this one)

To: Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages,  
GPO Box 30

Sydney 2001

“ Registering a death in NSW” and “NSW Death Certificate Application” forms are available at:  
Government Access Centre, MPS Dorrigo,  
Bellingen Court House.

MAKE UP A FUNERAL SERVICE PROGRAM  
Some suggestions:

- A photocopied photo of the dead person on the front.
- Words of songs to be sung.
- Poems to be read
- How the Service will end.

WHERE WILL THE SERVICE BE HELD.

- In own home, garden
- Chapel.
- Graveside.

FOR THE SERVICE

- Flowers. Candles. Incense.
- Music: Tapes. CD's. A choir. Live music.
- Who will be speaking?
- A photograph and some small personal belongings of the dead person.
- A Memorial book for people to write in.
- Small cards and pens for people to write messages to place in or on the coffin.
- A corkboard and pins for photos.
- Someone to take photos, to video.
- Refreshments.
- Is it possible for the dead person's pet to be at the Service?

## A CREMATION

Before you contact a funeral director decide how actively involved you want to be.

Let the funeral director know what you want.

If there are any problems you can contact the Bereavement Service or ask a friend to negotiate for you.

Consider the legal side of what is required:

- "Cause of Death" certificate.

- "Attending Practitioners Cremation certificate"

These two certificates will be supplied by your own doctor.

- "Registering a death in NSW" form.

- "Medical referee's Cremation Permit"

The body of the dead person must be seen by a medical referee before being issued with this certificate.

- "Application for Permission for Cremation with Statutory Declaration"

The funeral director will assist you with the above required forms.

Home-made coffins built to regulations are legal and will be accepted.

Have removable name tag on coffin.

Plastic, metal or glass must not be put into coffin.

You can use your own car to transport the dead person to the Crematorium.

When people are back in their places.

-Have a silent time.

-A guided meditation of goodbye to the dead person.

You can end the Service by doing something uplifting like:

Singing. Chanting.

Holding hands in a circle.

Inform people, if there is to be a gathering after the Service.

## A MEMORIAL SERVICE

A memorial service, is one where the coffin is absent. This can be carried out at a later date.

Some suggestions:

-A gathering of friends in a favourite place of the dead person.

-In a park. At the beach. At home.

-Play music the dead person loved.

-Throw flowers into a nearby stream, or the sea.

-Form a circle with people saying what they will miss about the person who died.

-Supply refreshments.

-End by doing something uplifting

## SUGGESTIONS FOR A CEREMONY

A funeral service usually takes about one hour.  
It has a beginning, middle and end.

Anyone can lead the Service, a friend, family member, celebrant, minister or funeral director.

This person need not say much, but be able to keep the Service flowing and be flexible in allowing time for the unexpected.

Have music playing as people are arriving.

Give a program and a flower to each person.

The person leading the Service will introduce themselves.

“We are gathered here today to say goodbye to.....and to celebrate their life and your part in their life”

Read out the obituary.

Music.

Invite first speaker up. In the case of someone starting to shake while reading, assist by putting an arm around the person or by steadying the paper.

After the last speaker, have the music playing softly while encouraging people to come forward to write a message on the small cards, and then to place the cards and flowers in or on the coffin

## A SERVICE AT THE CREMATORIUM

Anyone can conduct the Service.

Minister, priest, celebrant, family member, friend.

Time allotted for each Service is one hour.

The Service can be carried out in the Chapel or in the grounds

You can arrange the chairs.

Have no chairs, use cushions instead.

Create a circle and have the coffin in the middle.

The coffin can be open or closed.

Provide your own music, live or taped.

Provide your own refreshments

You can witness the burning of the coffined person.

The cremation takes about one and half hours to complete. It usually takes about 24 hours before you can collect the ashes. The crematorium will provide a container for the ashes, or you can bring your own.

The cost of a simple cremation, where you do most of the organising, can start at \$1000(2005)

Cremations are carried out weekdays and Saturday mornings.

## BURIAL IN CEMETERY

Legally all burials in Council Cemeteries must be carried out by a funeral director.

Make some decisions before contacting the funeral director.

Some suggestions:

- Keep the dead person at home until the funeral.
- Use your own vehicle to transport the confined body to the cemetery.
- Have a service at the graveside.
- Have the funeral director collect the dead person from the hospital or your home.

### LEGAL REQUIREMENTS.

Prior to the interment of the person.

The "Application of burial" to be filled out.

The Council approved grave digger contacted.

"Registering a death in NSW" filled out.

The funeral director will assist you with the above requirements.

You will need to supply the funeral director with "Cause of Death" certificate.

Cost of grave site reservation \$345(2005)

Cost of interment \$108

A wooden cross can be used for a short term marker until a more permanent headstone can be provided. Headstones can be in the form of a sculpture as long as they are in accordance with the Australian standard for headstones.

## THE GRIEVING PROCESS OF A PERSON WHO IS NEWLY BEREAVED

The way we respond to excessive stress is incredible complex and variable. It can depend on many things including a person's conditioning (internal) and circumstances (external), but basically psychic shock will produce the following:

Adrenalin. The fight or flight chemical.  
Endorphin's. Opiate-like chemicals.  
Cortisone. This sustains the stress response.

1. The Biophysical Reaction (more pronounced in sudden death)

This response is usually immediate and will slowly come down. Rapid breathing. Pale skin. Accelerated pulse rate. Digestive shutdown.

Elevated blood pressure and sugar level.

Immunological disturbance.

2. Psychophysical Reaction This can produce symptoms that reflect the nature of the death e.g. A husband has had chest pains after his wife has died of a heart attack.

3. Emotional Reaction. Anxiety. Depression. Anger. etc;  
This is called a sympathetic response. (Sym, meaning together. Pathos, meaning suffering).

Generally the chemical reaction tapers off around seven weeks after the death. It is nature's way of protecting and allowing time for the body to adapt to a new situation.

**N.A.L.A.G**  
COFFS COAST

**BELLINGEN SHIRE  
BEREAVEMENT  
SERVICE**

**BY HELPING  
YOU  
I'M HELPING  
ME**



**N.A.L.A.G**  
Coffs Coast

**Bellingen Shire Bereavement Service**



email: [ellanthis@aapt.net.au](mailto:ellanthis@aapt.net.au)

Designed by  
Leah  
Barbara  
Chris

**AMARANTH ROOM**  
BELLINGEN HOSPITAL

**ALCOORINGA ROOM**  
DORRIGO M.P.S.

## The Bellingen Shire Bereavement Service

was started in 1992 in response to the needs in our community.

The aims of the Bellingen Shire Bereavement Service are:

- ◆ To be open and ever-changing, to meet the needs of people who have experienced the death of a loved one at sometime in their lives, and also for the people who provide support.
- ◆ To increase understanding and raise awareness in the community, of grief reactions that can follow a loss of any kind.
- ◆ This is a free service run by trained volunteer workers.

From August 2004 B.S.B.S became a sub-branch of Coffs Harbour National Association of Loss and Grief (N.S.W)

## The Service provides:

- ◆ Lending library of relevant books and videos, on loss and grief.
- ◆ One to one grief support.
- ◆ Phone support.
- ◆ Information.
- ◆ Referrals.
- ◆ Funeral support.
- ◆ Weekly Meditation Group.

## Volunteers

Catherine: Co-ordinator.

- ◆ Grief support.
  - ◆ Funeral support.
  - ◆ Dying at home support.
- Phone: 66552334.

Ola:

- ◆ Grief support for seniors.

Leah :

- ◆ Grief support.
- ◆ Funeral support.
- ◆ Meditation group.
- ◆ Books for sale
- ◆ One Breath Away \$12
- ◆ Do It Yourself Funeral Book \$7
- ◆ Grief Work Book \$10

Phone: 66572648

Administration: Barbara



**ORDER FORM**

ARTICLE	AMOUNT	COST
"One Breath Away" @ \$12.		
"The Do-It-Yourself Funeral Book" @ \$7.		
"Griefwork" @ \$10.		
Plus: \$2. postage for one book, \$1. For each additional book		
<b>TOTAL</b>		
Payable to: L. Munro. 65 Myrtle St. DORRIGO 2453 ph: (02) 66572648		

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To increase understanding and raise awareness in the community, of grief reactions that can follow a loss of any kind.

**This is a free service, run by trained voluntary workers.**

These three books were written by Leah, with assistance from members of the Bereavement Support Group.

Available at:

The Yellow Shed, Bellingen.  
 Bellingen Neighbourhood Centre.  
 Myrtle Clinic, Dorrigo.

Enquires: Leah Munro,  
 ph: (02) 66572648

Email: [lmunro@dodo.com.au](mailto:lmunro@dodo.com.au)

**AN  
 INVITATION  
 TO A JOURNEY  
 THROUGH  
 LOSS AND  
 GRIEF TO  
 GROWTH,  
 WITH A  
 PREVIEW OF  
 OUR THREE  
 PUBLICATIONS**

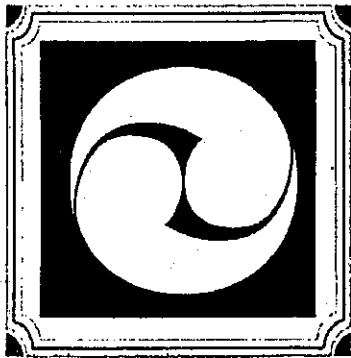
**"One Breath away"**

**"Do-It-Yourself  
 Funeral Book"**

**"GriefWork"**

## ONE BREATH AWAY

*The story of a love between two people  
which continues after one has died.*



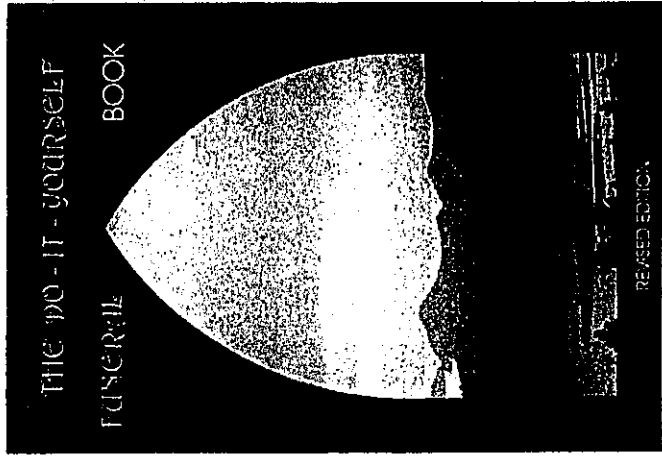
Leah Munro

This book provides a personal insight into a two year grief process, recorded by Leah, whose partner Kim dies suddenly.

Through the pain and devastation, the mood swings, frustration's and alienation that the death of a loved one can bring, an extraordinary inner life began to unfold between them. For death has the power of transformation, and for Leah, the dialogue continues, transforming the trauma into meaningful action.

This book has become increasingly sought after, not only by professionals as a valuable case study, but of great comfort to anyone confronting a similar life experience.

122 pages.  
PRICE \$12

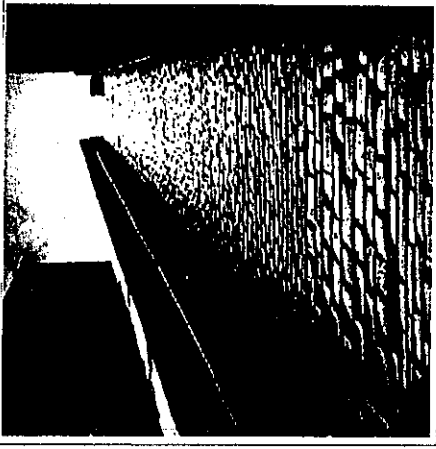


This booklet has been written to encourage people to talk openly about death, and to become familiar with the procedures around death.

Including:

- Legal requirements
- Home burial
- Making a coffin
- Organising a funeral
- Suggestions for a ceremony
- After the funeral
- Two personal stories

36 pages  
PRICE \$7



## Grief Work

Compiled by the Bellingham Sfire  
Bereavement Service

This book has been set out in a very clear way to:

- Assist and encourage a grieving person to become an active participant in their own recovery.
- Provide support people with a better understanding of what may be happening for the grieving person, and some suggestions for guidance.
- Allow a space for personal reflection and creative ideas of ones own.

52 pages  
PRICE \$10