

WESTMILL WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND CIC

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Winter newsletter 2018

Tree and bulb planting

What a wonderful Friends and Family day we just had. We planted more trees and are delighted to report that, despite the lack of rain, this year we only lost two trees which is very reassuring.

Thirty-nine of us sat down for a delicious lunch organised by our Friends and Family group. A big thank you to Ann and Brian Layt-Williams, Jackie and Colin and Ann for making it all run so smoothly - washing up, making and serving up soup and making it all so enjoyable. We had a record number of children present during the morning all busily digging holes, planting bulbs and in one case collecting worms! The weather, despite being a little dull could not dampen their spirits.

Our AGM was well attended and a very useful



discussion on lots of different topics took place beside the glowing woodburner.

We are delighted to announce that in response to our request for a CIC director from our Friends and Family group David Birley (vice chair of the FFG committee) stepped forward to become our third Director. This ensures



that should our existing two directors, Adam Twine and Liz Rothschild, both meet an untimely end there would be smooth continuity with our manager to keep the ship steady. He has been involved for many years and would be able to ensure that our ethos remains in place in the future. Thank you David!



Dios de los Muertos

Liz and Adam - co-founders of the burial ground - recently got back from a long awaited trip to Mexico.

We spent the festivities in Oaxaca city. The whole experience was so rich and stimulating that it is impossible to encapsulate it in a short article.



What literally moved me to tears was to sit quietly in one of the cemeteries and watch the crowds of people of all ages surging past bringing stools to sit on, picnics, brooms and

cleaning equipment and huge buckets of flowers.

Elderly women arrive on the arms of their young sons, children come in full skeleton



make up wearing special costumes, teenagers sit checking their phones and running errands. They all settle in for the day erecting shelters to keep off the sun.

This festival is more important than Christmas and some people stay all night talking, praying, remembering, drinking, dancing and listening to live music. Mariachi bands wander around magnificently dressed in their embroidered Charro suits and elaborately decorated sombreros.

It is sad and joyous at the same time.

Outside the gate there is a busy funfair with stalls selling roast maize and delicious Mexican snacks including grasshoppers!

There is a strong belief that the those who have died come back to visit for the night as told in the film Coco. So people put out food for their visitors and leave trails of marigold petals to entice them back.

Every grave is a riot of colour and each one decorated uniquely and beautifully using the same simple elements. At home each family has an offrende - an altar to the people they are remembering. We saw them in private homes, hotels, offices, galleries, car hire firms and bus stations, each one laden with flowers, food and drink, photographs, little skeleton figures, bowls of spicy hot chocolate and the specially baked Pan de muerto, not forgetting, an iced sugar skull for each member of the family. Everywhere there are strings of colourful papercuts. They make it so beautiful the dead just won't be able to resist returning.

What impresses me is the close connection with those who have died. It does not matter whether you literally believe they return. Family and friends get together everywhere and remember the person. Too often we hear of people in England being told they should not talk about the person who has died. They should "move on". I think the Mexicans have something to teach us here.

And when I see all those adults and children happily busy at the burial ground and people tending the site, bringing flowers, shedding a tear, sharing a laugh and telling their stories I feel a little of that spirit is present. As one person put it "We are all in the same boat" and somehow admitting that helps a little.



A very profound story

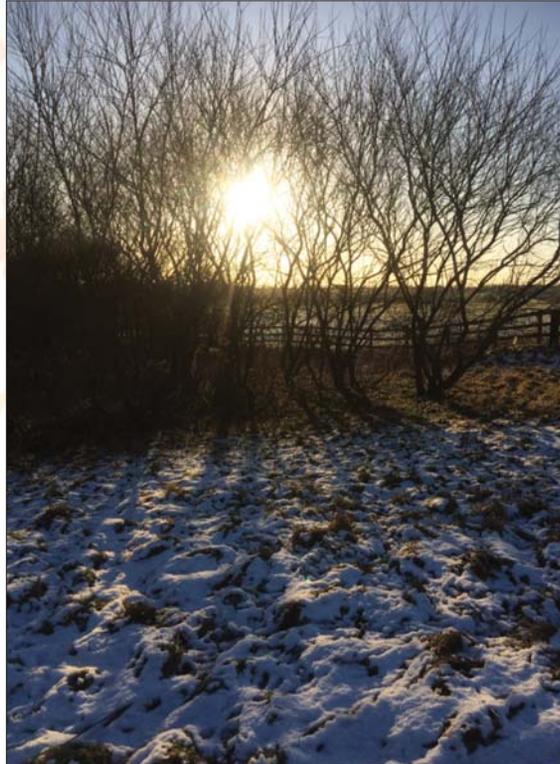
As I travel around the country performing my show I am privileged to be entrusted with some truly amazing stories. If you want to see a whole range of them visit my website www.fullcircleproductions.org.uk I would like to share one I recently received because it struck me as so moving and wise.

"I was told it by a woman at a performance in Wellington Meeting House in Somerset and I report it in the first person as it was told to me.

I was told by a hospice nurse trained in Poland that she was taught not to hold the patient's hand because this can hold them back from dying. I was very surprised. I think this is mistaken. It is about how we hold the person not whether we touch them at all. If our touch gives permission and is gentle and sensitive then it can be very helpful indeed.

I worked in a hospice in Capetown using a body technique to help patients release pain and fear working on the spine and the feet. It really seemed to work. I could feel them relax.

One day I was asked to go to see a man who was dying. I went into the room. It was very small. There was his wife next to the bed and the man lying curled up facing the wall. I did what I could and worked on the places I could reach. I could see his wife was really struggling. I suggested we talked in another room. She was beside herself because for days he had not spoken, looked at her or communicated in any way. She was desperate for a smile or any sign he knew she was there. I could feel this when I was working



on him, like hooks reaching out from her grabbing hold of him. I said "Would you try something. Can you feel the love you have for him in your heart?" "Yes", she said. "Can you remember a special time together, at the beach, at home, out at a movie. A

time when you were really happy and close." She nodded. I want you to go back in and just sit with that feeling. Let it grow inside you. That's all. Don't try and get a response from him just feel your love. She said she would try.

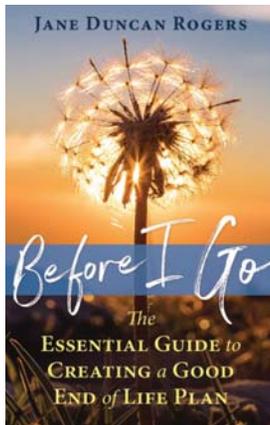
The next week I was back in the hospice and the woman came rushing up to me and said "I did what you told me to do and it worked. I just sat there remembering and

feeling my love for him and suddenly he turned on his back, stretched out his legs, looked at me and smiled!" I told the medical staff about this more than once and they dismissed it saying it wasn't something that could really work for most people. But I know it did."

So often we can feel helpless at the bedside - distressed, exhausted and even sometimes bored. We have ideas about how the death should be just like we often do about birth. But nature will take its own course and we can feel utterly helpless and distressed naturally. I think the advice in this story could offer many of us a great gift if we find ourselves in similar circumstances.



Book Recommendation



Jane Duncan Rogers wrote Gifted by Grief after her husband died of cancer and she led a workshop on planning for end of life at the last Kicking the Bucket festival I organised in Oxford.

She is a delightful person - honest and sensitive. She has now turned her workshop into a

book Before I Go. Well worth getting if you want a way to get you started. She is very detailed on the practical and emotional level. I would recommend working through it with a small group of friends so you can nudge each other along to get things organised and discuss the pros and cons of different options.

Any other recommendations anyone? Send them to us on info@woodlandburialwestmill.co.uk

Breaking News



We are delighted to see that there is to be a government enquiry into funeral costs since they have risen way above the costs of inflation in the last ten years.

I really hope this will lead to much more clarity about pricing and an awareness of how much costs can vary.

This comes as a result of years of hard work from many people including Rosie Inman-Cook at the Natural Death Centre, The Quaker led initiative on funeral poverty 'Down to Earth', Oxford's independent funeral director Lucy Coulbert along with other colleagues in the business, some church led initiatives and the Citizens Advice bureau. Well done them.

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All articles written and edited by Liz Rothschild unless otherwise stated. Photographs by Jan Power and Liz Rothschild.

Dates for the diary

SAT 15th JUNE - OPEN DAY

2-5 Refreshments available. Talk about green burial at 3.

SAT 28th SEPTEMBER 5-7 THE MEMORIAL GATHERING

This event is open to anyone wishing to come and spend time in a peaceful, beautiful place remembering someone who has died.

SAT 16th NOVEMBER

11-4 FRIENDS & FAMILY DAY

Planting trees, ground work. Light lunch and AGM.

Friends and family group only.

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And if you would like to attend a DEATH CAFÉ, the Prospect hospice are holding them one evening every other month See www.prospect-hospice.net and to learn about Death Cafes www.deathcafe.com



Seasonal wishes

We wish you well over the winter festivals knowing this can be such a hard time. Stay warm and listen to what you really need and tell those close to you how you feel and how they can help.