

WESTMILL WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND CIC

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Winter newsletter 2023

Coping with Christmas and other Winter Festivities



Hospice UK are gathering stories from people who have used their services and one question they recently asked was how do you keep your memories alive and include those who have died in your festival celebrations. I think this is a really good question to ask.

I heard recently that in Finland on Christmas Eve, which is their main festival day, everyone takes lanterns with candles that can burn

up to 96 hours long and the graveyards are filled with light. Then they all go and have a sauna, then a big meal and finally presents. Sounds rather wonderful doesn't it? You can simply light a special candle or lantern and place it on your table or in a special place in memory of someone and all the light they brought into your life.

One story hospice UK received was of a family

who have a decoration for their Christmas tree which they bought in memory of someone. So each year when it is hung on the tree it brings back memories and conversations about them. I wonder what you all do. Perhaps you drink a toast or come over to Westmill and pour the person a dram. Whatever you do I think allowing yourself to include them in your life in these different ways is actually less painful than just feeling the gaping absence and feeling unable to talk about them or how you are feeling.

We send you all our warmest wishes knowing this can be a very difficult time for many people and we hope to see as many of you as can make it on December 22nd at Root and Branch - 11-12.30 when we gather to have a hot drink and mince pie, make a lovely willow star with Norah Kennedy (if you feel like it) or just enjoy the warm company. - £5. You could also post a Christmas card in our postbox if you wanted to. See article on page 3.

Bringing Life to the process of dying – Ali Craigan

Recently I had the joy and privilege of walking alongside a good friend during her final days in St Richard's Hospice in Worcester. Hannah had a diagnosis of myeloma four years ago and so we knew the day would come.

Those last four years had been a challenge of getting the most out of life, especially with grandchildren finally appearing, whilst handling chemo, bone marrow transplant and weariness.

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Hannah was a landscape gardener and the lovely gardens at the hospice were a comfort. She also loved music, singing along with her husband Mike, with me accompanying on violin.

Visiting her we soon realised that in the midst of the sadness of saying goodbye there was still living to be had. Sitting by a loved one's bed from morning to night, a lot of the time in silence, can feel sad and empty. Mike and I decided to take our instruments along. Music is a marvellous way to connect, live music even better. We were, of course, worried about disturbing others but the hospice was very encouraging.

So we played. A modern version of The Lord's My Shepherd; Irish and Scottish airs; Paper Moon; Stevie Wonder. We played it all, quietly and gently, connecting through the sounds and words and bringing normality to the strangeness.

On her final day Mike took his violin in and sang to Hannah. She waited till her final song had finished then sighed and let go. It couldn't have been better.

Editor's note. In the recent Kicking the Bucket Festival we had a beautiful concert called Singing Our Hearts In including a Companion Voices group who will come to someone's bedside and sing to



them in their last days - a very precious and intimate sharing. There are several around the country and there is one starting up in Oxford so if the idea appeals look up www.companionvoices.org Not all of us are musicians or singers but we can all bring music to the bedside in a recorded form and that can be hugely comforting and connecting too.

Bereavement Two Years On – Mary Neave

Recently, when asked how I was, I found myself saying, 'Well, the second year of bereavement is harder than the first.' This came as a surprise to me, even though I knew it to be true, so I started to consider why it should be, and will share my thoughts with you knowing well that very few bereavements are alike, and many people will feel differently.



My husband, Leonard, had been very ill for nearly 10 years and sudden admission to hospital was not new, so I found it hard to believe that this time he would not be coming home, even though I had been with him when he died. The immediate aftermath will be familiar, not only shock and disbelief, and the work of funeral planning, but also the loving warmth of family and friends, who also were shocked and saddened. And there was also relief. I think it is not always easy to admit this but I was glad his suffering was over and he had been spared some of the later stages of his illness. For me, too, there was the realization that I am now alone. I had never lived alone before, having gone from home to various forms of student living to marriage. There was so much for me to learn and work out for myself. The first year was a time of huge

sadness as I lived in the echoing space where he had always been a familiar presence for 50 years. I found eating meals alone particularly hard. Yet there was also a feeling of challenge and even of adventure. I was facing new practical household problems as well as developing a more active social life. I was thinking how I wanted to live in the years left to me, time that I valued all the more for having been made so aware of the shortness of our lives.

Now, just over two years since Leonard died, many of the possibilities are still with me, but there is not so much of a novelty in the challenge and the freedom in of a solitary life. It has become how my world is now and will continue to be. A friend said of this stage, 'That's how it is from now on.' Friends and neighbours also have become used to my status, and I now feel like one of many old women living alone. I am beginning to see that I may somehow

have had a fantasy that last year's life was a temporary state! Now it feels more like a plodding on with the daily routines, still trying to decide what kind of volunteering or what project (e.g. painting, knitting, writing) will give my life a sense of purpose. When my husband was alive my task was the happy one of looking after him.

However now, moving to my third year of bereavement, I am realizing that this is what the work of grief and loss is about. It is about accepting what has happened and learning to enjoy being alive, and finding hope in life's possibilities. Not that I always achieve this blessed state, but often grumble or complain. Thank goodness for long-suffering friends who bear with my sadness, regrets or low moods. But I have learned that this ordinary day-to-day living, going through anniversaries and sudden memories, and keeping on going, is all as much of a challenge and an adventure as the drama of the first year.

Our travelling postbox

Many of you came across our travelling postbox at our last memorial gathering. We know that not everyone wants to do this but we also know that for others it is really helpful to be able to write a message to someone who has died, send them a birthday or Mother's Day card.

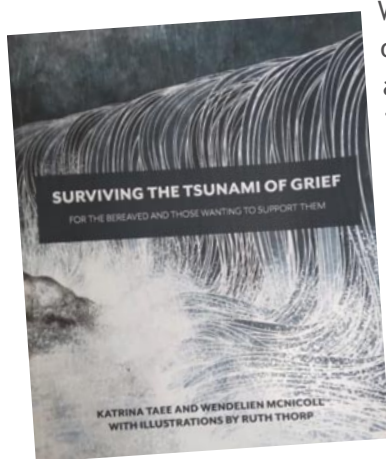


Maybe it is a chance to say the things you never managed to tell them, or a way of sharing your news or just saying you love them. We burnt the 102 letters received over the festival period after the Friends and Family day with rosemary in the memorial circle and the wind scattered the ashes all over the site. We plan to burn all the letters we receive throughout the year at each memorial day and any letters gathered there will be saved with love and care until the following year. The postbox will be in the office so do come into the office to post a letter or mail it to us marked 'For the Postbox'. And it will be there on the 22nd as mentioned above.



BOOK RECOMMENDATION

Surviving the Tsunami of Grief - illustrations by Ruth Thorp, Katrina Tae and Wendelien McNicholl



We keep a very good library of books in the office that are all available to be borrowed. They cover preparing for end of life, the process of dying, suicide, funerals, green burial, bereavement and other subjects.

A recent addition is quite wonderful and unusual I think. It is a book that places the illustrations to the fore.

They are very powerful images inspired I think by Japanese woodcuts and convey the internal and external landscape of grief and how it gradually changes. The text is written by two counsellors. I do hope some of you will feel interested in borrowing or buying it as I think their approach is very unique in the way the images speak so directly. You can see the style from the cover so you will know whether it might appeal.



It is now very easy to donate via our website by going to the home page and pressing on the donate button at the top right. www.woodlandburialwestmill.co.uk

All articles written and edited by Liz Rothschild, Mary Neave and Ali Craigan. Photographs courtesy of Karen Lane, Mary Neave, Ali Craigan, and Liz Rothschild. Design/artwork by Lee Hiom and Simon French

Dates for the diary

Friday 22nd December - 11-12.30

mince pies hot drinks and optional star making with Norah Kennedy at Root and Branch next door to our office - £5 to cover costs.

LAST FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH.

Our monthly meetups continue on the £2 for a cuppa and biscuit to cover costs. A chance for a chat and sharing experiences of being bereaved.

We will have a plant and insect day and gardening day up on site. Date tbc

OPEN DAY Saturday June 8th 2-5

including flower walk, talk on green burials, tea and cake

MEMORIAL GATHERING

Saturday September 28th - 4.30-6.30pm (Sunset) - Lantern decorating, hot drinks, singing and readings in memory of those who have died. (date has moved from the one proposed at AGM)

FRIENDS AND FAMILY DAY

Saturday November 16th

Please tell us if you plan to have lunch

11-1 - planting trees and caring for the site.

Bring tools, wellies, thermos.

1-2 - Lunch at Root & Branch - £5.50 booking required

2-4 - AGM

Mission Statement

- To make death approachable.
- To help people plan for the end of their life.
- To enable people to ask for and get what they want from a funeral.
- To show that funerals can be personal and beautiful without being expensive.
- To support people as they grieve.
- To create a community of people connected to the burial ground - our Friends and Family group.
- To create a beautiful nature reserve by increasing the bio-diversity and providing a place of peace and relaxation for future generations.